

Religion, Conflict, and Stability

in the
Former Soviet Union



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Preface

Considerable scholarly work across disciplines has sought to understand the roots of conflicts that have plagued the former Soviet republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but it has rarely focused on religion as an important factor. Instead, analysts have often cited the Soviet legacy of forced unification, linguistic and cultural assimilation, and arbitrarily drawn borders between the republics to explain regional volatility. The shared atheistic Soviet past and, as a consequence, presumed low religiosity across most of the former republics also may have led researchers to dismiss religion as a meaningful actor in stability and conflict in the former Soviet Union (FSU). However, the remarkable religious revitalization in most post-Soviet states in recent years demands a closer look at religion and its potentially important role in regional stability and instability across this highly varied region.

To improve understanding of the manner in which religion has affected conflict and stability in the FSU, this volume develops both a nuanced examination of specific post-Soviet countries and an identification of common trends across the region. To achieve the breadth and depth of expertise required for such an analysis, we invited contributions from a multidisciplinary group of scholars, from within and beyond RAND, each with either extensive regional knowledge or expert understanding of the role of religion in stability and conflict in general. This volume represents a collection of analytical essays by these invited experts and concludes with the analysis of the context-specific features and shared trends, and their policy implications.

The research was sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation, under the Initiative on Religion in International Affairs program, which supports projects aiming to achieve a deeper interdisciplinary understanding of the role of religion in international affairs and to foster dialogue between the academic community and policymakers. The research was conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis on defense and national security topics for the U.S. and allied defense, foreign policy, homeland security, and intelligence communities, foundations, and other nongovernmental organizations that support defense and national security analysis. For more information on the International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/isdp or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).

Contents

Preface	iii
Figures and Tables	ix
Summary	xi
About the Authors	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvii
Abbreviations	xix

CHAPTER ONE

Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union

Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick	1
About This Volume	5
Overall Themes	9

CHAPTER TWO

Armenia-Azerbaijan: Rethinking the Role of Religion in the Nagorno-Karabakh

Conflict

Artyom Tonoyan	11
Religion and Conflict Analysis	12
Politicizing Religion and Religionizing Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh	16
Religious Symbols and Cleavages in the Conflict	21
Reflections on Future Trajectories	32

CHAPTER THREE

The North Caucasus: How Islam and Nationalism Shaped Stability and Conflict in the Region

Sufian N. Zhemukhov	35
Why Young People Turn to Islam in the North Caucasus: Revival of Islam in the North Caucasus	37
What Drove People Toward Religion?	40
Nationalism and Islam in Russia's North Caucasus	43
How Different Ideological Trends Shaped Radicalization in the North Caucasus	48

Russia's Evolving Antiterrorism Concept.....	55
Reflections on Future Trajectories	62

CHAPTER FOUR

Central Asia: Where Did Islamic Radicalization Go?

Svante E. Cornell	65
The Rise and Fall of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia	66
Cultural and Historical Determinants of Islam in Central Asia	77
External Islamic Influences	80
Government Policies	85
Reflections on Future Trajectories	96

Special Feature

Religion and Intergroup Conflict: A Social-Psychological Approach

Steven L. Neuberg and Gabrielle Filip-Crawford	99
A Social-Psychological Approach.....	99
The Global Group Relations Project and Survey.....	104
Findings: Religious Infusion, Values Incompatibility, and Resource Competition	110
Implications of Social-Psychological Approaches for Policy and Practice.....	111
Conclusion.....	114

CHAPTER FIVE

Kazakhstan: Islamic Revival and Trajectories of State-Society Relations

Nargis Kassenova	115
Islamization and Fragmentation of Society	117
State Policies Toward Islam: Changes over Time	127
Contestation Between the State and Religious Movements.....	133
Reflections on Future Trajectories	136

CHAPTER SIX

Ukraine: Religious Confessions in Competition Under the Dominance of Political Discourse

Vadym Vasiutynskyi	139
Religious Confessions in Ukraine, Past and Present.....	139
The Nature of Interconfessional Tensions in Ukraine.....	144
Sociopolitical and Psychological Differences	150
People's Perceptions of the Role of Religion in the Conflict in Donbas.....	153
Reflections on Future Trajectories	155

CHAPTER SEVEN

Russia: The Stability Implications of State Policies Toward Religion and the Russian Orthodox Church

Irina du Quenoy 159
 The Evolution of State Policy Toward the ROC/Religion in Post-Soviet Russia 160
 Reflections on Future Trajectories 176

CHAPTER EIGHT

Religion and Stability in the Former Soviet Union: Policy Implications of Analysis

Jonah Blank 181
 Analysis of Religion and Stability in the FSU 182
 Policy Recommendations 191
 Conclusion 204

References 207

Figures and Tables

Figures

3.1.	The North Caucasus.....	36
3.2.	Evolution of the Religiosity Dynamic in Russia	39
3.3.	Republics Included in the Illegally Proclaimed Caucasus Emirate	49

Tables

3.1.	Nationalist Ideology in the North Caucasus After the Fall of the Soviet Union.....	35
3.2.	East-West Dichotomy in Russia's North Caucasus	46
3.3.	Victims of Terrorism and Antiterrorism in the North Caucasus, 2010–2016....	59
6.1.	Religious Confessions with Most Communities in Ukraine	141

Summary

Conflicts in the former Soviet Union (FSU) have often been framed as struggles of emerging national and ethnic identities, territorial disputes, aspirations for self-determination, and the tug-of-war between the former republics' thirst for sovereignty and Russia's desire to maintain its "sphere of privileged interests."¹ Despite the rise of religion as a visible force in the sociopolitical life of post-Soviet countries, we know little about how religion has contributed or may yet contribute to tensions or peace in this region. An improved understanding of the relationship between religion and conflict in the former Soviet republics can fill a critical gap and help inform policymakers and other actors working to bring peace and stability to this volatile region.

This volume takes a multidisciplinary and cross-domain look at religion and how it affects the stability of the former Soviet republics. It includes contributions from a range of international researchers and policy experts on religion and conflict and the post-Soviet region and addresses the dynamics among religion, conflict, and stability in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia.

Three main themes emerged in these analyses. First, the role that religion can play in promoting either opposition to or support for governments appears to have varied substantially based on the local context. For example, in some contexts, religion has been used to increase social cohesion and support for the state within the population (e.g., Kazakhstan). In other contexts, opposition groups and nonstate actors have marshaled religion to mobilize supporters of their causes (e.g., in the North Caucasus).

Second, while religion has played a role in sustaining or intensifying conflict in some parts of the FSU, it has never been the original source of this conflict. The conflicts described in this volume have stemmed from territorial disputes among ethnic groups, domestic and international power struggles, aspirations for self-determination, and economic challenges; the religious dimension in each of these conflicts emerged as an auxiliary in pursuit of the nonreligious aims. Despite religion's secondary role, however, the instrumentization of religion apparent throughout the region has frequently

¹ The phrase was coined by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in an interview with Euronews TV channel on September 3, 2008, as reported in GlobalSecurity.org, "Russian Privileged Interests," webpage, undated.

been destabilizing, as the greater infusion of religion in social and political life has exacerbated existing tensions and encumbered progress toward peace.

Third, state policies that restrict or regulate religion appear to have contributed to stability or conflict in different circumstances. Relatively loose controls over religion led to later concerns regarding the effect of foreign influences on state stability in both Russia and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, religious restrictions have been maintained more consistently and have helped to maintain state control over society. However, these restrictions may also have damaging longer-term effects. Both harsh controls over religion and free rein for external religious influences appear to pose short- and long-term risks in the post-Soviet countries, which are particularly susceptible to manipulation, as they share the legacy of disrupted religious traditions and relatively weak religious knowledge, coupled with the growing demand for religiosity as the source of morality, identity, and certainty.

The findings in this volume have implications for several key policy goals of U.S. and FSU leaders. These include ensuring regional stability, the diffusion of religious radicalism, and the prevention of violent extremism from either growing in the region or being imported from or exported to other global hot spots. While the authors of this volume diverge somewhat in their recommendations, overall they identify a number of best practices for achieving these shared policy goals: Policy actors in the FSU should avoid using religion and religious groups to attain political and military goals, should reconsider the ongoing repression of all religious groups not beholden to the state and resulting long-term consequences for stability, should ensure that no one religious group is too close to political power, and should encourage secular education and values. Taking into account each country's context, policymakers in the United States should encourage FSU nations to adopt constructive policies regarding religion along these lines, invest resources to better understand religious extremism in the region, and expand this understanding beyond Islam.

While broad in scope, this volume provides an important contribution to a better understanding of the role of religion in stability and conflict in the FSU. Further inter- and multidisciplinary work and scholar-practitioner collaborations will be crucial for developing comprehensive and nuanced recommendations for how to approach religion when working toward building sustainable peace—in the FSU and beyond.

About the Authors

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Identity in a Post-Soviet Society” (with Scott Spehr) in *Asian Ethnicity*; and “Central Asia: Contemporary Security Challenges and Sources of State Resilience” (coauthored with Alessandro Frigerio) in *Security and Human Rights*.

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We are grateful for the rich, intelligent, and diverse contributions of the authors featured in this volume. We thank them for their willingness to engage in interdisciplinary discussions and their hard work in shaping their chapters. Their diverse perspectives, in-depth knowledge of the region, and critical thought about the role of religion in conflict and stability have made this volume both informative and unique.

Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party
ASiP	Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists of Kazakhstan
ChRI	Chechen Republic of Ichkeria
CSI	Christian Solidarity International
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation [study]
FSB	Federal Security Service
FSU	former Soviet Union
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IOC	International Olympic Committee
LeT	Lashkar-e Taiba
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
UAOC	Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
UGCC	Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

UN	United Nations
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
UOC-KP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate
UOC-MP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate

Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union

Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick

Contrary to a once-popular prediction of the inevitable demise of religion as a global force,¹ religion today continues to be at the forefront of world affairs. In fact, a cursory look at the world today suggests that religion plays a crucial role in global peace and conflict dynamics. Across the globe, religious and traditional rhetoric have grown in prominence in an apparent reaction against globalization, massive migration flows, diversification of societies, and multiculturalism.² Religious sectarianism has been woven into conflicts within and among many societies undergoing transition. Religious differences appear to widen existing chasms in civil wars and struggles for self-determination. Religious fundamentalism, present in all of the world's prominent religions, has often served as a legitimizing platform for acts of violence and terror.

Despite religion's frequent portrayal as a *casus belli* of conflict—a thesis prominently argued in Samuel Huntington's work on the clash of civilizations³—religion has also been lauded for its potential to bring about conflict resolution and facilitate postconflict reconstruction. Indeed, historically, religious leaders have helped usher peace into conflict zones and improve intergroup perceptions through interfaith dialogue.⁴ In the search for peace, people have often drawn from religious texts to promote communal values and unifying themes amid divisiveness and conflict. Prominent religious leaders' messages of tolerance and acceptance have reverberated across the world. Finally, in times of personal and social chaos and uncertainty, many turn to religion as

¹ Peter L. Berger, "A Sociological View of the Secularization of Theology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 16, 1967; Émile Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, Anthony Giddens, ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 161; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1963.

² Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict*, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

³ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22–49.

⁴ Marc Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," *Peace and Change* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1997, pp. 1–31; Isak Svensson, "Fighting with Faith," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51, No. 6, 2007, pp. 930–949; Jeffrey Haynes, ed., *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*, London: Routledge, 2009.

a source of meaning, comfort, and sense of security. At the individual level, religious faith has been linked to greater psychological and even physical well-being.⁵

We should be cautioned, however, from making the simple assumption that religion is a fundamental cause of conflict or a requisite agent of peace.⁶ Multiple factors—and interactions among them—contribute to conflict, and conflict analysis or a plan for conflict resolution cannot be reduced to only one factor, whether it is religious, cultural, economic, or political.⁷ Even when religious narratives appear prevalent in a conflict, religion is often used by leaders as a potent mobilizing force and justification for violence in service to nonreligious goals, such as struggles over resources, land, or power.⁸ Religion might be part of the picture but is unlikely to be the sole cause of conflict and, therefore, cannot be expected to bear the sole responsibility of conflict resolution.

Religion does bear the power to accelerate violence or promote peace.⁹ Research has shown that violent religious conflicts can spread and cross borders with greater ease than nonreligious conflicts.¹⁰ Negotiated settlements have been found to be less likely when the warring parties make explicit religious claims.¹¹ While self-determination and nationalism have most often been the primary causes of ethnic conflicts, the added religious dimension has often increased their intensity.¹²

⁵ Morgan Green and Marta Elliott, “Religion, Health, and Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2010, pp. 149–163.

⁶ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson, “What’s So ‘Religious’ About ‘Religious Terrorism?’” *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 4, No. 3, December 2011, pp. 369–388; Jonah Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969, pp. 167–191; Elise Boulding, “Two Cultures of Religion as Obstacles to Peace,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1986, pp. 501–518.

⁷ Mats Berdal, “How ‘New’ Are ‘New Wars?’ Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War,” *Global Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2003, pp. 477–502; David D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; Monica Duffy Toft, “Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War,” *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Spring 2007, pp. 97–131.

⁸ Harriet Baber, “There’s No Point in Interfaith,” *The Guardian*, November 23, 2010; Gunning, Jeroen, and Jackson, 2011; Galtung, 1969.

⁹ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and the Reconciliation*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000; Jeffrey Haynes, ed., *Religion, Politics and International Relations: Selected Essays*, Abingdom, UK: Routledge, 2011; Daniel Philpott, “Explaining the Political Ambivalence of Religion,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3, August 2007, pp. 505–525.

¹⁰ Jonathan Fox, “Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Third World: The Role of Religion as a Cause of Conflict,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2003, pp. 101–125.

¹¹ Svensson, 2007. The study finds that if governments or rebel-groups have made explicit religious claims, these conflict-dyads are significantly less likely than others to be terminated through negotiated settlement. By contrast, whether the primary parties come from different religious traditions does not affect the chances for negotiated settlement.

¹² Fox, 2003.

It is therefore important to carefully analyze the role of religion in stability and conflict.¹³ Many aspects of religion may contribute to how it shapes conflict or stability: its theology and general view on conflict; the extent of religious penetration in everyday society; the type, reach, and influence of religious institutions; and its alliances with political and popular movements. These aspects of religion further interact with characteristics of each specific context, making the task of creating a general model for how religion may affect societal stability particularly problematic. Yet, because of the important role that religions play today in both local and global processes, the complexity of the link among religion, conflict, and stability should be a consideration—and not a deterrent—from pursuing deeper insight into how these interactions play out.

Such insight will be crucially important for programs and policies aiming to incorporate religion in efforts on conflict cessation, resolution, or postconflict reconstruction. Essential to these efforts is the examination of the underlying causes of conflict—the actors that enable it, their relationship with religion, and their religious stakes; religiosity among the general population; and the history and culture of a group or country. Putting these puzzle pieces together will help clarify how to best capitalize on religion's potential to bring about peace and curb possibilities for it to be used as a tool of war.

Contributors to this volume investigate these questions in the context of the former Soviet Union (FSU), which presents a unique laboratory for such analysis. On the one hand, the former Soviet countries represent a diverse set of religious, cultural, sociopolitical, and economic circumstances. On the other hand, these otherwise very different states share a common Soviet legacy of forced secularism, which has set a similar starting point for religious renaissance across them. This common starting point may allow for a better understanding of how different sets of pressures and circumstances have influenced the evolution of the role of religion in conflict and peace.

Considerable scholarly work across disciplines has sought to understand the roots of conflicts that have plagued the former Soviet republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union but rarely has it focused on religion as an important factor. Instead, analysts have most often cited the Soviet legacy of forced unification, linguistic and cultural assimilation, and arbitrarily drawn borders among the republics as explanations for regional volatility. The shared atheistic Soviet past and, as a consequence, presumed low religiosity across most of the former republics may have also driven researchers to dismiss religion as a meaningful actor in stability and conflict in the FSU.¹⁴

¹³ Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945–2001," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 6, 2004, pp. 715–731; Scott Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

¹⁴ See, for example, Christoph Zuercher, *Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*, New York: New York University Press, 2007.

However, the remarkable religious revitalization in most post-Soviet states demands a closer look at religion and its potentially important role in regional processes.¹⁵ Post-Soviet religious life emerged rapidly from historical memory and previously suppressed religious traditions, as well as through newer religious teachings brought by a post-Soviet influx of foreign missionaries. As the unifying ideology of the Soviet Union crumbled and the search for new meanings ensued, religion became a ready filler in an ideological vacuum and a source of certainty in highly uncertain times.¹⁶ People across all post-Soviet states relied on religion to create a coherent connection to their countries' pre-Soviet past, help cope with economic and political chaos, and offer new definitions of morality and meaning.

The appeal of religion has not been lost on the new era's political and military leaders, who recognized religion as a potent instrument of governance, mobilization, and, more generally, societal manipulation. Across a wide range of post-Soviet contexts, religion found its way into political discourse on delineating identities and groups, defining common and alien values, and garnering political and military support.¹⁷ In addition, the realization that cross-border religious alliances may inspire international funding and support for relevant causes led to the further use of religion as a fundraising mechanism and a recruitment tool.¹⁸

With such growing religiosity among the population and the eager exploitation of religion by political leaders, religious institutions gained influence and leverage on governing structures. Today, whether directly or indirectly, religious leaders across most post-Soviet republics have a significant say in political and social affairs,¹⁹ and leaders have to reckon with the church—in its many forms—as an important political actor.

The rapid renaissance of religion, its usurpation for political and military purposes, and its growing effect as a political actor have ensured religion's nonneutral role in regional stability and conflict. Indeed, with time, many of the FSU conflicts that

¹⁵ Olaf Müller, "Secularization, Individualization, or (Re)vitalization? The State and Development of Churchliness and Religiosity in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe," *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, pp. 21–37; Gert Pickel and Kornelia Sammet, eds., *Transformations of Religiosity: Religion and Religiosity in Eastern Europe, 1989–2010*, Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2012.

¹⁶ Aleksandr Agadjanian, "Public Religion and the Quest for National Ideology," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2001, pp. 351–365; Liudmila Zhukova, "Religion and Ideology in Modern Russia," in Tetsuo Mochizuki and Gō Koshino, eds., *Orient on Orient: Images of Asia in Eurasian Countries*, Sapporo, Japan: Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2013, pp. 163–177.

¹⁷ See, for example, Sergey Mozgovoy, "The Military and Society in Post-Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia*, No. 3, 2005, pp. 10–19.

¹⁸ Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*, 1st ed., Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2003.

¹⁹ David Westerlund, ed., *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, London: Hurst and Company, 1996; Larissa Titarenko, "On the Shifting Nature of Religion During the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine," *Social Compass*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2008, pp. 237–254.

initially started as territorial disputes or struggles for self-determination acquired religious undertones. This new religious dimension bore a consequence: Even when religious divisions did not appear to be the principal drivers of tensions, conflicts fought across religious lines (e.g., in Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh) have lasted longer and were generally characterized by a higher number of casualties than those that were not.²⁰

About This Volume

The peculiarities of the evolution of religious life across the FSU make it a challenging yet particularly fitting context in which to analyze the role of religion in conflict and stability. Despite the common atheistic Soviet past and similarly remarkable religious resurgence of most of the former Soviet states, the role of religion in matters of stability and conflict has evolved differently across these countries, shaped by their unique cultures, demography, political realities, and church-state relationships. By taking a closer look at these different contexts, this volume hopes to contribute to a better understanding of factors that shape religion as a contributor to stability and conflict—in the FSU and beyond.

Methodology

This volume brings together multidisciplinary perspectives about the role of religion in stability and conflict in different countries of the FSU. This approach is characterized by several conscious methodological choices. The first was the identification of the countries for study. As Christianity and Islam are the two most frequently practiced religions in the FSU, we ensured that the contributions to this volume incorporated contexts where these religions would be central to shaping stability and conflict. This approach avoids the limitations of a more common focus in recent years only on Islam as a potential cause of conflict. Examining how both Islam and Christianity might contribute to stability or conflict in the FSU may help detect previously overlooked common trends.

Second, we selected contributors that specialize in a range of different geographical regions and methodological approaches, which allowed this volume to benefit from perspectives from different areas of scholarship that might otherwise remain disparate. Such multidisciplinary approaches have proven particularly fruitful for examining topics for which no one discipline has developed a comprehensive set of theories or frameworks. To further facilitate the exchange of ideas among the contributors, as well as other outside experts including policy practitioners, the RAND Corporation

²⁰ Christopher Marsh, “The Religious Dimension of Post-Communist ‘Ethnic’ Conflict,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 35, No. 5, November 2007, pp. 811–830.

hosted two conferences on the role of religion in stability and conflict in the FSU. Our approach therefore aimed to take advantage of expertise across key disciplines and regions and to ensure that the volume contains information that is useful for researchers and practitioners alike. The integrative insights gained in this manner are highlighted in the introductory and concluding chapters.

Finally, the authors of each chapter were free to use the methodology they believed to be most appropriate for their specific inquiry. Thus, scholarship in each chapter has relied on a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including survey research and interviews, historical and policy analysis, and reviews of relevant literature.

Defining Conflict and Stability

For the purposes of this project, we defined *stability* broadly as the absence of violent conflict and a reasonably predictable and positive development trajectory for the society in question. The means that can be used to attain stability may vary widely across different social and political systems: from severe repression and silencing of dissent to a strictly maintained social contract, which may or may not embrace tolerance for different approaches to liberalization and power sharing. Stability achieved through these different trajectories will have distinct characteristics and may vary greatly in longevity and efforts and costs necessary for its long-term sustainability. The role of religion in these qualitatively different pursuits of stability will inevitably vary as well. Keeping the definition of stability broad allowed the authors to engage with the link between religion and stability in the very different contexts present in the FSU.

Our definition of *conflict* is also broad and includes highly contentious relations between the society and state, alarming volatility in intergroup relations, terrorism, and civil or cross-border war. Religion may shape and be shaped by all of these processes, as evidenced by the analyses in this volume.

Overview of Individual Chapters

Artyom Tonoyan opens the volume by looking at how religion contributed to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. While religion was not initially a major factor in the conflict, it became gradually more important over time as it was used by both sides to build and sustain political support for continuing the fight. While a cease-fire between the two sides has largely held for 20 years, the issue has become increasingly infused with a religious dimension, making an ultimate compromise or settlement appear to be more elusive. The potential for an eventual return to active conflict, one that would be seen as more religious on both sides, remains.

Sufian N. Zhemukhov illustrates how the relationship between religion and conflict in the North Caucasus has evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union. He discusses the rise of Islam in the North Caucasus, contrasts its coevolution with nationalism in the eastern and western parts of the region, and discusses factors that may have contributed to the differences that emerged between the two parts. Russian strategies for

dealing with the instability in the region have tended to focus on killing insurgent leaders and terrorists without addressing underlying causes of dissatisfaction or radicalization. These policies have led to a measure of stability, including notably a lack of terrorist attacks during the 2014 Sochi Olympics, but their long-term effects are less clear, particularly as Russian policy has seemingly failed to take into account the different roots of insurgencies in the eastern and western North Caucasus.

Svante E. Cornell continues the theme of the evolution of radical Islam in the FSU and ponders the question of why Islamic radicalization has failed to set strong roots in Central Asia thus far, despite earlier claims that its rise was inevitable. As an explanation, he offers that the Central Asian governments' policies of secularization and religious restrictions may have helped to contain the spread of radical Islam in the region that would otherwise be prone to its influence. He argues that calls to liberalize the regulation of religion, and particularly greater openness to religious influence and funding from external sources, may be ill-advised for Central Asian states and should be treated with caution.

In a featured insert, Steven L. Neuberg and Gabrielle Filip-Crawford use an alternate perspective to look at the religion-conflict relationship in general and discuss how religion may affect existing points of tension between different groups. More specifically, taking a social-psychological approach, the authors show that religious infusion—the extent to which religious beliefs, practices, and discourses permeate the daily life of a group—may turn values incompatibility and resource competition from simmering grievances to drivers of conflict. They argue that religious infusion may help create more cohesive groups, the members of which may be more eager to organize and sacrifice for a common cause, even when their group is in a disadvantaged power position. Leaders or states may capitalize on such cohesion and further use religion for mobilization of forces. While Neuberg and Filip-Crawford do not focus their research specifically on the FSU,²¹ the findings of their research contribute to the fundamental understanding of how religion may shape conflict and stability in this region.

In the subsequent chapter, on the example of Kazakhstan specifically, Nargis Kasenova argues that while the Kazakh government's suppression of any form of "nontraditional" Islam may constrain the development of radical Islamism in the short term, it may also undermine the security and development of the state and society of Kazakhstan in the medium and long term. This repression has helped to stifle religious and secular social movements in the country and has been used as a tool to strengthen state power over civil society. A loosening of religious suppression, together with a rebalancing of relations between the state and society, could help increase the stability of Kazakhstan over the long term and counteract the social-political trends that threaten to destabilize Kazakhstan's current system in the years to come.

²¹ The authors do, however, provide initial evidence that the global findings for the religious infusion–conflict relationship should be translatable to the context of the FSU.

Then, shifting the geographical and political contexts, Vadym Vasiutynskyi outlines the religious landscape of Ukrainian society today and offers sociopsychological insights into the principal differences between the followers of Ukraine's main religious confessions. He argues that religious tensions in contemporary Ukraine primarily reflect, rather than drive, political tensions. While adherents to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appear to stand in opposition to the followers of most other (Christian) denominations in Ukraine, the tensions between them are not religiously, but politically, motivated. As levels of religiosity in Ukraine continue to rise along with people's willingness to assign themselves to different denominations, a more-clear separation of religion from political affairs is necessary to preclude religion from becoming an exacerbating factor in Ukraine's ongoing political and military conflicts.

Irina du Quenoy discusses how stability concerns have shaped the development of Russia's policies toward religion in general and toward the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in particular. Growing concerns about social and regime stability have prompted Moscow to gradually introduce policies that restrict and manage religious freedom, privileging traditional religions, and the Orthodox Church in particular, while limiting missionary activity. At the same time, Moscow has also increasingly relied on an appeal to Orthodoxy and "traditional values" as a key element supporting the legitimacy of the state. Russia's demographic diversity complicates the effectiveness of the Kremlin's increasing reliance on the Orthodox Church, however, as the state's apparent preference for Russian Orthodoxy risks an eventual backlash against both.

Jonah Blank concludes the volume with a discussion of the policy implications that can be drawn from the preceding chapters. He highlights that leaders in the FSU face a complex series of choices regarding managing religion in their countries. Most countries in the region have introduced substantial restrictions on religious freedom and practice, and in the short term, such restrictions have the potential to increase stability and limit challenges to the regime. However, these restrictions can risk both displacing radical groups to neighboring countries and fostering greater radicalism in the long term. While permitting greater religious freedom can help alleviate some of these concerns, careful attention must still be paid to external funding aimed at supporting radical groups. U.S. policymakers do have a range of policy levers that can be employed to promote more productive policies to limit the growth of radicalism in the region, including various types of security and economic assistance. Doing so effectively, however, will require a clear analysis and understanding of local dynamics and policies.

While these chapters make important contributions to our understanding of these issues, this volume has its limitations. The broad reach of the chapters naturally limits the depth of analysis on any individual topic. While the diverse set of authors are able to provide an overview of the relationship between religion and stability across a number of different countries and highlight many interesting patterns and insightful explanations, they are limited in their ability to robustly test potential alternative

hypotheses. While we feel that prioritizing breadth over depth was appropriate for this initial survey on the topic, certainly follow-on work that can examine the hypotheses raised in this volume in greater detail will be needed.

Overall Themes

Three main themes emerge from this survey of the diverse relationships between religion and stability across the FSU. First, the authors discuss the role that religion can play in promoting either conflict or stability, and how the effects of stronger religious identification and activity since the collapse of the Soviet Union appear to have varied based on the local context. In Kazakhstan and Russia, as noted by Kassenova and du Quenoy, religion has been used to increase social cohesion and support for the state within the majority population. In Ukraine, Vasiutynskyi also observes close alignment between religion and politics, in that religious tensions largely reflect sociopolitical divides. As Neuberg and Filip-Crawford note, however, the cohesiveness that religious belief and practice can bring can also be marshaled to promote conflict. As Tonoyan points out, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, religion was used explicitly on both sides to increase support for the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. In Central Asia, Cornell argues that externally supported Islamic influences from the Gulf, when allowed to operate freely, promote radicalization and support for violent extremism.

Second, while religion has played a role in sustaining or intensifying conflict in some parts of the FSU, it has not been the original source of this conflict. Zhemukhov notes this dynamic in the North Caucasus, where, after a first round of conflict based largely on ethnic and national identities, religion increasingly became the unifying force for violent opposition to the state. Tonoyan shows that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan had many alternative sources, including territory and ethnicity, although religion was later used explicitly to marshal support for the opposing sides. The religious dimension in the conflicts discussed in this volume typically emerged as an auxiliary to nonreligious aims. Despite this secondary role, however, the instrumentalization of religion apparent throughout the region has frequently been destabilizing, as the greater infusion of religion in social and political life has exacerbated existing tensions and encumbered progress toward peace.

Third, state policies that restrict or manage religion appear to have contributed to both stability and conflict in different circumstances. Most states in the region have taken an active approach to managing religion and prohibiting certain groups or activities, although the extent to which they have done so varies across countries and over time. As du Quenoy outlines, Russia initially left religion largely unregulated in the post-Soviet period but has gradually increased restrictions on missionary activity and promoted the Orthodox Church as concerns over social and political stability have increased. In the North Caucasus, Zhemukhov shows that the local authoritarian

regime put into place to prevent secessionism has encouraged more moderate forms of Islam while fiercely repressing more radical or externally supported forms. In Central Asia, Cornell notes that states have taken differing approaches, with countries such as Uzbekistan retaining strict control while countries such as Kyrgyzstan removed their restrictions and allowed freer financial and ideological flows from outside the country. Kazakhstan, as Kassenova describes, has maintained restrictions over nontraditional religions, while encouraging the practice of traditional, state-affiliated religion.

The effect of these differing approaches seems to have varied. In Russia and Kyrgyzstan, relatively loose controls over religion led to later concerns regarding the effect that foreign influences ranging from Jehovah's Witnesses to Wahhabi groups were having on state stability. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, religious controls have been maintained more consistently and have helped to maintain state control over society. However, these restrictions may also have damaging longer-term effects on stability, inhibiting the development of civil society, driving certain religious practices underground, or encouraging migration that may be associated with radicalization in other countries. These concerns are also felt in the North Caucasus, where opposition to the local authoritarian regime in Chechnya has become increasingly religious and radical in nature; while the region remains more stable than two decades ago, these groups appear to retain the ability to execute large-scale terrorist attacks, particularly against targets in other parts of Russia. Both harsh controls over religion and free rein for external religious influences therefore appear to pose short- and long-term risks in post-Soviet countries that share the Soviet legacy of disrupted religious traditions and where relatively weak religious knowledge along with the growing demand for religiosity as the bastion of morality, identity, and certainty make religious life particularly susceptible to manipulation.

Control over religion does not appear to offer a shortcut to the long-term development of social cohesion and state legitimacy that are the foundations of truly stable societies. However, states in the region have tactically adapted their religious policies with varying degrees of success to address pressing short-term concerns that religious groups, and particularly external religious influences, may be a threat to continued government control and stability. Managing religious tensions, while continuing to develop as societies, remains a challenge for states throughout the region.

Armenia-Azerbaijan: Rethinking the Role of Religion in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Artyom Tonoyan

This chapter focuses on the role of religion and religious rhetoric in the Armenian-Azeri conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. I argue that religion played a significant role in the conflict, and not as a causal factor—a common and avoidable mistake committed by analysts and scholars—but as the confluence of several sociopolitical roles religion came to assume as the conflict was unfolding. Although religion's role in the conflict has waned with the establishment of the cease-fire regime, it has reemerged in the public discourse with every new round of violence.

It is impossible to discuss the religious dimension of the Armenian-Azeri conflict without first discussing the broader socioreligious and religious-political context of the region and the reasons why scholars have avoided the topic. The present chapter will address these issues before making the case that religion in the Armenian-Azeri conflict may need a second, much closer look.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, all forms of social interaction in the South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have undergone tremendous changes. Religious life, which had been marginalized during the Soviet era if not outright eliminated, sprang anew, bringing with it new forms of social and political organization. It was not surprising that, in this new religiously permissive environment, churches, religious organizations, and Islamic orders attempted to reassert themselves as chief arbiters of public morality and to reclaim their lost status as the locus of these nations' spiritual and cultural heritage. The religious reclamation of public space and public discourse has been a long and uneven process. Although the religion factor is less robust than when it first began with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it should not be confused with a standstill.¹ Religion remains a potent phenomenon, albeit one that, for a long time, eluded close and sustained scrutiny—until it could no longer be ignored.

¹ See Adam Hug, ed., *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2015.

Religion and Conflict Analysis

In the last decades of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st, ethnic and religious differences have been sources of social and political instability.² Contrary to the assumptions of modernization and theories of secularization that envisaged a world with less religion, societies around the world are becoming more ethnically and religiously conscious, perhaps even more than we would like to believe. In many regional contexts (the South Caucasus being no exception), there clearly have been processes afoot that can be described as the religionization of politics and the politicization of religion.

Yet, despite these important developments, social and political scientists have generally avoided the topic of religious influence on politics and vice versa for various reasons, secularization theory chief among them.³ For Western social sciences, much of the discourse on religion has been determined by the towering influence of this theory, profoundly shaped by the likes of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Peter Berger, and others. The theory, in its simplest form, posits that “modernity necessarily brings about a decline of religion.”⁴ Like an hourglass, the more modernity trickles down, the less religion remains. It was not surprising, then, that when Berger famously declared in 1968 that “by the year 2000, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture,”⁵ it was received as an empirically uncontested and incontestable sociological prognostication—the social mood and the available data seemingly on the same page.

Although secularization theory is being jettisoned by a growing list of social scientists as empirically untenable, its initial intellectual foundations have proven rather durable among a cadre of influential social scientists⁶ and, by extension, with conflict analysts. Despite its overall usefulness in explaining social evolution, especially

² See, for instance, Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda*, rev. ed., Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008.

³ Daniel Philpott’s study on the state of the affair articulates the scope of the problem. According to Philpott’s findings, a “survey of articles in four leading international relations journals over the period 1980–1999 finds that only six or so out of a total of about sixteen hundred featured religion as an important influence” (Daniel Philpott, “The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations,” *World Politics*, Vol. 55, October 2002, p. 69). Echoing and at the same time reinforcing Philpott’s argument is the article by Kenneth D. Wald and Clyde Wilcox, “Getting Religion: Has Political Science Rediscovered the Faith Factor?” (*American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4, November 2006, pp. 523–529) provides us with a critical insight as to why this may be the case. They declare with a certain dejection that “apart from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has paid less attention to religion than political science.”

⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, Boston, Mass.: Walter de Gruyter, 2014, p. 48.

⁵ John Leo, “Conference Due on Nonbelievers,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1968, sec. L, 55.

⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of the subject, see articles that appeared in the journal *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 1999, which were dedicated to secularization, its origins, and its demise.

in Western sociocultural and political contexts, secularization theory cultivated what Michael Sells has called, “disciplinary prejudice”⁷ against religion, classifying it as the “hobby of an eccentric few.”⁸ Thus, the emphasis was placed on more “valid” areas of inquiry, such as sociology, history, and economics.⁹

Reality, however, has a way of undermining even the most ardently held intellectual positions. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, the emergence of the religious right in the United States, the role of the Catholic Church in the Polish resistance to communism, and the rise of religious fundamentalisms worldwide, for example, contributed to the questioning of the assumptions of secularization theory leading to Berger’s now oft-cited declaration that the “world today, with some exceptions . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever,” and that a “whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”¹⁰

Berger’s declaration recognized the staying power of religion, and that religions of all confessional stripes and denominational varieties can and will adapt to adversarial situations. Perhaps nowhere has this adaptation been more obvious than in the former republics of the once proudly godless Soviet Union.

Religion, that “opium of the people,”¹¹ not only survived the brutal assault and the experimentations of forced secularization of society,¹² but in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it provided one of the many alternative ideological building blocks with which the various ethnonational entities that composed the Soviet state would come to articulate new pan-national ideas commensurate with changing historical and political realities. Religion thus would assume a prominence in the emerging discourse on national identity alongside ethnolinguistic formulations. Religion-based ideological formulations became potent new instruments in this new ethno-political atmosphere not because of the strength of religious institutions (they had been in large part declawed and domesticated during the Soviet reign), but rather because their strength lay in their ability to revive dormant conceptual patterns among large segments of the populations by capitalizing on the swift changes taking place in the cog-

⁷ Michael Sells, “Sacral Ruins of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Mapping Ethnoreligious Nationalism,” in Craig R. Prentiss, ed., *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, p. 211.

⁸ Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, London: Profile Books, 2010, p. 14.

⁹ Sells, 2003, p. 211.

¹⁰ Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Washington, D.C.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and the Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999, p. 2.

¹¹ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” in trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, *Early Writings*, London: Penguin Classics, 1992, p. 244.

¹² See Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009.

nitive frameworks of individuals in the post-Soviet marketplace of ideas. Religion, with its teachings, rituals, vestments, symbolism, and ability to build and maintain community, served to relink the disrupted “chain of memory,” reinvent disrupted social links, and reform existing ones.¹³ Thus, these revived institutions were able to re-create religiously inflected and emotionally laden political and social spaces through existing and newly built religion-based distribution networks, stimulating and influencing public discourse. This proved to be the case in all three of the South Caucasus states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

In peaceful social and political contexts, these developments are more or less benign, but within more politically turbulent contexts, religion and religious symbolism are called on to serve as key instruments of otherization (i.e., “ways of identifying oneself and others, construing sameness and difference”¹⁴), only this time with a more deleterious outcome in mind. Within the context of the emerging Armenian-Azeri conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, religious identity gradually became what Rogers Brubaker has called a “key diacritical marker” separating Armenians from Azerbaijanis and vice versa. It was not the only such marker to be sure, but it certainly was as prominent as the next one. Yet, the question of religion as a variable in the conflict is almost universally shunned by both local and foreign scholars for reasons explored in this chapter.

If, for Western scholars, it was the “Western” secularization theory serving as an obstacle for studying the nexus of religion and conflict, for Soviet and post-Soviet scholars, it was the Marxist (Leninist) approach to the social sciences in general and religion in particular. This approach was hegemonic in Soviet social scientific discourse and has persisted among post-Soviet social scientists whose training, while having undergone methodological and ideological reconfigurations and modifications, has nevertheless inherited some of the suspicion of the study of religion in general and sociology of religion in particular if only because “Western” sociology of religion was strangely seen as buttressing rather than undermining the claims of religion.¹⁵ Although these sentiments have long been abandoned or otherwise softened, this secularist *Weltanschauung* (worldview of a group) has retained its purchasing power.

¹³ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000, pp. 140–162.

¹⁴ Rogers Brubaker, “Language, Religion, and the Politics of Difference,” *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁵ R. A. Lopatkin, “Opportunities for the Sociological Investigation of the Process of Secularization” [“Vozmozhnosti sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya protsessa sekulyarizatsii”], in P. K. Kurochkin, ed., *Toward the Religion-Free Society (Secularization Under the Conditions of the Socialist Society) [Kobshchestvu svobodnoi ot religii (Protsess sekulyarizatsii v usloviyakh sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva)]*, Moscow: Mysl’, 1970), republished in *Questions of Religion and Religious Studies [Vorprosy religii i religiovedeniya]*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Moscow: OOO ID “Media Prom,” 2009, p. 377.

Apart from the influence of secularization theory and the Marxist-Leninist approach, two additional factors have discouraged the analysis of the religious aspects of conflict: first, the zeal of some scholars to debunk Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, whose eponymous article was making the rounds in academic circles at about the same time that the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was experiencing its battlefield apogee. Huntington, the venerable Harvard political scientist, argued, controversially, that the end of the Cold War, far from bringing about the end of history, would usher in a "revival of religion, 'la revanche de Dieu' . . . [providing] a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations,"¹⁶ reconfiguring the existing international relations along civilizational lines. These civilizations, according to Huntington, are based primarily on religion and contain unavoidable cultural-conflictual fault-lines.¹⁷ Huntington's article, and the book that followed, cited the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as one of his cases of conflicts along civilization/religious lines, whereby the "kin-country syndrome" stimulated Turkey "to become increasingly supportive of its religious, ethnic and linguistic brethren in Azerbaijan."¹⁸ Thus, in the zeal to debunk Huntington's thesis, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater, as the popular saying goes: There is no civilizational conflict here, move along.¹⁹

The second reason for avoiding the topic of religion in studying the conflict is a political one, as the following anecdote will demonstrate. In 2007, then-Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia, who in 2008 became the president, was visiting the offices of the *Los Angeles Times* for a round-table discussion organized by the paper's editors. Among the topics of conversation was the recent militarization of the region and the conflict between Armenians and Azeris. Soon after the discussion began, the conversation turned to religion. The exchange between Sargsyan and his hosts perfectly illustrates why religion, despite being such an obvious component of the conflict, is so vigorously avoided. From the transcript of the conversation:

Tim Cavanaugh: How large a role does religion play in this, given that both of the countries we're talking about are predominantly Muslim countries and Armenia is predominantly a Christian country?

Sargsyan: We have long avoided talking about this factor and taking it into account. And not only in respect of our relationship with Turkey but also with neighboring Azerbaijan. But irrespective of our wish, this factor exists, and the factor is very big. The factor is as big; as we can expand it over milleniums [sic] and thousands of

¹⁶ Huntington, 1993, p. 26.

¹⁷ Huntington, 1993, p. 36.

¹⁸ Huntington, 1993, 36.

¹⁹ See Svante E. Cornell, "Religion as a Factor in Caucasian Conflicts," *Civil Wars*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Autumn 1998, pp. 47, 49.

years, this was probably the only reason of our conflict. There are no Christians to the east of us. And if I can use this word, we are at the edge of Christianity. But the edge has the amortization problems. And over thousands of years we were wearing out. (Ambassador Tatoul Markarian whispers into the prime minister's ear.)

Sargsyan: The ambassador reminds me to tell that we have excellent relationship with many Muslim countries. (Room erupts in laughter.)²⁰

Given this excerpt from the brief discussion, it should not be surprising that the body of scholarly literature dedicated to analyzing the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh lacks detailed and sustained analyses of the role of religion in the conflict despite the widespread presence of religious symbols and rhetoric.

This chapter should be seen as an attempt to rethink the neglect of the study of religious dimension of the conflict by identifying the various links between religion and the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. In short, it is an invitation for a further study. Thus, I argue that contrary to the economic and rational choice models used to study the conflict, which eschew religion as a variable altogether, the evidence makes clear that religion played several important roles throughout the duration of the conflict. Although its influence has waned since the 1994 cease-fire and the postwar consolidation of state power by political elites, it continues to be a potent cultural and emotional resource that periodically makes itself available as a validator of the “sacred cause,” as Stephen Saideman and William Ayres have put it.²¹

Politicizing Religion and Religionizing Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

How did religion become a factor in the conflict, and what roles did it play? As I argue in this chapter, religion was not an important factor in the beginning of the conflict, rather it entered through a back door, becoming a factor in the later stages. In the beginning of the conflict, the Armenian and Azeri grievances were anything but religious; they were largely territorial, economic, and historical. Religion grew to become a factor in the conflict through two distinct processes. First, religion became an important vehicle for forging and maintaining social and emotional solidarities across social ranks in a time of profound political and social crisis because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the crisis, which also coincided with the emergence of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, religious leaders in Armenia and Azerbaijan became critical role players in creating formal and informal links between various social and politi-

²⁰ “‘There Are No Christians to the East of Us’: Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan Talks Geopolitics,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2007.

²¹ Stephen M. Saideman and R. William Ayres, *For Kin or Country: Xenophobia, Nationalism, and War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 94.

cal movements, introducing a sense of stability amid a disintegrating social order. In this period, religion emerged as one of the few social institutions capable of shielding individuals from existential anxiety—brought by the near collapse of society—and fostering communal life, accomplishing its mission with a noticeable degree of success. As Émile Durkheim reminds us, in situations of social breakdown and acute external conflict, in-group solidarity and socio-moral cohesion based on religious bonds move to the forefront of social life, pushing economic and political matter into the background, for the time being.²² In such a world, religion becomes a “privileged resource of social and cultural construction,”²³ enveloping other concerns and creating an environment within which it exercises all-pervading influence. It also invites opportunities for cooptation and exploitation by political virtuosi and ethnonationalist entrepreneurs.

Second, religion became instrumentalized for the purposes of political legitimation at the hands of the newly emerging political elites who ideologically conflated religion and ethnicity,²⁴ infusing them with the emerging nationalist discourse. With that came the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with religious motifs, metaphors, and symbols,²⁵ “reifying the importance of religion, [and] presenting it as a struggle between ‘Islam’ and ‘Christianity.’”²⁶ Whether intended or not, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was thus sacralized; the violence that ensued was then religionized. In short, the politicization of religion led to the religionization of the conflict. The inclusion of religious rhetoric in the public discourse created a sociopolitical environment within which the conflict between Armenians and Azeris often made sense when portrayed in religious terms, even though it would not become about religion per se: Armenians and Azeris were not killing each other chiefly or even mostly because of religious animus. Religion never became a “self-propellant phenomenon,”²⁷ rather, it served as an ampli-

²² Émile Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, Anthony Giddens, ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 161.

²³ Aleksandr Agadjanian, “Ethnicity, Nation and Religion: Current Debates and the South Caucasian Reality,” in Aleksandr Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke, and Evert van der Zweere, eds., *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*, New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 26.

²⁴ Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisovskaya, and David Barry, “Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2012, p. 639.

²⁵ This was a process not unique to Armenia or Azerbaijan. For example, Agadjanian has argued with similar premises regarding the emerging influence of the Russian church immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union by noting that, “Before, the communist ideology was in fact an overwhelming *pseudomorpheme* of religion and full of religious overtones. Now, in the new secular atmosphere religion becomes an instrumentalised symbol used for legitimation (or to say it with M. Eliade and P. Berger, ‘cosmization’) of a new reality that still lacks order.” Aleksandr Agadjanian, “Religious Responses to Social Changes in Russia: Traditional and New Religions Compared,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1996, p. 70.

²⁶ Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, and Edward Allworth, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 16.

²⁷ Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 41.

fier of a conflict that had its principal roots elsewhere (e.g., territory, history, economy). The war in Nagorno-Karabakh thus gradually acquired religious flavor, with religion refining and sharpening the exclusionary boundaries, landing legitimacy to the ruling elites, and functionally supporting the violence said elites promoted and/or exercised. In this process, religion moved from the symbolic and rhetorical realm to a broad organizational underwriter of physical violence,²⁸ even though direct participation in violence by religious figures was strictly limited but not unprecedented.

Seen through this prism, it becomes clear that religion served to intensify what Berger called “the ecstasy of marginal situations”: events that emotionally and psychologically affect entire societies, undermining the social reality previously taken for granted. As he notes,

At such times religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front. Furthermore, whenever a society must motivate its members to kill or to risk their lives, thus consenting to be placed in extreme marginal situations, religious legitimations become important. Thus the “official” exercise of violence . . . is almost invariably accompanied by religious symbolizations. . . . Men go to war and men are put to death amid prayers, blessings, and incantations.²⁹

Through this lens, religion in conflict is seen not in narrowly defined individualistic-pietistic terms (i.e., religion as a matter of personal preference practiced in the closet, with little bearing on social processes), but as a complex mechanism of social, political, and moral legitimation. Additionally, it serves, in the Weberian sense, as a basis for and a motivator of social action and group behavior,³⁰ with a powerful, effective arsenal at its disposal. In the context of a rapidly changing social order and an

²⁸ Instrumentalization of religion in this fashion was similar to the one taking place in the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, where religious actors and political elites were creating mutually beneficial alliances. As Alexander De Juan has argued,

The war in Bosnia is often cited as a prime example of the virulent nature of religious differences. The antagonisms between Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosnians are interpreted as the cause of the war in 1992. Recent studies, however, contradict this view: before the outbreak of the hostilities, religious identifications did not play a central role for the majority of the population. Discrimination was hardly practiced and there were many instances of mixed marriages: both indications that all three religious groups lived side by side in relative amity, not enmity. Hence it is not “ancient hatred” that is responsible for the religious dimension of the Bosnian conflict. Rather, orthodox clerics and nationalistic political elites have cooperated to mutually support each other in the realization of their respective aims. Slobodan Milosevic needed the Orthodox Church to legitimize his claim for power as well as his nationalistic and expansionist agenda. Orthodox clerics supported him with the aim to regain their former influence in the Serbian society. (Alexander De Juan, “A Pact with the Devil? Elite Alliances as Bases of Violent Religious Conflicts,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 12, 2008, p. 1121)

²⁹ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books, 1990, pp. 44–45.

³⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978, pp. 24–26.

emerging conflict, the politicization of religion and the sacralization of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh became almost inevitable.

Set against the background of the early stages of the conflict in 1988, it becomes clear that religion played very little if any role in the initial framing of the grievances and the conflict. Religion and religious differences were at best an afterthought. A telling indication was the near absence of religious figures during the initial protests in Yerevan and Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh. Felix Corley, editor of *Forum 18*, a news platform for a Norway-based religious freedom advocacy group, notes that during the February 1988 demonstrations in Yerevan, there were virtually no priests in the crowds, with the exception of the 100-year-old celibate priest Boghos, who was there in a personal capacity rather than as a representative of Ejmiatsin, the official seat of the Armenian Church.³¹ Armenian religious leaders and their Azerbaijani counterparts were passive observers of the unfolding crisis and chose to stay on the sidelines rather than intervene, although not for long. When demonstrators began using religious slogans and symbols (e.g., crosses, posters with images of Armenian saints, posters of Ayatollah Khomeini) in lieu of communist-themed posters and slogans, the religious leadership began to engage. Central authorities themselves would soon realize the changing dynamics of the crisis and the importance of the religious leadership in fostering either dialogue or conflict. Hoping to contain the conflict, in May 1988, the Armenian Catholicos Vazgen I and the leader of the Office of the Muslims of the Caucasus Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade met in Rostov-on-Don at the urging of the Soviet leadership. Despite some initial agreements to continue dialogue and urge restraint for their respective “constituents,” the meeting led nowhere, as both leaders came under increasing popular pressure to join their ranks or be left out of the unfolding political processes.

The language used against the religious leaders often lacked decorum. In one instance, not content with Catholicos Vazgen I’s calls to remain calm in light of anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan, Armenian protestors upped the ante against the aging Catholicos, accusing him of serving in Moscow’s interests and committing treason. One banner unfurled in a popular demonstration in Yerevan proclaimed, “[t]he Catholicos has crucified our faith” for not speaking out about Armenian national aspirations.³² Shortly thereafter, Vazgen I would change course, declaring during a television interview that he supported the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia since it was both “constitutional and legal,” falling short, however, of supporting the most

³¹ See Felix Corley, “The Armenian Church Under the Soviet and Independent Regimes, Part 3: The Leadership of Vazgen,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 26, Nos. 3/4, 1998, p. 293.

³² Gerard J. Libaridian, ed., *The Karabagh File: Documents and Facts on the Question of Mountainous Karabagh 1918–1988*, Toronto, Canada: Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation, 1988, p. 93.

radical of demands by Armenian nationalists—independence for Armenia (albeit for the time being).³³

Similar developments were also taking place in Azerbaijan. The spiritual leader of the Caucasus Muslims, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, at first did not feel compelled to join, at least publicly, the emerging nationalist movement in Azerbaijan. But as the conflict got underway and as popular pressure grew he, too, would make a public volte-face regarding his engagement in the nationalist stirrings in Azerbaijan. A turning point was Pashazade's interview in *Bakinskii Rabochii* (the flagship Communist Party newspaper in Soviet Azerbaijan) in November 1988. Commenting on the attempts of Karabakh Armenians to build a new aluminum factory in Topkhana, a small provincial town in Nagorno-Karabakh, circumventing Baku's permission, Pashazade accused Armenians and their "foreign supporters" of an "uncivilized" land grab, using the highly charged term "living space," an allusion to the Nazi concept of *lebensraum*:

Our holy faith calls us to spread and strengthen peace, establish justice and respect rights, uproot treachery and cunning in all their manifestations. For a Muslim, as for any decent human being, there isn't and there cannot be any compromise in matters of honor, dignity, and justice. We, along with all our people, decisively and categorically reject the attempts, (unworthy of the civilized world), by the neighboring republic and its foreign supporters, to attain "living space" at the expense of historically Azerbaijani territories. It is very much possible, that Topkhana, is just one link in the comprehensively worked-out plan of actions, geared towards the gradual achievement of proposed goals. This provocation may be followed by yet others raising the tensions higher still. Our foes will be standing by ready to use them in a distorted manner misinforming the world community on our righteous indignation and the demands of the Azerbaijani people. We cannot for a moment forget about this, while carrying out a righteous struggle for the honor and dignity of our people.³⁴

According to Arif Yunusov, some of his reasons for the turnaround had much to do with the growing challenge of Iran and what Brenda Shaffer has called the "Iranian Islamic model"³⁵ over Azeri politics and the Azeri national identity.³⁶ The implication

³³ Corley, 1998, pp. 295–296.

³⁴ "Sheikh-ul-Islam: Such Is the Will of Our People" ["Sheikh-ul-Islam: Takova volya nashego naroda"], *Bakinskii Rabochii*, Baku, Azerbaijan, November 1988, p. 4 (translation provided by author).

³⁵ Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2002, p. 109.

³⁶ In Azerbaijan, the turning point, according to Yunusov, was the clampdown by the Soviet troops on Azeri protestors on January 20, 1990, after which the public distrust of the communist system and the parallel rise of the prestige of the Sheikh-ul-Islam created a new dynamic for the growth of Islamic sentiments in Azerbaijan. See Arif Yunusov, *Islam v Azerbaidzhane*, Baku, Azerbaijan: Zaman, 2004, pp. 183–194.

is that he changed his position because he feared his own influence might be on the verge of being vanquished.

As a result of the mounting pressure and the desire not to feel left out of the increasingly popular national movements, religious leaders would enter the fray of the new national identity discourse and help change its dynamic as well as the dynamic of the interaction between religion and politics. Criticized one moment and popular in another, these leaders would be hereafter courted by nationalist leaders in a bid to legitimize their own political agendas, infusing them with populist religious themes, symbols, and meanings.³⁷

Religious Symbols and Cleavages in the Conflict

One of the main sources of Armenian grievances was the closure of Armenian churches and the complete absence of Armenian religious life in Nagorno-Karabakh. Catholicos Vazgen I would bemoan this fact to a Soviet journalist by stating that “[i]n the past 15 years the Azerbaijani leadership has refused our repeated appeals to allow us to open at least one church in Nagorno-Karabakh. . . . Some 150,000 Armenians live there, while there is not a single working Armenian church, while there are more than 100 churches standing empty and forgotten.”³⁸ Catholicos Vazgen’s remarks gave voice to the long-held belief that, after the incorporation of Karabakh into Azerbaijan, the region’s Armenian Christian religious life came to a complete standstill; it was so by design rather than happenstance. Armenians point out that although the religious situation in Armenia was much the same in the 1920s and 1930s, the Armenian Church was able to recuperate from decades of Stalinist persecution and revive a vibrant religious life during World War II and thereafter, whereas no such thing happened in Nagorno-Karabakh. This, Armenian nationalists claimed, was not only because Moscow was against a revival of religious life in Karabakh but because of the discriminatory policies crafted in Baku. By 1932, all Armenian churches and monasteries in Nagorno-Karabakh that had operated since the Middle Ages were shut down, along with the Gandzasar Monastery, the crown jewel of medieval Armenian monastic learning. Although there were constant petitions by Catholicos Vazgen I to reopen some churches and allow the clergy to serve the liturgy, the petitions fell on deaf ears.³⁹ There would be no functioning Armenian church in Nagorno-Karabakh until 1989, one year after the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh took to the streets of Stepanakert

³⁷ Yunusov, 2004, p. 191.

³⁸ Quoted in Corley, 1998, p. 295.

³⁹ “The Bells of Artsakh” [“Kolokolka Artsakha”], *Kommunist*, Stepanakert, Azerbaijan, March 30, 1990.

(the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh) in February 1988, and only after years of clandestine activities by enthusiastic clergymen and lay activists.⁴⁰

One document I uncovered in the Armenian National Archive was a directive issued in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1987, asking the local governors to draw up a list of houses of worship that were vacant or were not being used so that they could be turned into objects of “socio-cultural and other everyday activities, such as libraries, educational centers, art galleries, youth houses etc.”⁴¹ Although the directive also mentions mosques, the list of religious facilities later provided included no mosque eligible for closure or transformation into so-called cultural centers, but it had nearly 70 Armenian churches, many of which dated back to the Middle Ages and were architecturally unique. Some of these churches were characterized in the document as “dangerous religious centers from the past.”⁴²

Although church closures were nothing new in the Soviet Union, most of them were carried out at the order of the central authorities in Moscow and rarely if ever met opposition. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the directive was issued, and its implementation was to be supervised not by Moscow, which may have given the initial green light, but by Baku. The Armenians remembered well the cultural erasure of everything Armenian in Turkey,⁴³ a country with which Azeris have extensive ethno-religious and cultural ties. Armenians thought that the same thing would happen to them in Karabakh. There, the closure of churches with obvious religious significance was profoundly disturbing to the Armenians and was variously dubbed as cultural or “white” genocide (i.e., destruction of culturally significant monuments that spoke of previous Armenian presence).⁴⁴ For Armenians, lobbying for the restoration of dilapidated churches and resumption of religious life was seen as a step in reclaiming the region’s Armenian Christian past, while Azeris interpreted such demands as an encroachment on Azeri cultural and religious life.

Beginning in 1988, Catholicos Vazgen I began pressuring the Soviet authorities to reestablish the long-defunct diocese of Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh), appointing physicist-turned-priest Pargev Martirosian as the Prelate of Karabakh. Within months, the prelate, accompanied by four other priests, arrived in Nagorno-Karabakh and laid the groundwork for establishing a diocese

⁴⁰ Hratch Tchilingirian, “Religious Discourse and the Church in Mountainous Karabagh 1988–1995,” *Revue du monde arménien moderne et contemporain*, Vol. 3, 1997, p. 73.

⁴¹ Hayastani Petakan Arkhiv (National Archive of Armenia), *The Karabakh Movement [Gharabaghian Sharzhum]*, undated, 1, 1159 (fund)/2 (list)/4 (case).

⁴² Hayastani Petakan Arkhiv (National Archive of Armenia), undated, pp. 2–5.

⁴³ See “Cultural Cleansing: Who Remembers the Armenians?” in Robert Bevan, ed., *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, Chicago, Ill.: Reaktion Books, 2007.

⁴⁴ Tatul Akopian, *Karabakh Diary: Green and Black or No War and No Peace [Karabakhskii Dnevnik: Zelenoe i Chernoe Ili Ni Voiny Ni Mira]*, Yerevan, Armenia: Antares, 2010, p. 50.

against the wishes of authorities in Baku. With the reopening of the Gandzasar Monastery in October 1989, for the first time in decades the liturgy of the Armenian Church was to be carried out in a church building in Karabakh. In a sermon delivered on the occasion, the newly appointed bishop of Karabakh Martirosian echoed the tenor of Armenian nationalist activists, both secular and religious, declaring “[t]oday is the beginning of our victories.”⁴⁵ He clearly meant victories on the battlefield as well as moral victories. The combination of religious identity, the echoes of the past, and the memory of the Armenian genocide had all come to form a “strong yearning for moral catharsis,”⁴⁶ and reopening the churches was the first step on that path. The religious, symbolic, and political significance of the occasion was not lost on either the participants or the observers. As one participant later recalled:

[This] was the first Divine Liturgy in Gandzasar, celebrated for the first time in sixty years . . . I remember there was a Russian reporter who was filming the event and I approached him and asked what was his impression of this event. He had captured our ethos, he said, “A people whose faith is impossible to kill, murder or destroy, is invincible. You are such people.”

From the very beginning they were trying to take away not our land, but our faith. And they thought they were successful, because for sixty years there weren’t any functioning churches in Karabagh. They had turned the churches into animal barns. This was part of the Communist propaganda and atheistic ideology. All of us, including myself, were cut off from that. It is now that every Saturday and Sunday—in any given church in Karabagh, even the ones that are not functional—people go there, not only to light candles or pray for the sake of praying, but go there as believers, even if they don’t know what exactly that entails.⁴⁷

It is clear, then, that with some initial resistance, religion made its way into the conflict when nationalist leaders on both sides of the conflict began emphasizing religious belonging as a factor in self-identification and the vilification of the other. Novelists and poets eventually entered the fray, versifying mutual vilification using religious symbols.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Tchilingirian, 1997, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Derlugian, 2005, p. 187.

⁴⁷ Tchilingirian, 1997, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁸ See Hayastani Petakan Arkhiv (National Archive of Armenia), undated. In this archival material, there are two undated poems by Azeri poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzade and Armenian Vahagn Davtyan where they use a slew of insults disparaging each other’s religions.

It was no coincidence that the beginning stages of the conflict, especially the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, an industrial suburb of Baku, and the desecration⁴⁹ and the attempted torching of Baku's lone Armenian church,⁵⁰ were blamed on Islamic fanaticism by Mikhail Gorbachev⁵¹ and later by the representatives of the Armenian diaspora in Moscow.⁵² The Azeris readily saw the hand of the Armenian Church as singularly responsible for fanning the flames of the conflict. An article published in *Bakinskii Rabochii* put the Azeri view of the Armenian Church's role this way:

Despite the statements made by the clerical leadership of the [Armenian Church] that the Church has stayed away from secular affairs as a matter of fact they are the silent ideological inspirers and active defenders of the "aspirations of the suffering Armenian people." The Armenian Church did not spare efforts to let the proverbial "jinni out of the bottle." . . . The Armenian Church long before the mass protests in Nagorno-Karabakh did everything it could to wrest away NKAO [Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast] from the Azerbaijan SSR [Soviet Socialist Republic] on the waves of national feelings. The Church was pursuing its goal relentlessly and methodically very often by way of behind the scenes maneuvering, but also openly leaving its opponents without a doubt about the true purposes of its endeavors. The Armenian Church is masterfully directing and coordinating the operations of its foreign-based priests and especially in the United States.⁵³

The author of the article goes on to state that it was the stated goal of the leadership of the Armenian Church to give the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh and Sumgait the cast of religious conflict to appeal to the sensitivities of the "Christian" West.⁵⁴ A similar sentiment is also echoed by scholars Mammadov and Musaev when they state that the "Armenian Church has always actively participated in politics, and it has played a special role in fanning the flames of hatred between Armenians and their Muslim neighbors."⁵⁵

Armenian nationalist writer and journalist Zori Balayan would stress that the conflict had obvious religious overtones, as during his meeting with Gorbachev in the

⁴⁹ See Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic*, rev. ed., New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Viktor Loshak, "Sumgait: Epilog Tragedii," *Moskovskie Novosti*, May 22, 1988.

⁵¹ Ivan Ivekovic, "The Political Use and Abuse of Religion in Transcaucasia and Yugoslavia," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1997, p. 27.

⁵² "Armenians Stage Protest in Moscow," Associated Press, March 14, 1988.

⁵³ A. Zargarov, "Zloi Umysel, Chuzhdye Golosa: Armyanskie Natsionalisty i Ikh Pokroviteli Seyut Yad Rozni Mezhdu Narodami," *Bakinskii Rabochii*, November 26, 1988 (translation provided by the author).

⁵⁴ Zargarov, 1988.

⁵⁵ Il'gar Mammadov and Tofik Musaev, *The Armenian-Azeri Conflict: History, Law, Mediation [Armyano-Azerbaijdzhanskii Konflikt: Istoria, Pravo, Posrednich-Estvo]*, 2nd ed., Baku, Azerbaijan: Elm, 2008, p. 13.

Kremlin,⁵⁶ but that Moscow was trying its best to suppress the religious side of the conflict, fearing another round of Muslim resentment over the Afghan war debacle.⁵⁷

As the conflict progressed, the use of religious slogans, images, and symbols became widespread.⁵⁸ In many instances, victims of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait reported cigarette burn marks made in the shape of crosses; the houses and apartments where Armenians lived were marked with crosses for easy identification of Armenians for Azeri mobs. A witness interview conducted by a prosecutor at the Armenian Ministry of Internal Affairs revealed grizzly details about murders that, among other things, used Christian religious symbols on murdered individuals.⁵⁹

One former Jewish resident of Baku subsequently published memoirs in Israel upon his emigration, in which he recounted some of the horrors that had befallen the victims of the 1990 anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku. He wrote about seeing dogs wandering in the streets of the town with dog tags inscribed with the name of the head of the Armenian Church Catholicos Vazgen I.⁶⁰ Conor O’Cleary wrote in the *New Republic* that “Islamic slogans [were] written on the dashboards of Azerbaijani vehicles used in this war against Christian Armenia.”⁶¹ Pamphlets with anti-Armenian propaganda and calls to take up the Muslim Azeri cause were reported to be circulating in mosques in Tehran and other Iranian cities with large Azeri populations. This excerpt from an undated pamphlet sent to the Armenian Foreign Ministry in Yerevan by the Armenian Embassy in Tehran recounted the events:

The blood of my Azeri brother will not remain spilled on the ground. The Muslim nations of the world such as Iranians, Turks, Pakistanis, Iraqis, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Syrians, Lebanese and the worldwide Muslim community will wash blood with blood and will liberate the stolen lands. We will not allow the creation of a new Israel by the hands of the “civilized” crusaders.⁶²

⁵⁶ Akopian, 2010, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Zorii Balayan, *Between Hell and Heaven: Karabakh Studies [Mezhdu Adom i Raiem: Karabakhskie Etyudy]*, Moscow: Academia, 1995, pp. 313–317.

⁵⁸ Yunusov, 2004, p. 183.

⁵⁹ “The Protocol of the Eyewitness Tamara Manvelovna Barkhudaryan’s Interview” [“Protokol Doprosa Svidetelia Barkhudaryan Tamara Manvelovna”], Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, March 18, 1988.

⁶⁰ “Now I Know How the Jews Felt in Germany in 1938” [“Teper’ ia Znaiu, Chto Chuvstvovali Evrei Germanii v 1938 Godu”], *Krug*, Tel-Aviv, July 27, 1989.

⁶¹ Conor O’Cleary, “Pajama Game,” *New Republic*, June 10, 1991, p. 12.

⁶² Archives of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Report from Armenian Embassy in Tehran,” February 18, 1997, packet number 2, case number 167, pp. 40–41 (translation from an Armenian translation of the Persian text by the author).

Pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini were used in rallies against the Armenians in Baku and elsewhere with calls to take up jihad, while in Armenia, pictures of Vladimir Lenin and Gorbachev with slogans praising the Communist Party and Perestroika were slowly giving way to posters denouncing Islam and pan-Islamism and to crosses and other Christian symbols.

Priests were taking center stage during mass rallies and demonstrations, often leading the demonstrations with chants and benediction. In a telling article published in the *Commonweal*, Armenian American Orthodox theologian Vigen Guroian would later decry the willingness and comfort with which the Armenian clergy had embraced the “new nationalism” coupled with “ethnic pride” in the years leading up to and during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁶³

As the conflict escalated into a war, the Armenians were able to achieve military superiority and began repelling Azerbaijani army units from inside Nagorno-Karabakh. Finding itself in dire military circumstances, the Azeri government would soon send a secret delegation to Afghanistan appealing to the Afghan Mujahedeen for military assistance. According to various estimates, up to 2,500 of them responded to the Azeri appeal and traveled to Azerbaijan,⁶⁴ where they joined forces with Azeri regulars as well as Chechen volunteers. These last were led by Shamil Basayev, the notorious Chechen terrorist and the organizer of many attacks throughout Russia. Basayev would be joined by other terrorists, Khattab, an Arab jihadist from Jordan, and Salman Raduev, Basayev’s compatriot from Chechnya.⁶⁵ Basayev would later confide to an Azeri reporter that his travels to the Karabakh front were motivated by “the idea of jihad”⁶⁶ and not for material gain, as his enemies had charged.⁶⁷

Azeri collaboration with Islamists from a variety of Muslim countries stretched well into the late 1990s. According to U.S. security expert Yosef Bodansky, the Azeri government of Heydar Aliiev pledged to allow safe passage for some jihadists from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other Arab countries into Chechnya in return for material assistance against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and a promise that these Islamists would not band together with homegrown Islamists to seek the overthrow

⁶³ Vigen Guroian, “The New Nationalism and the Gospel Witness: Western Tolerance vs. Christian Repentance,” *Commonweal*, Vol. 122, No. 13, July 14, 1995, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Michael Taarnby, “The Mujahedin in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Case Study in the Evolution of Global Jihad,” working paper, Vol. 20, September 5, 2008, p. 5. See also Gaik Demoian, *Turkey’s Foreign Policy and the Karabakh Conflict: Historical Comparative Analysis* [*Vneshnyaya politika Turtsiia i Karabakhskaa Konflikt: Istoriko-sravnitel’nyi analiz*], Yerevan, Armenia, 2013, pp. 265–297.

⁶⁵ Sanobar Shermatova, “Islamskii Faktor v Rukax Politicheskix Elit,” in Alexei Malashenko and Martha Brill Olcott, eds., *Islamic Factor in the Hands of Political Elites* [*Islam na postsovetkom prostranstve*], Moscow: Moskovskiy tsentr Karnegi, 2001, pp. 220–221.

⁶⁶ Aris Ghazinyan, “Springboard” [“Platsdarm”], golosarmenii.am, April 3, 2010.

⁶⁷ Later in the interview, Basayev would declare, somewhat disappointedly, that he did not find jihad there, as he had hoped for.

of Aliiev's government. Azerbaijan thus became a "hub,"⁶⁸ as Bodansky has put it, for Islamist operations throughout the Caucasus region, effectively becoming part of the "global intifada" that also included Palestine, the Balkans, and Kashmir.⁶⁹ These may well have been part of a larger effort by Gulf Arab states to geopoliticize religion in the South Caucasus and to try to project influence in a remote geographical location through religious means, albeit unsuccessfully.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Garegin I, and other priests in the church were saying benediction over Armenian troops fighting Azeris, invoking Christian ideals and the saints of Armenian history who had fought off the "enemies" of Christianity.⁷¹ The Armenian primate of the newly created diocese in Nagorno-Karabakh Martirosian would become an active participant in the conflict by organizing baptisms of the volunteer fighters before battles, preaching sermons that were part inspirational and part inflammatory, and offering blessings to the fighting Armenian troops. In an interview to an Armenian journalist years later, the archbishop would counter the notion that the war was won by people who had for decades embraced atheism:

During the war for the liberation of Artsakh⁷² the Armenian clerics were right next to the soldiers. Freedom fighters were going into battle with crosses, and those who could not get crosses would paint crosses on their clothes. . . . People saying such things have no idea what they are talking about. Everybody was going into the battlefield with faith, getting water baptism as they did so. They were all saying: "[God forbid] in case I die unbaptized. If I die, I must die as a Christian soldier." What atheism? On the contrary, you should have seen the miracles they witnessed, and how they felt God's hand. It was not one or two cases either, but counted in the hundreds. Freedom fighters were throwing themselves into the battlefield to save what was holy. Is this not a testimony about faith? The view about the role of atheists is a complete foolishness.⁷³

⁶⁸ Yossef Bodansky, "The New Azerbaijan Hub: How Islamist Operations Are Targeting Russia, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh," *Defense and Foreign Affairs' Strategic Policy*, October 1999, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Bodansky, 1999.

⁷⁰ That these efforts failed was partially related to the changing U.S. national security calculus in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Azerbaijan had become an important transit point for U.S. troops engaged in the Afghan theater. U.S. involvement and security arrangements naturally invited reevaluation of local security priorities influencing ground-level situations. Another reason for the failure can be explained by the robustness of local traditional religious and cultural practices, which successfully resisted the penetration of foreign politicized religious ideologies.

⁷¹ Ivekovic, 1997, p. 27.

⁷² Armenians refer to Nagorno-Karabakh as *Artsakh*.

⁷³ Armine Kareyan, "People Saying Such Things Have No Idea What They Are Talking About: Everybody Was Going Forth with Faith": Archbishop Pargev" ["Ghalat en anum nman ban asoghnerne: bolore havatkov ein gnum": Pargev Srbazan"], RAZM.info (translation by author), April 20, 2012.

Journalist Thomas de Waal wrote about his conversation with what he calls a “warrior priest straight out of medieval Christendom” about the latter’s involvement in the war in Nagorno-Karabakh:

After the service, Father Koryun invited us to his home in a semi-ruined apartment block. He plied us with cognac and introduced us to his wife and son. Yet most of his conversation was that of a fanatic, mixing the recent war with events of more than a thousand years ago. Koryun said he had come to Karabakh “on the summons of the blood of my ancestors.” He had not only taken services but fought as well. “I would kiss my cross and put my cross and gospel aside,” he related, acting this out with his gestures. “I would take off my cassock, put on my uniform, take up my gun and go into battle.”⁷⁴

De Waal also wrote about his conversations with Archbishop Pargev, who reminisced about the events leading up to the capture of Shusha/Shushi, the “Jerusalem of Karabakh,”⁷⁵ the culturally most significant city in Nagorno-Karabakh:

When the Armenian offensive to take Shusha was bogged down on the evening 8 May 1992, Parkev said that it was he who had identified the problem and the solution. The trouble was that the statue of the Antichrist—Lenin—was still standing in Stepanakert’s central square: “I said, ‘Take down Lenin,’ and a few hours later we captured Shusha. That’s how it was. In two or three hours we were almost in the center.”⁷⁶

Other events of the war freighted with sectarian significance included the use of the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shusha/Shushi by the Azeri troops as a weapons storehouse; this was justified on the grounds that Armenian fighters would not bomb the church because of its obvious religious and symbolic significance. However, the cathedral’s bas-reliefs portraying Christ and the apostles had been used for target practice, and crosses and the face and hands of the relief of Christ were obliterated as a result. Similarly, Armenian troops had painted crosses on tanks that were used to capture Shusha/Shushi, wearing uniforms patched with crosses and adopting the name Crusaders with an obvious nod to the medieval crusaders.⁷⁷ The Armenian documentary filmmaker Tigran Khzmalyan recounted the night of the attack to capture the city while filming a documentary:

⁷⁴ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2003, p. 192.

⁷⁵ De Waal, 2003, p. 185.

⁷⁶ De Waal, 2003.

⁷⁷ See Akopian, 2010, p. 149.

I still shudder when I think back. The military uniforms worn by the Armenians and the Azeris were similar, and our troops, to set themselves apart, used gauze, or some such thing, to fashion crosses on their backs: it was the most obvious and the same time the simplest of solutions. When finally the command to attack came, fighters lined up in one column: can you imagine, 400 hundred men in half darkness, with crosses on their backs, and they are marching to certain death. . . . It was a Crusade in the truest meaning of the word.⁷⁸

“Before going to the battle front,” one American Armenian priest visiting the region recounted, “all the fedayin [Armenian volunteer fighters] take an oath in church before the priest.”⁷⁹ Other Armenian clergy were also reported to have taken active part in the war. One such clergymember, a priest named Raffik, told a visiting French journalist, “I am a priest, I pray always, it’s essential. But I fight too. My rifle has shot many times. I’m afraid of blood, I’m afraid of bullets, but they don’t hit me.”⁸⁰ As he lay dying, mortally wounded in the battle for the town of Mardakert some months later, the priest was quoted as saying:

I came from Gandsasar to Mardakert. Vartan the Brave said to God: “Just as You gave Your son, we give our lives for our brothers.” We are the successors of Gregory the Illuminator, of Vartan. This is how a people is formed. May Your kingdom come.⁸¹

In the diary he wrote while traveling through the region, British research Dov Lynch recounted a similar story about a conversation with a former unit commander who had fought in Karabakh:

“This nation is a nation of believers. This is why we have always had to fight the Turks. And we will always fight them.” Our friend glanced at me quickly and laughed. He lit another cigarette in the blinding light. Over lunch, I asked him how they won the war against the Azeris. He looked at me, confused. “How could we not win? They have no faith. They are sheep. They had no idea what they were fighting for. They came at us and we mowed them down. They are sheep. They are a stupid people.” He talked later about the growing role of the United States in the Caucasus. “This is a bad thing for us.” Why? “The Americans should support us, but they don’t. They support the Turks. Russia is our only savior. Only she will defend us to last against the Turks. We have the same faith. We have always

⁷⁸ See Akopian, 2010, p. 149.

⁷⁹ Yeprem Kelegian, “Diary of an American Priest in Armenia,” *Window View of the Armenian Church*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1992, p. 76, as quoted in Corley, 1998, p. 332.

⁸⁰ Myriam Gaume, *Les Invites de la terre: Arménie, Karabagh 1988–1992*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993, pp. 60–61. Quoted in Corley, 1998, p. 332.

⁸¹ Gaume, 1993, pp. 159, 189–90. Quoted in Corley, 1998, p. 332.

worked together here to fight off the Muslims, and we always will. Russia needs us as much as we need them.” “Poor Armenia,” his laugh had bitterness. “We are the last Christian position in the Caucasus. We are surrounded by Turks and by enemies. Still we will fight. We always will.”⁸²

The international dimension of the conflict would later involve such organizations as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). From the time that Azerbaijan joined the organization in 1992, the OIC has taken a position favoring that country’s interests, largely based on Islamic solidarity, as have a number of individual Muslim countries as varied as Pakistan and Turkey.⁸³ On a number of occasions, the OIC has issued declarations condemning Armenian “aggression” against Azerbaijan.⁸⁴ The OIC has since continued to issue regular proclamations condemning Armenian “aggression,” the latest such proclamation being issued as recently as April 2016.⁸⁵

On the side of the Armenian Christians was the British organization Christian Solidarity International (CSI). Although diplomatically far less potent than the OIC, CSI is headed by Caroline Cox, a leading member of the British House of Lords, whose articles on the “suffering of Christian Armenians” at the hands of their “Muslim tormentors” saturated Christian publications in the West.⁸⁶ Cox’s impassioned speeches from the floor of the House of Lords decrying what she has termed “violent Islamism” on the attack against Armenian Christianity have made her many Armenian friends.

With the cessation of armed conflict, political life has more or less consolidated in Armenian and Azeri societies, and religious life, though vibrant, has largely been “routinized,” to borrow from Weber. Gone are the days of religious freelancing and charismatic leadership that could challenge authorities. Religious leaders have since then lost considerable ground in the political affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan from their heyday in the 1990s. Levels of religiosity have also petered out, but public trust in religious organizations is still robust, as political scientist Robia Charles has demon-

⁸² Dov Lynch, “Documentaire: Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Documentaire*, August 12, 2000.

⁸³ Svante E. Cornell, “Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Delicate Balance,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, January 1998, pp. 51–72.

⁸⁴ For a comprehensive treatment about the OIC and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, see Araks Pashayan, *The Organization of Islamic Conference: The Goals, the Activities, the Position Towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict [Islamakan Konferans Kazmakerputyune: Npatakner, Gortsuneutyunnere, Dirkoroshume Gharabaghian Hakamartutyany Nkatmamb]*, Yerevan, Armenia: Zangak-97, 2003, pp. 181–219.

⁸⁵ “Final Communiqué of the 13th Islamic Summit Conference (Unity and Solidarity for Justice and Peace),” Istanbul, April 14–15, 2016.

⁸⁶ Caroline Cox, “Survivors of the Maraghar Massacre: It Was Truly Like a Contemporary Golgotha Many Times Over,” *Christianity Today*, April 27, 1998. See also “Ethnic Cleansing Warning Sounded,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 42, No. 5, April 27, 1998.

strated using the latest available statistical data.⁸⁷ Religious institutions and the clergy, though much less visible in public debates compared with the 1990s, still command enormous influence with the public in their respective societies, should they choose to exercise that influence. With respect to the ongoing conflict, there have been attempts to start an inter-religious and interethnic civic dialogue, followed by exchange visits by the Armenian Catholicos Garegin II and Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade to Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively. But the religious rhetoric, despite the formal pleasantries, remains vitriolic.

In 2006, Pashazade threatened Armenia with jihad during a press conference by saying, “I am ready to proclaim jihad for the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. And I am ready to do so when the right time arrives.”⁸⁸ He echoed the same sentiment in 2016, when he declared in an interview with an Azeri news outlet that

[t]he defense of the Motherland is part of our faith. . . . Of course as soon as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief gives an order we will go forth and fight. But for now every *minbar* [pulpit] as a minimum has to be for believers a foxhole of sorts. We have to realize this. In our sermons we have to feel as soldiers. We must and we will liberate our Motherland from occupation.⁸⁹

Other Azeri politicians and political analysts have followed suit. A respected Russian Azeri political analyst, Geydar Dzhemal, even went as far as to suggest that Azerbaijan should exit the diplomatic process entirely and transfer the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh to a more global scale, presenting it as a religious confrontation, thereby involving the wider Islamic world in the process. According to him, Karabakh should occupy, along with Palestine, the center stage for the worldwide Islamic *ummah* (a community of Muslims bound together by the religion). Then and only then will Azerbaijan be able to regain its “lost” territories.⁹⁰ Armenian clerics have also not remained on the sidelines, picking up arms and fighting along regular troops on the front lines.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Robia Charles, “Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions: Tales from the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia),” *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 2, August 2010, pp. 228–261.

⁸⁸ Sokhbet Mamedov, “Armenia Threatened with Jihad” [“Armenii Prigrozili Dzhikhadom”], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, Moscow, August 29, 2006.

⁸⁹ “Sheikh: The Defense of the Motherland Is Part of the Faith” [“Sheykh: Zashchita Rodiny yavlyayetsya chast’yu very”], *Oxu.az*, May 26, 2016.

⁹⁰ G. Khanmamedov, “Geydar Dzhemal: Armenians Are Afraid of the Characterization of the Karabakh Conflict as Religious” [“Geydar Dzhemal: Armiane Ne Sluchaino Opasaiutsia Predstavlenia Karabakhskoi Problemy Kak Mezhrefligioznoi”], *Aze.az*, December 27, 2011.

⁹¹ Yelena Gabrielyan, “The Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: Priests Between the Cross and Weapons” [“Konflikt v Nagornom Karabakhe: svyashchenniki mezhdou krestom i oruzhiem”], *RFI*, May 20, 2016.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

As shown by the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 and the April 2016 four-day skirmish in Nagorno-Karabakh, conflicts in the Caucasus, despite the best efforts of international mediators, are still a possibility given their lack of resolution. The battlefield phase of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh ended in 1994 when Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire agreement under Western and Russian pressure. Armenia and Azerbaijan are currently negotiating for a comprehensive peace plan. The diplomatic negotiations carried out since the cease-fire under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have proven to be difficult and fraught with dangers. The rhetoric of hostility has continued unabated, there being little tolerance for the views of the “enemy.” Azerbaijan, rich with billions from oil, has been actively rearming its military and is gearing up for another round of hostilities. Armenia, meanwhile, has been matching its rhetoric with a military buildup of its own. At the moment, the prospects for a resolution do not look hopeful, especially in view of the clashing political interests in the region by regional and extra-regional powers that have made it nearly impossible for small states to carry out independent and prudent foreign policies.⁹² The internal dynamics in Armenia and Azerbaijan invariably reflect the larger power dynamics between outside actors. Should these dynamics undergo dramatic changes, as they did briefly during the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008 and the April 2016 mini-war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the consequences may well prove to be tragic. Moreover, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have staked their current political identity around the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby reducing the chances of compromise. The positions of the parties are still mutually exclusive: Armenia wants independence for Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerbaijan rejects any such possibility.

In light of the growing tensions in the region, it is not entirely unimaginable that the Armenian-Azeri conflict—which has been so far managed by international organizations in an admirable fashion—may transpose into a much bloodier affair than its first iteration in the 1990s; the growing military arsenals of the sides certainly suggest so. And as before, the “logic of violence,” to borrow from Stathis Kalyvas,⁹³ will demand justification, validation, and comfort for the innumerable loss of human lives the sides will inevitably suffer. Religion, tarrying in the wings, may and most likely will be called on to provide these justifications, validations, and comforts. Which is not to say that religious actors will embrace those roles with any degree of enthusiasm. Currently, the prevalent social and political moods in both Armenia and Azerbaijan strongly suggest that they might. Since the beginning of the peace process in 1994 and especially with the diminution of Track II diplomatic measures, the role of religious

⁹² Asbed Kotchikian, “The Dialectics of Smallness: State-Making in the South Caucasus,” Armenian International Policy Research Group, working paper, Vol. 6, No. 13, January 2006, p. 8.

⁹³ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

leaders has been rather minimal and episodic. The resumption of full-scale hostilities will most likely reverse this trend and bring about the elevation of the role of religious actors in the public discourse during war. Having largely embraced aspects of the nationalist discourse in their respective societies, religious bodies in Armenia and Azerbaijan presently possess limited will for peacemaking and cannot be expected to suddenly change course and abandon their perceived civil religious mandates and obligations (i.e., support for god, country, and flag). Therefore, given the precarious role of religion in the conflict, a gentle but principled nudging may be in order to consider alternative positions within the context of a revived Track II diplomatic effort.

International organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international mediators involved in tackling the conflict would do well to actively seek out and engage religious leaders from both countries encouraging direct contact, dialogue, and other confidence building measures, thus integrating them into the peace process. As it stands, religious organizations make only limited cameos in the peace process, rather than serving as “primary ethical brokers,”⁹⁴ to borrow from political scientist Eric O. Hanson. A meaningful integration is a difficult task that requires considerable effort and resources, but the potential benefits far outweigh the potential costs. If nothing else, an institutionalized inter-religious dialogue has the potential to curb the less salutary impulses of religion and marginalize religious actors and organizations that seek to perpetuate negative religious and cultural stereotypes about the other side, which make lasting peace a distant and unachievable dream.

⁹⁴ Eric O. Hanson, *Religion and Politics in the International System Today*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 52.

The North Caucasus: How Islam and Nationalism Shaped Stability and Conflict in the Region

Sufian N. Zhemukhov

The North Caucasus has long been one of the most turbulent regions in Eurasia. Events such as the secessionist conflicts in Chechnya in the 1990s, the growing radicalization and the spread of insurgent groups across the region in 2000s, and the security challenges surrounding the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi grabbed the headlines both in Russia and internationally. The roots of these complex developments can be found in the rapid development of nationalism and Islam, which have affected regional politics in Russia's North Caucasus in the post-Soviet decades. This chapter examines how nationalist sentiments and Islamic practices emerged in the post-Soviet North Caucasus after decades of suppression and how this dynamic gave rise to new ideological trends that have shaped stability and conflict in the region.

Islam in the North Caucasus emerged as an anticolonial mobilizing force during the Russian conquest of the 19th century. Islam was then suppressed during the Soviet era and resurged in the post-Soviet period. Nationalism penetrated the North Caucasus with the fall of the Soviet Union and incited several regional conflicts, including the North Ossetian–Ingush conflict in 1992, Georgian–Abkhaz War in 1992–1993, and two Russian–Chechen Wars, in 1994–1996 and 1999–2009 (see Table 3.1). However, because of the ethno-confessional differences between the eastern and western parts of the North Caucasus (see Figure 3.1 for the map of the region), the dynamics

Table 3.1
Nationalist Ideology in the North Caucasus After the Fall of the Soviet Union

Nationalistic wars	North Ossetian–Ingush conflict, 1992 Georgian–Abkhaz War, 1992–1993 First Russian–Chechen War, 1994–1996 Second Russian–Chechen War, 1999–2009 Russian–Georgian War, 2008 (over South Ossetia and Abkhazia)
Separation of regions (successful)	Adygea from Krasnodar Krai, 1991 Chechnya and Ingushetia from Checheno–Ingushetia, 1992
Separation of regions (unsuccessful)	Cherkessia from Karachaevo–Cherkessia, 1991 Balkaria from Kabardino–Balkaria, 1992

of how post-Soviet Islam and nationalism have shaped stability and conflicts have differed across the regions.

In the northeastern republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, the rise of Islam in the mid-2000s replaced nationalism as the motivating force behind their conflicts. Islam merged with the northeastern local political machines as a result of intragroup competition between radical Salafi and the moderate Shaafi school with the involvement of the Russian state on the side of the Shaafi school. In the northwestern republics, Islam spread around the same time but did not replace nationalism. There, Islam and nationalism continued evolving separately and in competition with each other because of irredentist sentiments to reunite the territories of North and South Ossetia (see 4a and 4b in Figure 3.1), Karachai-Balkaria (see 2b and 3b in Figure 3.1), and Adygea-Cherkessia-Kabardino (see 1, 2a, and 3a in Figure 3.1). Religious diversity among Muslim-Christian Ossetians and Circassians populating these northwestern republics softened the competition between radical Salafi and the moderate Hanafi school of Islam, promoted identity based on ethnicity, and served as a foundation for the separation of state and church (see Table 3.2).

Figure 3.1
The North Caucasus



NOTE: The northwest Caucasus region encompasses Adygea (1), Karachai-Cherkessia (2ab); Kabardino-Balkaria (3ab), and North Ossetia (4a). The northeast Caucasus region encompasses Ingushetia (5), Chechnya (6), and Dagestan (7). There are also two South Caucasus regions: South Ossetia (4b) and Abkhazia (8), which are culturally and politically connected to the northwest Caucasus.

Despite these important regional differences, the Kremlin took a reductionist approach to radicalization in the North Caucasus. The Russian government viewed it as a spillover from the Chechen Wars and chose to fight terrorism militarily: It treated insurgents as combatants and aimed to eliminate them without trial. Simple military methods, however, did not resolve the problem of radicalization, as they addressed only the consequences of the problem and failed to grapple effectively with its roots. The Kremlin's failure to address the root causes of radicalization (e.g., economic and social challenges of the transitional period, corruption, a shattered education system) and reliance on aggressive military actions have escalated the situation in the region by creating a notion of an ongoing civil war between the regime and the citizens and a civilizational chasm between the citizens of other parts of Russia and the North Caucasus. These deepening divides have provoked many young people to join local and global terrorist movements.

In this chapter, I analyze how Islam may have contributed to stability and conflict in the North Caucasus and in Russia. I begin with an examination of the social, economic, and personal motivations behind the North Caucasus youth's pivot toward religious practice, peaceful or otherwise, after the fall of the Soviet Union and particularly in the mid-2000s when religious beliefs replaced nationalist sentiment. I then look into the broader political evolution of Islam and nationalism in the North Caucasus and discuss its implications for the conflicts in the region and ways to address them. I further identify the main ideological trends in the region and trace the genealogy of the Caucasus Emirate, the insurgent and terrorist organization that emerged from the clash between nationalism and Islam in the North Caucasus. Finally, I analyze the Kremlin's response to the terrorist threat, including the evolution of an antiterrorism concept in Russia in the aftermath of the wars in Chechnya and the legacy of antiterrorism efforts for Russian society. I conclude with reflections on the future trajectories of how nationalism and Islam may continue to shape conflict and stability in Russia's North Caucasus region.

Why Young People Turn to Islam in the North Caucasus: Revival of Islam in the North Caucasus

There was a mosque next to my former apartment building located in Russia's North Caucasus. When it was still under construction in the early 1990s, I walked past it with a good friend of mine, a 70-year-old man who used to work as a school principal and was well respected in our little town of Nartkala. "I am going to devote myself to Islam and come to pray in this beautiful mosque as soon as it is finished," he solemnly told me then. When the construction of the mosque was completed in the late 1990s, my friend was in his mid-70s. However, he never fulfilled his solemn promise nor did many other old men in Nartkala. As I watched the mosque from my window, I noticed

that mostly young people came to pray there. I, along with many others, wondered why we expected elders to turn to Islam after the demise of Soviet ideology and not the youth, as it turned out.¹

Religion was not popular during the Soviet era, and ambitious young men were usually nonreligious. Only older people were known to pray and perform Islamic duties, which came to be regarded as tradition. North Caucasus society, which firmly stood on customs and traditions (Adat), started to believe that Islam was a religion of old people. So, when the society regained its religious freedom and construction of mosques commenced, people generally expected that respected old men would occupy the houses of prayer.²

Indeed, the enactment in 1990 of the law of the Soviet Union “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”³ and the law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic “On Freedom of Religion”⁴ fostered unprecedented growth of religiosity throughout Russia (see Figure 3.2). In the North Caucasus, it was a process of people turning toward Islam rather than converting into the religion: People who previously saw themselves as Muslims, while never practicing religious rituals, turned to the active practice after the fall of the Soviet atheist regime. Thousands of new mosques were built in the North Caucasus and people began attending them and praying regularly. This Islamization reached its highest level in 2000s. Contrary to expectations, in the North Caucasus, many more young people, rather than old, turned to Islam.

The North Caucasus insurgency went through significant generational changes as well, shifting toward younger actors over time, as is often the case in prolonged conflicts.⁵ As a result, the education and socioeconomic background of the insurgents has also changed throughout the post-Soviet insurgency in the North Caucasus. In the 1990s, the intelligentsia, including Soviet retired military specialists with nationalistic ideology and separatist attitudes, was the driving force of the discontent. They witnessed the fall of the Soviet Union and vividly imagined that the same may happen to

¹ Nina Garunova, “Social Problems as a Cause of Youth Radicalization in the North Caucasus,” *Bulletin of Chelyabinsk State University*, Vol. 22, No. 351, 2014, pp. 132–135.

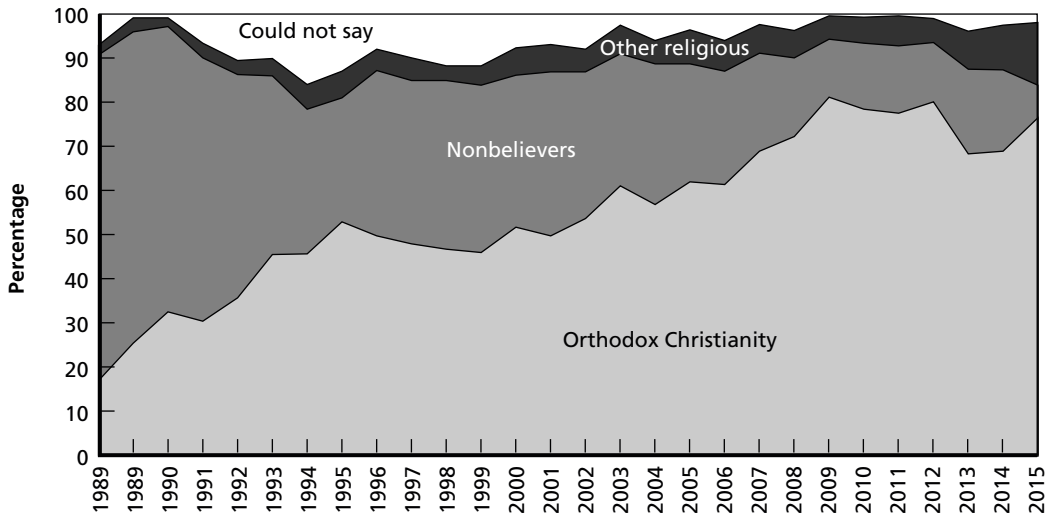
² Paul Goble, “Revival of Ethnic Code Immunizing Circassians Against Islamist Radicalism,” *Window on Eurasia*, September 30, 2016.

³ “The Law of the USSR from October 1, 1990 N 1689-1 About the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” [“Zakon SSSR Ot 1 Oktyabrya 1990 g. N 1689-1 O Svobode Sovesti I Religioznykh Organizatsiyakh”], levonevsky.org, 2007.

⁴ “The Law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic from October 25, 1990 N 267-1 About the Religious Freedom” [“Zakon RSFSR Ot 25 Oktyabrya 1990 g. N 267-1 O Svobode Veroispovedaniya”], levonevsky.org, 2007.

⁵ Denis Sokolov, “Kennan Cable No. 17: Russia’s Other Pipeline: Migration and Radicalization in the North Caucasus,” Wilson Center, August 15, 2016.

Figure 3.2
Evolution of the Religiosity Dynamic in Russia



SOURCE: Natalya Zorkaya, ed., *Public Opinion—2015 [Obschestvennoe Mnenie—2015]*, Moscow: Levada-Tsentr, 2016, p. 177.

RAND RR2195-3.2

new and still-weak post-Soviet countries, including Russia.⁶ The 2000s saw insurgents with less “professional” education: More were self-educated in Islam and inspired to fight for local and international jihad.⁷ They saw the rapid and wide spread of Islam in the North Caucasus and imagined a possibility of further Islamization of the region.

The new insurgents of the 2010s were yet different from both prior generations. Sometimes referred to as “Putin’s generation,” they grew up during the strong Russian authoritarian regime. They did not witness the breakup of the Soviet Union. They could not imagine the fall of the state the same way as the “separatists” of the 1990s could. Being well educated, including in Islamic theology, they were different from the previous generation of insurgents inspired by superficial religious self-education. Rather, feelings of injustice formed their motives and inspired them to hopeless and suicidal fights against the mighty state, which could not be defeated. The romantic memory of the past two “heroic” decades of insurgency was another important motive.⁸

⁶ Georgi M. Derluigan, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*, Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

⁷ Marc Sageman, “The Next Generation of Terror,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2008, pp. 37–42.

⁸ Emil Souleimanov, “The Caucasus Emirate: Genealogy of an Islamist Insurgency,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 155–168; Derek Henry Flood, “The Caucasus Emirate: From Anti-Colonialist Roots to Salafi-Jihad,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2014, pp. 13–17.

What Drove People Toward Religion?

Research on the post-Soviet religious revival mostly focuses on political, economic, and social issues, while personal motivations for turning toward religion remain understudied. As a step toward mending this gap in understanding, in 2007 I conducted non-representative in-depth interviews in the North Caucasus with young people I knew closely and who would trust me with intimate details about their religious beliefs and social attitudes as well as share their observations about their friends who practiced Islam. I interviewed seven people and inquired about their motivation for turning to religion. Later I conducted 24 more in-depth interviews and five focus groups during the 2009 Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca as part of a research project with Mikhail A. Alexseev. Our interviews and focus groups included a total of 64 people; about one-half of them were young people who turned to Islam in the 2000s.⁹ Their motivations could be personal or social incentives.¹⁰ Most young people who turned to Islam remained moderate, while few young people became radicalized. However, I was not able to find any indication that those who were either moderate or radical had different motivations, paths, or socioeconomic profiles before and during turning to Islam. The distinctions between moderate and radical Muslims became apparent only after their conversion when, at some point, some young Muslims would “go further” than others and reject local traditions, question their ethnic identity, and even denounce developments within Islam after the death of Muhammad.

The search for ethnic and religious identity was one of the most important motives for turning to Islam for young people. The Soviet state imposed atheism and Russification on the citizens for decades with totalitarian methods, including various ethnic groups in the North Caucasus. This particularly concerned urban youth who spoke Russian all their lives and never learned to fluently speak their native languages. The search for ethnic identity was usually important at the beginning of one’s religious path and at the very point of conversion and was a precursor to developing an affinity toward both traditional and Salafi approaches to Islam. The search for ethnic identity often preceded the development of religious identity mainly because the nationalist movements preceded religious trends in the North Caucasus.¹¹

On the personal level, some of my respondents compared figures from the local and global history to Muhammad and viewed the Prophet as the sole role model. That was the point of split between Salafi followers and everybody else. The former failed to see any teaching value in either local history, global history, or even the his-

⁹ Mikhail A. Alexseev and Sufian N. Zhemukhov, *Mass Religious Ritual and Intergroup Tolerance: The Muslim Pilgrims’ Paradox*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

¹⁰ Paul Goble, “Why Young People in the North Caucasus Continue to Turn to Islam,” *Window on Eurasia*, July 6, 2008.

¹¹ Religious movements became competitive with the nationalist movements since the beginning of 2000s.

tory of Islam after Muhammad's death. The Salafi followers emphasized the difference between "pure" Islam, as it was prophesized by Muhammad himself, and later religious innovations that came to Islam in the centuries that followed, known by young Salafi Muslims as *novovvedeniya* in Russian. The next step in the radicalization of young Salafis was acquiring a sense of the difference between the "true" believers and "hypocrite" Muslims. Some radicalized Salafis organized into small groups that treated the followers of traditional Islam as nonbelievers. There were some instances when Salafis would refuse to shake hands with non-Salafis praying in the same mosque or would shake hands with their fists closed. During the interviews, I specifically asked questions such as, "When did you begin to see *novovvedeniya* in Islam? When did you begin to suspect that some Muslims might be 'hypocrites?'" The answers indicated that the increase of their radicalization led to a more rigid worldview and less social tolerance. Although few young people reached an extreme degree of radicalization, the trajectory from the search for ethnic identity to a Salafi religious identity was clear.

Among social drivers of religiosity, economic problems such as unemployment also played an important role in the conversion of young Muslims at the beginning of the 2000s. They could not afford what most young people desired, such as a car, an apartment, clothing, getting married, and a university education. After turning to Islam, young people tended to avoid risky and unlawful situations. The unemployment problem was easier to solve for young people living in the countryside because they usually lived with their parents and had houses with land; as a result, they were taught by their parents to grow fruit and vegetables in their gardens to sell. Such an occupation corresponded to their desire to live an honest and useful life and, in time, it gave them a stable model for living that discouraged religious extremism.

Educational difficulties often accompanied economic problems. Not all post-Soviet high schools provided the level of education required for entering a university, and most of the young Muslims interviewed did not have the resources to pay for further education. This mostly concerned rural citizens. Ambitious young people without proper education felt dissatisfied with their low social status and often looked for informal means of self-education, such as the kind provided through the study of Islam. Not only did religious study offer these youths a chance to think in new, creative, and empowering ways, it also granted them the assurance that they obtained the only true knowledge in the world.

Educational difficulties were connected with the search for ethnic identity as well. School curricula in Soviet times did not teach local history and decreased native language classes. This was particularly true for schools in urban areas; rural youth had more opportunities outside the school walls to be immersed in ethnic customs, and the majority used their native language in daily life. The inability to find a sense of belonging within the systems offered by the state has led many young people to religion.

Another important reason why young people turned to Islam and why some of them were ultimately driven to religious extremism was connected to feelings of protest

regarding the post-Soviet wars in the North and South Caucasus.¹² Interviewees talked about feeling insecure living in such a violent world, where majorities treat minorities unfairly; in this context, they usually regarded Muslims as the disenfranchised minority. Feelings of rejection and protest usually were connected to seeking ethnic identity and a strong sense of belonging to an oppressed minority. Those who were questioned identified with Chechens as a minority, as Caucasians, or with Abkhazians as a “close relative nation” and partly as a minority as well.

Respondents also reported feelings of protest with regard to the persecution of Muslims by Russian law enforcement agencies. This issue was particularly important in the context of the tragic events in Nalchik on October 13, 2005, when 100 young Muslims attacked the headquarters of the local police and secret services. Even the officials agreed that the masterminds behind the attack used deception to capitalize on the young participants’ outrage about persecution of Muslims by some members of the local police. International conflicts such as the wars in Iraq (and, later, Syria), the events in Palestine, and the scandals about the cartoons of Muhammad have also caused serious and continuous frustration among young people. Conversations about global conflicts did not dominate the interviews, however, and reactions to them were much less emotional than they were to discussions of the persecution of local Muslims.

The dissatisfaction of young people with their lives before turning to religion and the perceived need for critical change was another issue related to social concerns. The youth had quite a high expectation for their standards of living; their inability to live up to these expectations caused them additional frustration. Respondents felt that their low social status and lack of money drove them to poor life choices: They had bad friends, drank alcohol, and some even used drugs or committed crimes. The lower they sank, the less satisfied they became with themselves, and the more they felt that they did not belong in the place where they had found themselves in life. For example, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their lives by noting that they had failed to fulfill their life dreams. Islam provided a new dream that could replace the previous one.

Health was another motivation, as turning to Islam was seen as one way to—at least partly—solve health issues. On one hand, religion offered a different perspective on health issues, as illness was considered to be punishment for sins and thus directly connected a believer to god. In other words, while feeling bad physically, a believer could feel well spiritually because the malady may point to a deeper spiritual meaning. On the other hand, believers often became healthier after turning to Islam because they started to lead a healthier life style because they stopped drinking alcohol, kept their body clean, and ate properly. The changes in their health were all the more striking if their lives prior to conversion had been unhealthy.

¹² Derluigian, 2005.

Although I lived in the same context in which I conducted my field research, at the beginning of my research, I had some presumptions that turned out to be wrong. For example, I assumed that the process of becoming religious would include a very dramatic personal history leading to dissatisfaction with life, followed by critical changes in character and view of people. But I met some people that did not fit that theory. Many young people were simply converted to Islam by family members, often siblings or spouses. This was particularly true for sisters, younger brothers, and especially wives. Practically all interviewed wives claimed that they became devoted Muslims under the influence of their religious husbands; however, in cases when the husbands turned away from Islam, their wives often kept the religion because they felt safer in the Islamic system of marriage. Those who came to Islam under the influence of their family members usually did not have negative social and personal motivations and did not visibly exhibit any radical feelings. The same kind of positive influence could come from the memory of childhood spent with religious grandfathers and grandmothers.

To summarize, the main trend in Russia's North Caucasus has been young people's conversion to Islam. This has mostly been a positive trend. Most of the converted Muslims become model citizens within their society: They work hard and lead honest lives. Young people in the North Caucasus turn to Islam as a source to address and resolve their social and personal challenges and problems.

Nationalism and Islam in Russia's North Caucasus

Although the North Caucasus is considered a Muslim region, it is different from the rest of the Islamic world. Modern Islam in the North Caucasus is largely a post-Soviet phenomenon, despite its rich pre-Soviet history. Unlike many in Muslim countries who were raised with religion since childhood, the religious people of the North Caucasus have emerged from a post-Soviet, formerly atheist, society and have only recently accepted Islam. The growing religiosity in the region evolved in the context of territorial disputes, struggles for sovereignty, and demarcation of ethnic and national lines, which have inevitably affected its nature. This section examines how post-Soviet Islam in the North Caucasus has evolved alongside, under the influence of, or in competition with political nationalism in the region. I distinguish between the trajectories in the east and west regions.

In the 1990s, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the North Caucasus region followed a similar, although more extreme, pattern of nationalist ideologies and movements as was seen in other parts of the FSU.¹³ This culminated in the first conflict in Chechnya (1994–1996) and the participation of North Caucasus groups in

¹³ John O'Loughlin and Frank D. W. Witmer, "The Localized Geographies of Violence in the North Caucasus of Russia, 1999–2007," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 101, No. 1, 2011, pp. 178–201.

the Georgian-Abkhaz War (1992–1993). A less-studied form of separatism centered on nationalist movements took place in dual-autonomous republics across the North Caucasus, in which minority ethnic groups made separatist demands from the larger, often more dominant groups. This form of separatism was the driving factor in Ingushetia's successful efforts to separate from the Checheno-Ingushetian Republic and likewise Adygea's from Krasnodar Krai. Two unsuccessful separatist attempts were also notable: Cherkessia from Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Balkaria from Kabardino-Balkaria (see Table 3.1). A similar pattern was also witnessed in Georgia, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia seeking independence from the Georgian state. The cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also pertinent to this study because of their close ties and proximity to the North Caucasus region and their involvement in regional politics since Russia's recognition of their independence.

In the 1990s, there was little diversity in the nature of the various separatist processes outlined in this chapter; most were driven by nationalistic aspirations. Nationalism, fueled by frustration with decades of draconian Soviet ethnic and territorial experiments imposed on most of the peoples of the Caucasus, was the readily available and accessible mobilizing ideology at the time. Religious ideology, on the other hand, needed more time to enter the conversation or resurrect, as the eradication of religious institutions during the Stalin period left the region in a religious vacuum. Thus, most of the separatist movements in the 1990s were driven by a nationalist and not religious ideology. The conflicts that emerged in the region also grew out of general political destabilization and a dramatic worsening of the socioeconomic situation following the collapse of the socialist system established in the Soviet Union. Similar processes took place beyond the FSU—for example, in former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A number of these separatist movements and organizations sought inclusion in larger international and regional organizations, with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) as the most prominent example. The UNPO tried to position itself as an alternative to the United Nations. At a regional level, in 1992, a Commonwealth of Unrecognized States was created as an alternative to the Commonwealth of Independent States.

By the 2000s, a new set of dynamics began to emerge within separatist movements in the post-Soviet space, with a number of separatist groups shifting their ideological basis from nationalism to regionalism and from ethnic to ethno-confessional identities. In this regard, separatist movements in the FSU were not unique; they were similar to other groups and causes across the globe, such as the ethno-confessional conflicts between Catholic and Protestant groups (e.g., North Ireland, Quebec), Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Orthodox Christians (e.g., Kosovo, north Cyprus), Muslims and Catholics (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, South Philippines), and Hindus and Muslims (e.g., Kashmir).

In Russia, nationalism and separatism mixed with religion. Since the beginning of the 21st century, developments in the North Caucasus have highlighted the diver-

sity of processes within the region, divided along the east-west axis. Along with rising nationalism, three other major ideological developments have also emerged in the North Caucasus, often contradicting one another, including Salafi, traditional Islam, and folklore Islam; these developments will be discussed in the next section.

The confluence of nationalistic and religious movements in the North Caucasus reveals two main trends. The first highlights the shift from nationalism to Islam among certain homogeneous groups, particularly in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai, and Balkaria.¹⁴ The second, by contrast, is a rise in nationalism among the ethnic groups that practice both Christianity and Islam in Kabarda, Cherkessia, Adygea, North Ossetia, as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A specific development has taken place in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, and Ingushetia. Here, the rise in nationalism among the Kabardian, Cherkessian, and North Ossetian communities has tempered the ideological shift from nationalism to Islamic ideology among the neighboring Balkar and Karachai communities, at the same time as the rise of radicalism has in turn affected the spread of Islam in the North Ossetia and Kabardian areas because of territorial, economic, and political similarities. Thus, while a blend of nationalism and Islamic religious identity took hold in the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, in the east of the North Caucasus, in the northwestern republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, and Adygea, this ideological fusion did not take place. In these republics, Islamist and nationalist ideologies have evolved separately and often in direct competition with each other.¹⁵

There were several reasons for the east-west dichotomy in the North Caucasus. First, Islam had different historical trajectories in the two regions.¹⁶ The religion arrived first and achieved its greatest influence in the northeast Caucasus, which became more connected to the Middle East, while the northwest adopted a unique blend of ethnic and religious identities, which partly can be explained by the closer historical connections between the west North Caucasus and the European-oriented Turkey. Further-

¹⁴ Murat Botashev, "Ethnic Conflict in Karachaevo-Cherkessia: From Its Sources to Our Days," *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Journal of Social and Political Studies*, 2000, p. 131.

¹⁵ The structure of a prominent terrorist organization in the North Caucasus, the Caucasus Emirate, reflected the principal ideological patterns of the 21st century. Many of the key figures in the Caucasus Emirate came from the northeast Caucasus—including Doku Umarov, one of the founders of the organization, who came from a more nationalistic background. By contrast, none of the leaders originally from the northwestern regions of the Caucasus, including Anzor Astemirov, another founder of the Caucasus Emirate, had such a background and their motivations for converting to Islam had many similarities with the motivations of young people that participated in the interview study described in the previous section.

¹⁶ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008; George Kennan, "The Mountains and Mountaineers of the Eastern Caucasus," *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, Vol. 5, 1874, pp. 169–193; Michael Khodarkovsky, "The Indigenous Elites and the Construction of Ethnic Identities in the North Caucasus," *Russian History*, Vol. 35, No. 1–2, 2008, pp. 129–138.

more, the northeast was dominated by the stricter Shaafi school, while the northwest was home to a milder Hanafi interpretation of Islam.¹⁷ Indeed, during the Russian-Caucasus war in the 19th century, the Imamate under the leadership of Imam Shamil was based on an Islamic ideology (1829–1859), while the Circassian Confederation (1861–1864), under the leadership of Geranduk Berzek, had mixed religious and nationalist origins (Table 3.2).

Second, the degree of religious homogeneity has played a major role in accounting for such regional differences. Historically, the population in the east of the North Caucasus, such as the Chechens, Ingush, and the mixed population of Dagestan, primarily practiced Islam, which made it into a unifying ideology. In contrast, the population in the west, such as the Circassians, Ossetians, and Abkhaz, followed both Christianity and Islam; this mixed heritage tended to promote the development of nationalism

Table 3.2
East-West Dichotomy in Russia's North Caucasus

	East	West
Geographical division	Chechnya Dagestan Ingushetia	Adygea Kabardino-Balkaria Karachaevo-Cherkessia North Ossetia
Historical differences	Islam since ninth century Islamic state (1829–1859)	Islam since 11th century Ethnic-Islamic state (1861–1864)
Islamic practice ^a	Shaafi school	Hanafi school
Homogeneity of religion	Only Islam	Islam and Christianity
Identity	Religious	Ethnic
Political machine	Islam is incorporated in political elite	State-church separation
Law	State law, Sharia, and Adat	State law
External influence	Small diaspora	Large diasporas and split territories

^a Four sharia schools (madhabs) in Sunni Islam were named after their founders, Hanafi (699–767 CE), Maliki (710–795 CE), Shafi'i (767–820 CE), and Hanbali (780–855 CE). Hanafi and Shafi'i are represented in the North Caucasus. The Hanafi school is the oldest and most tolerant sharia school in Sunni Islam; it is regarded as more liberal and flexible and has a reputation of putting emphasis on the role of reason. The Shafi'i school is regarded as more strict in practicing Islam in everyday life and emphasizes the importance of analogy in explaining religious theories and practices.

¹⁷ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan*, London: F. Cass, 1994.

as a unifying ideology.¹⁸ The Karachais and Balkars, who live with the Circassians (Kabards and Cherkess), are somewhere in between, influenced by their nationalism; nevertheless, Karachais and Balkars are monoreligious and therefore are more affected by Islam than the neighboring Circassians. Religion could not be the primary basis for the identity for the Circassians, Ossetians, and Abkhaz because that would cause a split of their ethnic groups, cutting off part of the population. In contrast, Chechen, Ingush, and Dagestan ethnic groups do not have conflicting religious identities: As Muslims and belonging to Chechen, Ingush, or Dagestani nationality, they identify as being Muslim.

Third, with ethnic groups in the west of the North Caucasus, ethnic identity prevails over religious identity because the groups are territorially divided within Russia and have large diasporas that reside outside of Russia.¹⁹ Reunification and maintaining historical ethnic ties are still goals of the divided ethnic groups and diasporas in the North Caucasus and have been important drivers of nationalistic sentiment. All ethnic groups in the western North Caucasus have faced irredentist problems and calls for territorial unification that have promoted nationalist ideas. The irredentist issues are important for the ethnically close Ossetians who want to reunite North and South Ossetia; Karachais and Balkars belong to the same Turkish ethnic groups and want to separate from Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria and reunite between themselves. Kabardians, Cherkessians, and Adygeans belong to the same Circassian ethnic group and also want to reunite their territories. The large diaspora communities abroad influence the homeland population mostly in nationalistic ways and less through religion.

The vast majority of contemporary analysis on the North Caucasus suggests that terrorism is the main problem in the region; terrorism is usually framed as resulting from the spillover effect of the two wars in Chechnya.²⁰ Western scholars and analysts often share this rather Russo-centric perspective on the region. Such a viewpoint is also an example of the mixing of policy and academic approaches with one another. This, in turn, structures the methods and solutions put forward to resolve the volatility in the region. At the heart of Russia's current policy in the region are two main approaches, both of which are not substantially challenged by the international community. The first approach centers on bringing peace to Chechnya, which is seen, in large part, as being realized by supporting the authoritarian regime of Ramzan Kadyrov. While the

¹⁸ Ian T. Lanzillotti, "The Sleeping Beauty of the Caucasus?: Kavkazskii Uzel and Contemporary Views on Politics and Security in Kabardino-Balkaria," *Journal of Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2016, pp. 143–76.

¹⁹ Zeynel Abidin Besleney, *The Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: A Political History*, London: Routledge, 2014; Mitat Çelikpala, "From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2006, pp. 423–446.

²⁰ Austin Jersild, "The Chechen Wars in Historical Perspective: New Work on Contemporary Russian-Chechen Relations," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2004, pp. 367–77.

international community supports the overall goal of pacifying Chechnya, it does not support the methods used by the Russian authorities; however, the international community has failed to put forward an alternative vision for the future of the Chechen Republic. Russia's measures have been predominantly based on military methods. This approach has not been successful in bringing stability to the region and only serves to motivate more young people to join underground cells.

In contrast to this reductionist approach, the situation in the post-Soviet North Caucasus should be analyzed through a variety of lenses: security, politics, economy, relations with the federal center, international affairs, religious extremism, and nationalism. This more-nuanced reading of the evolving trends in the region reveals a much more varied picture than an understanding of a region split between radical Islamists and everyone else.

This section analyzed the regional differences inside the North Caucasus. The ethno-religious differences developed before and during the post-Soviet time affected important social and political aspects, including Islamic practices, ethnic and religious identity, and church-and-state relations. The next section will focus on the similarities between west and east of the North Caucasus that have played an important role in radicalization in the North Caucasus, including the emergence of the Caucasus Emirate, a jihadist network in Russia.

How Different Ideological Trends Shaped Radicalization in the North Caucasus

The 21st century has seen the North Caucasus experience an upsurge of violence and terrorist acts.²¹ The “policy of chechenization” that the Kremlin adopted during the Second Russian-Chechen War from 2001 caused a major shift in the stabilization of the North Caucasus. That policy included the election of pro-Kremlin Chechen leadership that became responsible for fighting Chechen separatists.²² Later, the 2004 Beslan hostage crisis marked a crisis for the Chechen nationalist movement, undermining its international legitimacy as a secessionist movement. Between 2004 and 2008, there was a decrease in terrorist acts and indiscriminate violence. However, insurgents' strategies in the North Caucasus changed after Doku Umarov's illegal proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate on the territory of all North Caucasus republics in 2007 (see Figure 3.3). Although Moscow announced the end of counterterrorist operations in Chechnya in 2009, suicide bombings and attacks against *siloviki* (law enforcement

²¹ John O'Loughlin and Frank D. W. Witmer, “The Diffusion of Violence in the North Caucasus of Russia, 1999–2010,” *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 44, No. 10, 2012, pp. 2379–2396.

²² Maya Eichler, *Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Figure 3.3
Republics Included in the Illegally Proclaimed Caucasus Emirate



RAND RR2195-3.3

agencies) targets only increased in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya. In 2010, while Ingushetia and Chechnya experienced a significant decrease in the number of violent incidents, the level of violence reached new levels in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. The Caucasus Emirate was able to perform terrorist acts outside of the Caucasus, including a bombing in the Moscow subway (2010) and the Moscow airport (2011) and a series of terrorist acts in Volgograd (2013). The security measures during the 2014 Sochi Olympics helped to weaken the Caucasus Emirate, and the number of terrorist attacks in the region significantly decreased after then.

Important changes in insurgent ideology can partially explain the upsurge in violence and terrorist attacks across Russia.²³ During the First Chechen War, insurgents

²³ Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism: Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus: A Longitudinal Perspective," *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers Series*, No. 289, 2004, pp. 1–24.

fought the Russian state mainly for political and nationalist reasons.²⁴ The establishment of the Caucasus Emirate legitimized, in the eyes of the local population, a radical version of Islam, which—although existing since the end of the First Chechen War—was appealing only to a small percentage of Muslims. In fact, there are competing ideologies in the North Caucasus: a nationalist trend, a moderate traditional Islam, and a more radical Salafi trend. The emergence and evolution of the Caucasus Emirate and its ideology helped to crystallize the radical, extremist trend.²⁵

Extremist Trends: Genesis of the Caucasus Emirate

The name of the unrecognized independent Chechen state between 1991 and 2000 was the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI). After the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the Chechen government in exile and the resistance kept the name ChRI until the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. Unlike the First Chechen War, which was fought relying only on recruits from the local population, during the Second Chechen War, insurgent leaders sought support from religious groups outside Chechnya to expand the insurgency across the North Caucasus. While cooperation started between *jamaats* (Islamic councils or assemblies) in Kabardino-Balkaria and the ChRI, no formal structure existed. The idea of uniting all the anti-Russian separatist and religious groups in the Caucasus belonged to Anzor Astemirov, the leader of the Kabarda-Balkaria jamaat. In 2005, Astemirov and the Ingush jamaat leader, Ilyas Gorchkhanov, approached Shamil Basayev with a suggestion to unite with the Chechen jamaat to form a Caucasus-wide coalition. Basayev did not agree and suggested that Astemirov and Gorchkhanov should subordinate themselves under the rule of the president of the ChRI, Abdul-Khalim Sadullayev. In exchange, Basayev helped insurgents in Kabardino-Balkaria organize a massive military attack on security forces in the regional capital of Nalchik in October 2005, which made Astemirov one of the most influential insurgent leaders in the Caucasus.

After the deaths of Basayev and Sadullayev in summer 2006, Astemirov proposed the creation of the Caucasus Emirate to Doku Umarov, the new president of the ChRI. The Caucasus Emirate included six *vilayats* (administrative divisions). The new ideology, based on religion without nationalism, was established at the foundation of the Caucasus Emirate in October 2007. The establishment of the emirate led to a clash between religious and nationalist branches inside the insurgency. A group of

²⁴ Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2004–2005, pp. 5–63.

²⁵ Emil Souleimanov, "The Caucasus Emirate: Genealogy of an Islamist Insurgency," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 155–168; Derek Henry Flood, "The Caucasus Emirate: From Anti-Colonialist Roots to Salafi-Jihad," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2014, pp. 13–17; John O'Loughlin, Edward C. Holland, and Frank D. W. Witmer, "The Changing Geography of Violence in Russia's North Caucasus, 1999–2011: Regional Trends and Local Dynamics in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2011, pp. 596–630.

insurgents denounced the transformation of the ChRI into the Caucasus Emirate and elected a new president of the ChRI, Ahmed Zakayev. This election did not prevent the creation of the Caucasus Emirate. Umarov became *emir* (executive leader), and Astemirov became Kadi of the supreme sharia court (ideological and judicial leader). The Caucasus Emirate established two main goals: to change the ideology from separatism/nationalism to religious extremism and to establish an Islamic state in the North Caucasus. The new insurgency leaders saw themselves as fundamentalists and claimed they were fighting for jihad against terrorism perpetrated by the Russian state.

During summer 2010, the religious-versus-nationalist ideological split among the insurgency leaders continued when Chechen warlords Hussein Gakaev and Aslanbek Vadalov withdrew their oath to the emir but did not renounce their loyalty to the Caucasus Emirate. Many analysts and politicians claimed that the split was mainly a clash between nationalist and religious factions inside the Caucasus Emirate. Others believed that the split was most likely about the leadership and power struggle within the movement.²⁶ The Caucasus Emirate was neither centralized institutionally nor ideologically. The strategies of vilayats could vary from the Caucasus Emirate main statements as well as among the leaders of vilayats. For example, at the same time Doku Umarov announced that insurgents should focus on targeting the preparations for the Sochi Olympics, other vilayats announced differing priorities. The Ingush vilayat announced its intention to stop targeting police officers and to exclusively focus instead on nationalist issues. At the same time, the Kabardino-Balkaria-Karachai vilayat announced its intention to intensify its attacks and to target not only siloviki structures but also “hypocrites, idolators, and necromancers.”²⁷

Caucasus Emirate statements and terrorist acts often made headlines of Russian and international news. Insurgents, however, represented only a small part of the Muslim community in the North Caucasus and the insurgency did not form an additional, separate ideological trend. Below is a brief overview of the principal differences and antagonisms between nationalism, traditional Islam, and Salafism.

Clashes Inside Islam

Salafism, the closest to the Caucasus Emirate, is an ideology that suggests that the law and spirit of Islam should reach all spheres of society.²⁸ This ideology is rather strict and judgmental of those who do not follow all five pillars of Islam, including reciting the Muslim profession of faith five times each day, praying, paying alms (or charity) tax to

²⁶ Souleimanov, 2011; Flood, 2014.

²⁷ Marat Shterin and Akhmet Yarlykapov, “Reconsidering Radicalisation and Terrorism: The New Muslims Movement in Kabardino-Balkaria and Its Path to Violence,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 39, No. 2–3, 2011, pp. 303–325.

²⁸ Chen Bram and Moshe Gammer, “Radical Islamism, Traditional Islam and Ethno-Nationalism in the Northern Caucasus,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2013, pp. 296–337.

benefit the poor, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and performing pilgrimage to Mecca. Although followers of Salafi Islam are not inherently radical, since the 2000s some splinter groups have developed into jihadi movements that conducted insurgency campaigns in the region and elsewhere. The insurgency ideology is characterized by terrorism and extremist behaviors such as the perception of security forces as a direct enemy, hostility toward Muslim leaders and scholars with differing beliefs and labeling them as “hypocrites” who promote anti-Islamic ideologies, and the exclusion of those who are not strict Muslims. The Caucasus Emirate’s first leaders had a common ideological ground and mutually agreed both on terrorist measures against siloviki and on traditional Islamic leaders who “betrayed” their religion by working with the state against the Caucasus Emirate. As Kadi of the Caucasus Emirate, Astemirov was responsible for issuing judgments against “traitorous Imams.” Umarov, in his turn, organized actions against siloviki and “infidels.”

Additionally, the region has witnessed the revival of more moderate Islam. The religious leaders of traditional Islam usually oppose Salafi Islam. They openly support and are supported by state authorities. Indeed, the Russian authorities regard the development of traditional Islam as an effective measure against Islamic radicalization and insurgent recruitment. In the northeastern regions of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, traditional Muslim leaders are incorporated into local political machines, which is not the case in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, Adygea, and North Ossetia, where political machines remained more secular and did not incorporate the local religious leaders, although politicians closely collaborated with them. Traditional Islam expands its number of followers to include all who identify as Muslims whether or not they practice the five pillars. In an interview with a local newspaper, the Mufti of Kabardino-Balkaria, Anas Pshikhachev, stated, “Everyone who acknowledges Allah, Koran, Sunna, and the Prophet is a Muslim even if he does not observe any practices.”²⁹ By this interpretation, Islam is not restricted to devoted faith and active practice, but expanded more widely, including passive acknowledgment. The clash between insurgency ideology and traditional Islam culminated on December 2010 with the murder of Pshikhachev.

Many local scholars and intellectuals who understand traditional Islam as an ideology of local traditions mixed with Islam represent a subtrend within traditional Islam, mainly in the northwest Caucasus.³⁰ This ideology takes its historical roots in the strong moral code of local traditional norms (Adat and Khabze). The first debates over the issue of the mixture of Islam and local traditions took place in the 19th century. In 1835, the scholar Sultan Khan-Girei wrote in “Notes about Circassia” that Islamic

²⁹ Larisa Shadueva, “Are Wahhabis Criminals? An Interview with the Imam of the SBM KBR [Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria Republic], A.M. Pshikhachev” [“Vakhabyty—bandity? Interview s predsedatelem DUM KBR A.M.Pshikhachevym],” *Kabardino-Balkarskaia Pravda*, February 11, 2006.

³⁰ Bram and Gammer, 2013.

law gives preferences to local customs but that the new generation of religious leaders “often performs judgment by Islamic laws, thus breaking the old customs.”³¹ This trend of Islam existed among the local intelligentsia since the Tsarist period through the Soviet era and became most prominent in post-Soviet Russia.

Initially, Caucasus Emirate leaders did not have a unified view of how to deal with the followers of traditional Islam. Some advocated radical methods, including violence against civilians, while others supported a policy of targeted assassination against adherents of traditional Islam. The ideologist of the latter, Astemirov, could be seen more as a politician than a military commander. Astemirov rejected the unnecessary use of violence against Muslim civilians; he sought the support of the local population and put forward a proselytizing strategy to convert traditional Muslims to radical Islam. Opposing such a policy, Umarov claimed that it was wrong to regard as the enemy only those who attacked insurgents directly.

The localized upsurge of violence in Kabardino-Balkaria, which coincided with Astemirov’s death in March 2010, demonstrated the inconsistency of the insurgent tactics.³² The explosion of the Baksan hydroelectric power plant in July 2010, the murders of local prominent folk scholar Aslan Tsipinov and Muslim leader Anas Pshikhachev in December 2010, attacks aiming to interfere with the local tourist industry in February 2011, and other terrorist acts against civilians demonstrated the ideological turn among the insurgents in Kabardino-Balkaria. There was a disagreement among insurgents regarding the killing of Tsipinov, who was well known for his public activities and academic works in promoting ethnic values before Muslim ones. This became an indication that the insurgents could not overcome their internal disputes about which strategy to adopt against traditional Islam. Those discussions came to the public’s attention when one of the insurgents stated that many Muslims could not comprehend why they should have killed Tsipinov and questioned if his death would benefit the insurgency. Tsipinov’s murder happened right after the killing of Pshikhachev and was conducted in the same way. While Pshikhachev was executed as a “traitorous Imam,” an extremist website, Jamaat Takbir, blamed Tsipinov, on May 29, 2010, for heading a group of “pagans and idolaters,” working to revive “ancient pagan festivals,” and “openly and overtly opposing Islam and Muslims.”³³

³¹ Sufian Zhemukhov, *The World View of Khan-Giray [Mirovozzrenie Khan-Gireia]*, Nalchik, Russia: Kabardino-Balkar State Agricultural Academy, 1997, p. 44.

³² Mikhail Alexseev, “Local Versus Transcendent Insurgencies: Why Economic Aid Helps Lower Violence in Dagestan, but Not in Kabardino-Balkaria,” in William Ascher and Natalia Mirovitskaya, eds., *Development Strategies, Identities, and Conflict in Asia*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 277.

³³ The website Jamaat Takbir was closed by the Russian authorities. See also Sufian Zhemukhov, “One Thousand Years of Islam in Kabarda: An Experiment in Periodization,” *Anthropology and Archaeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2011, pp. 54–71; “The Site ‘Jamaat Takbir’ Is Recognized as Extremist (Kabardino-Balkaria)” [“Sait Jamaat Takbir proznan ekstremistskim (Kabardino-Balkaria)”], *Regnum*, December 29, 2011.

Nationalism Versus Islam

Nationalism is another ideological trend in the North Caucasus. In Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, many insurgency leaders evolved from nationalism into radical Islam, but in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, and partly in North Ossetia, these two trends almost never interacted and have even confronted each other. None of the Circassian, Karachai-Balkar, and Ossietian nationalist leaders in the 1990s tried to present themselves as devoted Muslims. On a larger scale, this can also be demonstrated by the fact that none of more than a thousand Circassian volunteers who participated in the Georgian-Abkhaz war was ever identified as supporting religious extremism or joining religious movements in the North Caucasus. At the same time, the Circassian volunteers managed to form a political movement by establishing an NGO, the Union of Abkhaz Volunteers in Nalchik, with a rather nationalist program. Meanwhile, many Chechen volunteers who participated in the Georgian-Abkhaz war became Islamic extremists, including Basayev, their leader.³⁴

The gap between insurgency and nationalist ideology widened after the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate, although its leaders did not have a common view on nationalism. While the main trend of the Caucasus Emirate ideology was antinationalist, Astemirov made several statements aiming to expand his supporters by reaching out to nationalists. In March 2009, he claimed that Sultan Sosnaliev, a Kabardian commander of the Abkhazian army during the Georgian-Abkhaz war and later a defense minister of Abkhazia, was on the side of the Caucasus Emirate. The leader of the Union of Abkhaz Volunteers, Alexei Bekshokov, responded that Astemirov's statement was false and that the late Sosnaliev was never connected to religious extremists. However, in spite of the differences in ideologies, the insurgents in the northwest Caucasus never regarded nationalists as their targets.

The creation of the Caucasus Emirate increased the coordination of insurgency groups in different regions of the North Caucasus and intensified discussions about ideology and terrorist methods. The insurgents' actions expanded rapidly from the fight against the *siloviki* to targeting civilians for ideological motives. They also became more involved in the political and economic struggle between local politicians and business elites.

The next section will analyze the Kremlin's response to the emergence of the Caucasus Emirate. Because of the direct threat that the Caucasus Emirate caused to the Sochi games, Russia's antiterrorism concept for the 2014 Winter Olympics became a showcase for how the Kremlin addressed the problem of Islamic radicalization in the North Caucasus.³⁵

³⁴ Sufian Zhemukhov, "The Birth of Modern Circassian Nationalism," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2012, pp. 502–524.

³⁵ Robert W. Ortung and Sufian N. Zhemukhov, *Putin's Olympics: The Sochi Games and the Evolution of Twenty-First Century Russia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Russia's Evolving Antiterrorism Concept

Terrorism activities increased during the run-up to the Sochi Olympics and significantly decreased during and after the games. Such a dramatic up-and-down dynamic was due to a combination of factors, including the effective security measures of the Russian law enforcement agencies, internal changes inside the insurgency network, the evolution of the insurgency's social fabric, and the emergence of the Islamic State, which created a split within the insurgency in the North Caucasus.

During two Russian-Chechen Wars, the Kremlin regarded the insurgents in the North Caucasus as separatists and fought for the restoration of "constitutional order" in the region. After the insurgency changed its ideology from nationalism to Islamism, the Kremlin also changed its ideological approach to fighting the insurgents and labeled them as terrorists.³⁶ According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service, there were 5,472 terrorist incidents in Russia between 2009 and 2013, averaging about two to three per day, with a decline from 1,381 in 2009 to 741 in 2013. Over that period, 1,672 security personnel and civilians were killed, along with 1,921 suspected terrorists. By comparison, in terms of casualties, 1,826 U.S. troops were killed in Afghanistan during the same period.³⁷ The well-respected Caucasus Knot website claims the total number of deaths was 6,074 between 2010 and 2015 (see Table 3.3), while Memorial, a prominent human rights NGO in Russia, recorded the deaths of 4,175 law enforcement officers from 2008 to 2015. All the sources show a relatively high level of terrorist activity in the immediate aftermath of Russia's winning the right to host the Olympics in 2007 and a reduction in the number of deaths as the Olympics approached in 2014.³⁸

Kremlin's antiterrorism concepts evolved through three distinct phases marked by different security concepts and practical measures. The security concept after the end of the active phase of the Second Russian-Chechen War assumed that Russia had achieved stability in the North Caucasus.³⁹ Russian authorities included this security concept in the candidature file for holding the Sochi Olympics, in the section "Enhancing Olympic Security."⁴⁰ The emergence of the Caucasus Emirate forced the adoption

³⁶ Aglaya Snetkov, *Russia's Security Policy Under Putin: A Critical Perspective*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

³⁷ Jim Nichol, Elaine Halchin, John W. Rollins, Alex Tiersky, and Steven Woehrel, *The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics: Security and Human Rights Issues*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R43383, January 26, 2014.

³⁸ Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling, eds., *The Sochi Predicament: Contexts, Characteristics and Challenges of the Olympic Winter Games in 2014*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

³⁹ David Barnard-Wills and Cerwyn Moore, "Securitising the Caucasus: From Political Violence to Place Branding in Chechnya," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2008, pp. 252–262.

⁴⁰ "Sochi 2014 Candidature File," sochi2014.com (via archive.org), undated.

of a second security concept in 2010.⁴¹ Given the threat to the Olympic facilities in Sochi, the large number of people being killed, and the spread of terrorist attacks, securing the entire North Caucasus region became an impossible task for Russian law enforcement agencies. Accordingly, to separate Sochi administratively from the rest of the North Caucasus region, the Kremlin carved out a new North Caucasus Federal District from the existing Southern Federal District. The third concept, adopted after Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, enhanced the crackdown on the terrorists by finding and killing them.⁴²

From the beginning of the preparations for the games, Russia's security planning took into account terrorist challenges in the North Caucasus. Planners drew up the first security plan for the games in May 2007, a time when the Chechen insurgency seemed to have been defeated and its leaders were either dead or in hiding. The Kremlin considered the Chechen problem solved, did not anticipate other serious threats to stability in the region, and officially ended its "counterterrorist operation" in Chechnya in April 2009. The stabilization of Chechnya was regarded as a result of Putin's ability to centralize power and to help Russia's return to the world stage.⁴³ The 2007 security concept of the North Caucasus reflected Russia's readiness to embrace the International Olympic Committee's (IOC's) concept of friendly security for the games, assumed that Russia had achieved stability in the North Caucasus, and implied that the Olympics would be open to everybody, including migrant workers who sought employment building Olympic facilities in the years before the opening ceremonies. Initially, the organizers of the games were so sure that no serious threats would face Sochi in the lead-up to the Olympics that they did not plan to involve federal agencies in the security preparations up to 2012. One regional law-enforcement agency, the Sochi Police Department, was responsible for providing all security. Military forces could be added on an ad hoc basis, according to these initial plans.

Several months after Russia won its bid to host the Olympics, the leader of the Chechen insurgency, Doku Umarov, proclaimed his intention to establish an Islamic state (the Caucasus Emirate), which would expand beyond Chechnya to include the entire Caucasus region. Although an extreme brand of Salafi Islam was taking hold in the North Caucasus, there was extensive turmoil within the insurgency, leading to "fragmentation, mutation, and reconstitution" of its ranks.⁴⁴ The grievances toward

⁴¹ "Decree of the RF President of May 14, 2010, no. 594, 'On Supplying Security During the Conduct of the Twenty-Second Olympic Winter Games and the Eleventh Paralympic Winter Games in 2014 in Sochi'" ["Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 14.05.2010 No. 594 'Ob obespechenii bezopasnosti pri provedenii XXII Olimpiiskikh zimnikh igr i XI Paralimpiiskikh zimnikh igr 2014 goda v Sochi'"], kremlin.ru, May 15, 2010.

⁴² "Decree of the RF President from August 19, 2013, no. 686" ["Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 19 avgusta 2013 g. No. 686"], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 23, 2013.

⁴³ Wills and Moore, 2008.

⁴⁴ Cerwyn Moore, *Contemporary Violence: Postmodern War in Kosovo and Chechnya*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010; Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A

Russia were rooted in domestic issues, but foreign jihadists were able to participate in the fighting, although their role had been declining since the heyday between 1999 and 2002. Russia's leaders did not try to address the root causes of the problem but sought to suppress the groups they dubbed "bandits" through a combination of repression and cooptation. Terrorism in the area was further fueled and fostered by corruption that has acquired grotesque forms. While regional leaders worried about the threats raised by these groups, the Kremlin did not employ special measures to secure the Olympic venues from 2007 through 2009, hoping that the combination of repression and cooptation would be sufficient.

Such limited measures proved ineffective, and anxiety rose when the Caucasus Emirate organized major terrorist attacks on Russian soil outside of the North Caucasus region. In November 2009, an express train traveling between Moscow and St. Petersburg exploded en route to its destination, killing 25 people and wounding 87.⁴⁵ In March 2010, two women detonated suicide belts in the Moscow Metro during morning rush hour; one of the blasts hit the Lubyanka Metro station near the headquarters of the Federal Security Service (FSB). The two blasts killed 38 people and injured 60. Other attacks in 2010 caused a number of deaths in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Although Russian troops and police outnumbered the rebels by more than 50 to one, the authorities' efforts did not eliminate the armed resistance.⁴⁶

The second security concept for the Sochi Olympics emerged in 2010. In adopting the second Olympic security concept, the Kremlin effectively admitted that it could not secure the entire region. It therefore imposed territorial-administrative changes in the North Caucasus and adopted a variety of different military preparations. According to the new security concept, the Kremlin separated the Sochi area from the center of destabilization in the North Caucasus republics by dividing the Southern Federal District in January 2010.

In May 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev issued a decree "On Providing Security During the Twenty-Second Winter Olympic Games and Eleventh Paralympic Games of 2014 in Sochi."⁴⁷ It established an operational staff headed by the FSB director who replaced the minister of internal affairs, who was given the job in the candidature file's original plan. Representatives of all other security services became subordinate to the head of the operational staff in 2010, rather than in 2012 per the original plan. The practical affect of Medvedev's decree was that Russia launched military and antiterrorism preparations for the Olympics much earlier than anticipated,

Critical Assessment," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2008, pp. 412–433.

⁴⁵ "Derailed Nevsky Express Train Was Blown Up—Law Enforcement Source," *RIA Novosti*, November 28, 2009.

⁴⁶ Mark Kramer, "Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2005, pp. 209–290.

⁴⁷ "Decree of the RF President of May 14, 2010, no. 594 . . .," 2010.

including military drills in the Black Sea, along Russia's borders, and in the Caucasus Mountains.

As early as 2010, regular military regiments from different parts of Russia were sent to the North Caucasus with the official goal of securing the region in preparation for the 2014 Olympics. One such case was reported in the Russian media when the soldiers' parents discovered that a regiment from Leningrad Oblast had been sent to Dagestan.⁴⁸ The regular regiments guarded important buildings while the special forces conducted antiterrorist operations, including ridding the nearby mountains of potential terrorists.⁴⁹

In addition to antiterrorist military operations, the local authorities in the North Caucasus tested soft-power methods to win over extremists and their supporters. Starting in 2010–2012, in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Karachai-Cherkessia, nonviolent prominent Salafi leaders made public appeals to the fighters. These soft measures had an immediate positive effect and, for example, Ingushetia became one of the most peaceful republics in the region, with fewer young people joining the insurgency.⁵⁰ The number of law enforcement officers killed and wounded by insurgents in 2009–2012 fell by half, from 929 to 475, according to Memorial (see Table 3.3).⁵¹

Putin's reelection to a third term in 2012 changed the Olympics security concept again. With his Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) background, Putin apparently considered the agency to be the most effective tool and gave the FSB control over the entire security infrastructure. In January 2013, a year before the games, Putin issued a decree establishing the State Committee for Preparing and Conducting the Olympics.⁵² With the decree, Putin appointed General Oleg Syromolotov, an FSB deputy director, to be the chairman of the operations staff to provide security at the games. Syromolotov was a specialist in counterintelligence, and his appointment as the head of Olympic security indicated that the Kremlin prioritized counterintelligence efforts over antiterrorism actions.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Conscripts Sent to Dagestan to Guard Olympic Venues" ["Srochnikov perebrosiat v Dagestan dlia okhrany Olimpiiskikh obektov"], Lenta.ru, September 21, 2010.

⁴⁹ Tat'iana Ivleva, "Kontrakty Temirkhana Saitova," *Kaspiets*, No. 49, December 18, 2015, p. 5.

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, "The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?" No. 238, March 16, 2016.

⁵¹ "Counter-Terror in the North Caucasus: A Vision of Human Rights Defenders. 2014 g" ["Kontrterror Na Severnom Kavkaze: Vsglyad Pravozaschitnikov. 2014 g.,"] *Pervaya Polovina*, 2016.

⁵² President of Russia, "The Decree by the President of the Russian Federation from January 15, 2013, No. 29: 'On the State Commission on the Preparation and Conduct of XXII Winter Olympic Games and XI Paralympic Winter Games of 2014 in Sochi'" ["Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii Ot 15.01.2013 G. No. 29 'O Gosudarstvennoi Komissii Po Podgotovke I Provedeniyu XXII Olimpiiskikh Zimnikh Igr I XI Paralimpiiskikh Zimnikh Igr 2014 Goda V G. Sochi'"], undated.

⁵³ Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, and Shaun Walker, "As Sochi Olympic Venues Are Built, So Are Kremlin's Surveillance Networks," *The Guardian*, October 6, 2013.

Table 3.3
Victims of Terrorism and Antiterrorism in the North Caucasus, 2010–2016

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Victims of terrorism and antiterrorism ^a	1,705	1,375	1,225	986	525	258	287
Number of killed and wounded law enforcement officers ^b	840	475	547	373	182	52	32

^a “Statistics of Victims in the North Caucasus for 2010–2015 Years According to the Data of the Caucasian Knot” [“Statistika Zhertv Na Severnom Kavkaze Za 2010–2015 Gody Po Dannym Kavkazskogo Uzla”], Kavkazskii Uzel, February 10, 2016.

^b “Counter-Terror in the North Caucasus . . .,” 2016.

Russia’s antiterrorism methods changed dramatically after Putin returned to the presidency. According to Memorial, the Russian leadership abandoned the soft-power methods that it used against terrorism under Medvedev and switched to an emphasis on force, often unlawfully: “Starting in 2012–2013, law enforcement agencies returned to practicing state terror and to provoking antagonism between different trends inside Islam.”⁵⁴ Amid this ongoing violence, the Caucasus Emirate made verbal threats against the Olympics in Sochi. In July 2013, a video appeared on YouTube in which Caucasus Emirate leader Doku Umarov called on his supporters in Russia not to allow the Sochi Olympics to go forward. With this announcement, Umarov claimed to be ending the moratorium on attacks that he had announced in early 2012.⁵⁵

According to a 2016 International Crisis Group report, the Russian security services carried out hundreds of antiterrorism operations, killing both leaders and rank-and-file insurgents. Security service agents followed the insurgents’ wives and poisoned food was sent to the fighters in the forests. This tactic produced results when the FSB claimed to fatally poison Umarov six months before the Olympics, on September 7, 2014, killing the greatest terrorist threat to the Olympics. The FSB also cracked down on nonviolent Salafi activity, closing prayer houses and charities while also conducting mass arrests of believers in mosques and *halal* cafés.⁵⁶ Despite their apparent success, the new heavy-handed methods came at a high cost for law enforcement agencies, and the number of killed and wounded officers increased in 2012.

Despite the death of Umarov, other terrorist groups were able to carry out deadly attacks in Volgograd, a city in Southern Russia, in the months before the games began. An explosion on a bus killed eight people and wounded 37 on October 21, 2013. One of the women killed was from Dagestan and, allegedly, a suicide bomber. Later, law enforcement agencies killed her husband, an ethnic Russian, and claimed that he was

⁵⁴ “Counter-Terror in the North Caucasus . . .,” 2016.

⁵⁵ BBC, “Umarov Called for Stopping the Olympics in Sochi” [“Umarov prizval ne doputit provedeniia Olimpiady v Sochi”], BBC Russian Service, July 3, 2013.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, 2016.

the organizer of the terrorist act.⁵⁷ On the eve of the Olympics, two more terrorist acts took place in the same city, leaving no doubt that they were connected to the Sochi games. On December 29, 2013, a suicide bombing rocked the Volgograd train station, killing 18 people and injuring 44. The next day, another suicide attack took place in a trolleybus, killing 16 people and injuring 41. A group named Vilayat Dagestan posted a video taking responsibility for the Volgograd explosions and threatening to conduct terrorist acts during the Sochi Olympics.⁵⁸ IOC president Thomas Bach, however, issued a statement the same day expressing confidence that the Russian authorities would deliver “safe and secure” games in Sochi.⁵⁹

The three explosions in Volgograd raised doubts about whether the Russian security system was capable of preventing terrorist attacks. But the deadly crackdown continued. On January 8, four cars with the bodies of six men were discovered in southern Stavropol Krai, just southeast of Pyatigorsk.⁶⁰ On the same day, a police officer killed a suspect in Dagestan and on January 11, secret service officers killed two other suspects, allegedly connected to the insurgents. On January 15, in a battle in the village of Karlanyurt, Dagestan, law enforcement forces killed four insurgents. These incidents took place in Dagestan, a predominantly Muslim populated region, and, because of that, drew less media attention than the previous three terrorist acts in Volgograd, predominantly populated by ethnic Russians. The 2010 separation of Sochi from the more turbulent North Caucasus Federal District, where Dagestan was located, paid off in this way, taking Sochi from the media headlines associated with terrorist acts so that the echo of terrorism from the distant Dagestan mountains did not reach Sochi, although it did not help directly increase security during the Olympics.

The Sochi games proceeded without any terrorist attacks disrupting them. Nevertheless, several incidents raised concerns. On January 21, 2014, the Russian police announced that Sochi had been infiltrated by a “black widow”—a female suicide bomber who was taking revenge for the killing of her husband. There were even reports of letters threatening athletes if they attended the Games, although these turned out to be a hoax.⁶¹ About a year after the Olympics, Russian security services claimed that they had prevented a terrorist attack during the games. According to Olympics security chief Syromolotov, more than one female suicide bomber was supposed to fly

⁵⁷ Dmitry Evstifeev, “Terror in Volgograd, the Bandits Responded to the Operation of Special Services” [“Teraktom V Volgograge Bandity Otvetili Na Operatsii Spetssluzhb,” *Izvestiia*, October 21, 2013.

⁵⁸ Timothy Heritage, “Militant Islamist Video Threatens Winter Olympics,” Reuters, January 19, 2014

⁵⁹ Artyom Liss, “Volgograd Blasts: IOC ‘Confident’ Games Will Be Safe,” BBC News, December 30, 2013.

⁶⁰ Nichol et al., 2014.

⁶¹ Nichol et al., 2014.

from France to Sochi, delivering explosive materials hidden inside a toiletry tube with a microexplosive mechanism delivered from Syria.⁶²

After the death of Umarov, the Caucasus Emirate's terrorist activities dropped significantly. The insurgents' violence decreased because of several causes. First, the newly elected Caucasus Emirate leader, Aliaskhab Kebekov, banned suicide bombing attacks against civilians and women's participation in the insurgency. In spite of his order, however, a suicide bombing took place in Dagestan after the Olympics, and this act of disobedience indicated that the new leader did not have authority over all the insurgents in the region. Second, the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria made the local North Caucasus radicalism, which was oriented toward al Qaeda,⁶³ less appealing; hundreds of insurgents from the Caucasus went to fight in Syria instead. Third, some experts believe that the security services opened the borders for the insurgents, making it easy for them to go to Syria.⁶⁴ Russian jihadists did not begin to leave for Syria in significant numbers until 2014 when, in the time before the start of the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, the security services in the nearby North Caucasus region made it clear that they would kill any militants they could find. Russia also actively pushed people to leave, according to human rights activists, who noted that a few well-known militants held under house arrest suddenly turned up in recruitment videos from Syria.⁶⁵

In sum, Russian authorities killed the leadership of the main terrorist threat to the Sochi Olympics a few months before the opening ceremonies. Other groups were able to carry out terrorist attacks in Russia in the months before the games started, but these attacks were displaced to Volgograd and Dagestan, far enough away from the events so that they did not have a major affect on the games themselves.

In the counterterrorism sphere, Russia successfully prevented a terrorist attack on the Sochi Olympics. The short-term result was that there was no violence at the games themselves, although some of the attacks were likely displaced to Volgograd, which suffered three deadly terrorist bombings in the months leading up to the games. While the emphasis on repressive measures secured the Olympics, the longer-term consequences were less clear. Attacking the terrorists without addressing the underlying causes of the problems, Russia's traditional strategy for dealing with the North Caucasus was likely to inflame the situation over time. Russian counterterrorism actions have not been based on the different trajectories of evolution of insurgency in the eastern North Caucasus (Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia) and western North Caucasus

⁶² Gennady Miranovich, "'Vigilance' Is a Concrete Concept" ["'Bditel'nost'—Poniatie Konkretnoe. Krasnaia Zvezda"], November 17, 2015.

⁶³ Gordon M. Hahn, *Getting the Caucasus Emirate Right*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2011.

⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, 2016.

⁶⁵ Ceylan Yeginsu and Rukmini Callimachi, "Turkey Says Airport Bombers Were from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Uzbekistan," *New York Times*, June 30, 2016.

(Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, and Adygea). The lack of such a differential treatment indicated a misunderstanding of the roots of the radicalization and caused a simplification of the Kremlin's antiterrorist measures.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

Islam successfully revived in the postatheistic society in North Caucasus after the fall of the Soviet Union. As a popular worldview, Islam followed the same pattern as nationalism and became particularly relevant for youth mobilization. As a political ideology, however, Islam evolved differently from nationalism. While activists of nationalism carefully studied and tried to reproduce the same traditions that existed before and during the Soviet era, Islam developed along new dimensions and followed distinct trajectories in the eastern and western parts of the North Caucasus. It merged as a political ideology along with nationalism in the eastern part of the North Caucasus, namely in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. In the west of the North Caucasus, in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, Adygea, and North Ossetia, Islam developed in competition with nationalism.

The clash between the separatist movement in Chechnya and, later, Islamic insurgency across the North Caucasus from one side and Russian law enforcement forces from the other turned the North Caucasus into a volatile region. A quarter-of-a-century-long instability caused additional complications for the transition from the planned Soviet economy to a free-market economy in the North Caucasus, compared with the rest of post-Soviet regions. While agriculture and trade recovered better than other sectors of the economy in the region and even became modernized, other sectors of the local economy suffered significantly. The tourism infrastructure built during Soviet times has been largely lost because of constant separatist and terrorist conflicts in the region. The Caspian resorts in Dagestan stopped functioning completely and mountain resorts in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, and North Ossetia were also affected by the instability in the region. The tourism business crisis, together with the post-Soviet deindustrialization of the region, brought the region to economic turmoil when all the North Caucasus republics became dependent on financial support from the Russian federal budget.

One possible future trajectory might be that Islam and nationalism will continue developing in the North Caucasus, although quite differently in the eastern and western parts. In the east, Islam and nationalism will continue to merge with each other in the judicial and political spheres, while in the west, the clash between Islam and nationalism might become even stronger. The current regime has failed to conduct reforms in Russia in general and in the North Caucasus particularly. Unless the Kremlin conducts deep reforms in Russia, however, the situation in the North Caucasus will remain the same. Broader political autonomy, state-church separation, and state sup-

port for religious/ideological diversity would help to promote tolerance and establish stability in the region. Antiseparatism and antiterrorist militarized response are the only efforts the Russian government have taken seriously in the region so far. Russian security policy in the North Caucasus has become another example of the general post-Soviet trend, showing that the Kremlin does not have a long-term strategy to resolve conflicts. Even after the Kremlin allowed other Russian regions to conduct governor elections, it still prohibited similar elections in the North Caucasus republics, except in Chechnya. This demonstrated that the federal elite continued to distrust the local elites. It can also be argued that the Kremlin used the appointment system to maintain its bargaining power vis-à-vis local warlords.

Another likely trajectory is that Russia will continue to face terrorist attacks until conditions improve in its restive south. The use of soft-power solutions has proven effective in some cases and could profitably be expanded over time. After struggling with instability in the region led by the Muslim insurgents of the Caucasus Emirate since 2007, the Kremlin was successfully able to repress the surge of terrorism before the 2014 Sochi Olympics. One of the main methods of its repression involved pushing the insurgents from Russia to Syria, where they joined the international terrorism effort led by the Islamic State. If those insurgents were to return to Russia with developed combat skills and more sophisticated jihadist ideology, it would cause a tremendous security challenge for Russia in the post-Soviet era.

Another likely future possibility is that nationalism and separatism in the North Caucasus will remain one of the main challenges for the Kremlin and the Russian state for decades to come. Post-Soviet history has proven that the transition of power is the most dangerous time for the territorial unity of the Russian state, and leaders exercise dramatic measures to centralize their power. The unresolved border issues between the republics of the North Caucasus present another threat to stability in the region; it would revive ethnic conflicts if the Kremlin's power were to weaken, for example, during a post-Putin transition of power.

In the longer term, while the political, economic, and security situation in Russia remains stable, the general political trend in the North Caucasus would be an extension of what is already happening in the region: There is steadily increasing corruption, and the local political machines are turning into more authoritarian regimes—in case of Chechnya, into a totalitarian one. The new forms of cooptation of Islam into the local political machine in Chechnya show that a particular sect of Islam directly connected with the state political machine may transform into an ideology for building a totalitarian society.⁶⁶ The only way to resolve the extremism problem and separatism challenges is to change the domestic policy in Russia and implement long-needed reforms. Economic reforms would help create new jobs for Russian youth and make

⁶⁶ Tuaeov Magomed, "Religious Clerks Accused Chechen Sufis in an Attempt to Split Muslims" ["Bogoslovy Obvinili Chechenskikh Sufiev v Popytke Vnesti Raskol Sredi Musul'man"], *Kavkasky Uzel*, September 3, 2016.

the pro-Russian choice more attractive for the regional elites. The Kremlin also needs to help local elites renegotiate land and border issues instead of suppressing them, which is a temporary solution that will reopen problems as soon as the federal center becomes weak during the next transition of power. Fighting corruption and reforming law enforcement agencies are related measures that would help reduce the feeling of injustice in society and decrease antigovernment protests, including political demonstrations and military insurgency. The Russian government also needs to develop a more assertive policy toward the state-church separation, most urgently in the northeast Caucasus republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Last, but not least, the Kremlin should encourage the development of a civil society in Russia instead of suppressing it; a vibrant and healthy civil society would become the most effective actor in reducing radicalism in the region.

Central Asia: Where Did Islamic Radicalization Go?

Svante E. Cornell

In June 1999, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) launched attacks from its bases in Afghanistan on the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which took the regional defense structures by surprise. Repeat attacks the following year met with more resistance, and following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. forces in Afghanistan found themselves directly confronting IMU militants aligned with al Qaeda fighters in north Afghanistan.¹ These events brought renewed attention to the rise of radical Islam in Central Asia, rekindling academic debates following independence—prompted by the role of Islamists in the civil war in Tajikistan—that suggested Communism could easily be replaced by Islam not just as the guiding belief system, but as a political ideology.² Indeed, the specter of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia received considerable attention in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The U.S. government, dependent on access to Afghanistan from bases in Central Asia, spent considerable resources on seminars covering the subject, while academics and policy analysts penned numerous studies on the subject.³

A distinct paradigm has emerged in this literature, one that argues that the combination of repressive governments and economic deprivation in Central Asia, and

¹ Ariel Cohen, “Central Asia Beyond Namangani,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, November 21, 2001.

² This paradigm was reflected clearly in the titles of some of the early books on the region: Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, London: Zed, 1994; Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad*, London: Harper Collins, 1995; Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995.

³ These included Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005; and Martha Brill Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. Other studies include Ahmed Rashid, “The Fires of Faith in Central Asia,” *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2001; Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002; Ghoncheh Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2001; Shirin Akiner, “The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003; Richard Weitz, “Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 2004; Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2005.

particularly Uzbekistan, would serve as an incubator of radicalism. Unless the Uzbek government changed its ways and opened its political system, radical Islam would only grow larger and more menacing. The Central Asian regimes advanced the opposite argument: The specter of Islamic radicalism—inspired and supported from abroad—was so severe that it legitimized their reluctance to engage in serious political reform and restrictive policies toward nonsanctioned religious groups. In fact, the 1999 events further convinced the Uzbek leadership that the more open political system in Kyrgyzstan was a serious mistake. Thus, regional governments and Western analysts clashed on the causal mechanisms at hand regarding the rise of Islamic radicalism. Yet they were in full agreement that Islamic radicalism was, indeed, a potent force in Central Asia.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that these predictions and fears did not materialize. While it is undeniable that Islamic extremist groups formed a considerable challenge in the 1990s, the widespread radicalization that was expected in the region has not occurred. In fact, its absence has led some scholars to recently talk of it as a “myth.”⁴ As will be argued in the next section, that may be going too far: There were indeed serious indications of a potential for radicalization in the region. Yet in the past decade, Islamic radicalization has swept the Middle East, including North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member Turkey, and come to strongly affect Muslim communities in Western Europe. In the same period, it has not been a serious factor in Central Asia. In fact, the academic and policy interest in Central Asian Islamism that was apparent a decade ago gradually receded, albeit receiving a new lease on life recently with concerns of Islamic State recruitment.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the relative absence, contrary to predictions, of Islamic radicalization in Central Asia. Following an overview of the emergence of radical Islamic groups in the region, it will assess factors that could explain radicalism’s limited development—ranging from the cultural and historical traits of Islam in Central Asia to external Islamic influences and the policies of regional governments.

The Rise and Fall of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia

It has long been noted that the prevailing secularization theories of the 1950s and 1960s have not stood the test of time. The idea that modernization would necessarily “lead to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals” has been proven wrong.⁵ In fact, in both political and nonpolitical ways, the world has seen a

⁴ John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics*, London: Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2014.

⁵ Peter Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999, pp. 2–3.

resurgence of religion, sometimes in the form of a backlash against this very modernity. As Peter Berger put it, the world is “as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.”⁶ Central Asia and the Caucasus have been part and parcel of that development; while the starting point of that process is often viewed as having begun with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is clear that it preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, as the example of Poland makes abundantly clear, the return of religiosity contributed to the collapse of communism rather than being a result of it. Of course, the end of Soviet state-imposed atheism facilitated this preexisting trend of a religious revival.

This analysis takes this resurgence of religiosity as a given, but focuses on a much narrower and only partially related issue: the rise of Islamic radicalism, which is not necessarily correlated with growing religious observance in Muslim societies. Globally, political ideologies seeking religious legitimacy in Islam have been on the rise for a half-century. They have been boosted by the failure of socialist and nationalist ideologies in the Islamic heartland and empowered by the export of inherently radical and political interpretations of Islam from the oil-rich Gulf monarchies since the 1970s, something Saudi officials have belatedly acknowledged and sought to stem.⁷ This process gathered speed following the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, when the Saudi leadership made a deal that allowed the jihadi groups to propagate their ideology abroad, but prohibited it inside the kingdom.⁸ Since then, Saudi Arabia has both formally and informally been the primary promoter of fundamentalist Islam throughout the Muslim world and beyond.⁹

Political Islam, of course, comes in many shades. It includes groups with a local agenda, groups with a global agenda, those that espouse violence to achieve their aims, and those that renounce it. It also includes groups with different stated aims of how far they intend to go in terms of the Islamization of society and state, and which of the two they focus their efforts on. But what Islamist groups have in common is a rejection of the secular form of government and an ambition to replace it with one based, often exclusively, on Islamic principles. This chapter differentiates between political Islam, Islamic radicalism and extremism, and terrorism, while recognizing the overlaps between the categories. Political Islam, or Islamism, is understood as any movement with political aims—stated or unstated—that is motivated by an ideology based on an

⁶ Berger, 1999, p. 1.

⁷ Zalmay Khalilzad, “We Misled You: How the Saudis Are Coming Clean on Funding Terrorism,” *The National Interest*, September 14, 2016.

⁸ Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam’s Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al-Qaeda*, New York: Anchor, 2008.

⁹ Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, “The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad,” *World Affairs*, May/June 2015; Sebastian Gorka, *Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War*, Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2016, p. 84.

interpretation of the Islamic religion. Political Islam may or may not be radical. A subcategory of political Islam is radical or extremist Islam: forces that advocate an ideology that is intolerant of political or religious dissent and lies outside of the mainstream of a given Muslim society's views and values. Radical and extremist groups, in turn, may or may not espouse violence, including terrorism, as an instrument to achieve their goals. Put otherwise, Islamist groups can be divided into at least three categories. The first are movements that are both ideologically radical and violent, including such terrorist groups as the IMU. The second are those that are radical but do not actively engage in violence, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. These groups tend to be at best ambivalent about violence; however, their ideology is inherently intolerant, and they tend to approve of violence in certain conditions (e.g., against Israeli civilians).¹⁰ As a result, focusing on whether groups espouse violence is only a part of the puzzle: The issue is the ideology that legitimates the violence. Ed Husain, a former Hizb ut-Tahrir member and author of *The Islamist*, observed that "addressing the 'conveyor belt' from ideology to terrorism is vital. We need to deal with this ideology."¹¹ As scholar Zeyno Baran has argued in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir, such groups are

part of an elegant division of labor. The group itself is active in the ideological preparation of the Muslims, while other organizations handle the planning and execution of terrorist attacks. Despite its objections to this description, HT [Hizb ut-Tahrir] today serves as a *de facto* conveyor belt for terrorists.¹²

In the third category are self-declared moderate groups that oppose violence, reject the most radical ideologies within political Islam, and use the rhetoric of democracy and human rights to advance their cause. This includes groups that claim to have no political agenda whatsoever—including the so-called quietist Salafis such as the Indian-based Jamaat al-Tabligh movement.

In this category, many Islamist movements, especially those connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, support the *mechanism* of democracy to achieve their purposes and tend to share a majoritarian approach in which they see themselves as representatives of a pious majority that should be allowed to set the rules by which society is governed. At the very basic level, however, many even in this category reject the notion that the people, not God, are the source of sovereignty and the legitimacy of a government. As Turkish scholar Ihsan Dağı has argued, this trend in political Islam is a form of "postmodern authoritarianism" that "is not justified by a reference to the 'text' but

¹⁰ See, for example, Anthony Bergin and Jacob Townsend, "Responding to Radical Islamist Ideology: The Case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Australia," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Policy Analysis*, No. 6, March 14, 2007.

¹¹ Dominic Casciani, "Inside the Jihadi Worldview," BBC News, May 24, 2007.

¹² Zeyno Baran, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, December 2004, p. 11.

to the ‘people’ and the people’s ‘will,’” which is “‘democratic and representative’ in justification and process but authoritarian in content and outcome.”¹³

This chapter is concerned with all Islamist movements, but primarily with the more-radical variants of political Islam, regardless of whether or not they espouse violence.

History of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Across Central Asia and the Caucasus, Islam has been thoroughly intertwined with local folk customs and pre-Islamic traditions. Scholars have linked the prominence of such traditions to the dominance of the Hanafi *madhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence), Maturidi theological approach in the region, and the powerful role of Sufi orders.¹⁴ Among the four madhabs of Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanbali), the Hanafi school is the one most open to accepting the independent reasoning of Islamic jurists (*ijtihad*), the consensus of jurists (*ijma*), and deductive analogy (*qiyas*) in cases where the Quran and Sunnah do not provide answers to particular questions of Islamic law.¹⁵ The Maturidi school of *Kalam* or theology is one of the two dominant ones in Sunni Islam along with the Ash’ari school. The Maturidi school places considerably stronger emphasis on human reason, maintaining—unlike the Ash’ari school—that humans can determine right from wrong in the absence of divine revelation.¹⁶ In practice, this led to a greater tolerance: The Hanafi madhab, which was codified in Central Asia, accepted some forms of pre-Islamic behavior and sought to integrate and cloak them in an Islamic shroud, something that stricter madhabs such as the Hanbali or Shafi’i schools would summarily reject. The Hanafi school thus sought to lessen the shock of the transformation taking place, thereby facilitating the spread of Islam across the region.¹⁷ Similarly, the Hanafi school tolerated the rise of Sufi orders, the largest of which originated in Central Asia and spread globally. The Sufi orders were based on the notion of a mystical communion between man and god, often understood to supersede Quranic injunctions. This, of course, was anathema to the stricter interpretations, particularly in the Hanbali madhab. The complex theological controversies over

¹³ Ihsan Dağı, “Pursuing Islamism with Democracy,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 9, 2012.

¹⁴ S. Frederick Starr, “Islam’s Civil War and Greater Central Asia,” *Islam: Governance, Ideology and U.S. Policy for the New Administration and the New Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute, 2009, pp. 33–40.

¹⁵ The Hanafi school dominates in former Ottoman lands and Central Asia; the Shafi’i school is followed in areas populated by Kurds, Southeast Asia, and East Africa; the Maliki school is dominant in the rest of Africa, while the Hanbali school is followed in Saudi Arabia and some Gulf monarchies. For more details about differences in jurisprudence, see Irshad Abdal-Haqq, “Islamic Law: An Overview of Its Origins and Elements,” *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 27, 2002.

¹⁶ Ahmad Mohamad Ahmad El-Galli, *The Place of Reason in the Theology of Al-Maturidi and Al-Ash’ari*, doctoral thesis, Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh, 1976.

¹⁷ S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia’s Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Sufism—and the diversities among Sufi orders, with the Naqshbandi in particular situated squarely within the boundaries of Sunni orthodoxy¹⁸—are beyond the scope of this chapter. The purist Salafi movement, inspired in particular by the Wahhabi movement that emerged from the Hanbali tradition in Saudi Arabia in the late 18th century, developed a fervently anti-Sufi tendency. The Sufi worship of saints and veneration of ancestors clashed with the extreme monotheism of the Salafis, who considered such practices a form of *shirk* or polytheism, and therefore as apostasy.

Across Central Asia, the dominant institutions of Islamic learning were all Hanafi and coexisted with the major Sufi orders, especially the Naqshbandi and the Yasawi. Surprisingly, the first inroads of Salafi ideology came during the Soviet period. Influential Arab scholars brought “proto-Salafi” ideas to Central Asia in the 1920s. From the 1950s onward, contacts between Islamic scholars and Saudi Arabia—home to an important Uzbek diaspora—were established when the pilgrimage to the holy sites was allowed after World War II. This led to a gradual growth of Salafi thought in underground religious communities in Uzbekistan—particularly in the Ferghana Valley—as well as in Tajikistan, where underground Islamists operated relatively freely. The North Caucasus remained largely under the influence of the Sufi orders; yet in Dagestan, which follows the stricter Shafi’i madhab, Salafi ideas also began to gain traction by the 1970s. As scholar Vitaly Naumkin details, the Soviet leadership may in fact have not only tolerated but also facilitated the rise of Salafi thought, as it contributed to splitting and undermining the more influential, and therefore politically dangerous, traditional Islamic forces in the region. This apparently went on even in the late 1980s: Naumkin quotes a former Uzbek communist official as saying “we couldn’t have imagined into what a monster this Wahhabi movement here would turn.”¹⁹

The Wahhabi movement indeed did expand dramatically starting in the late 1980s.²⁰ A younger generation of Salafi imams and activists began to organize in Tajikistan, as well as in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley, particularly the towns of Andijan, Namangan, and Margilan. By this time, many Uzbeks and Tajiks were already exposed to the Islamic radicalism of their co-ethnics in Afghanistan,

¹⁸ The Naqshbandi order is a Sufi order founded in Central Asia in the 14th century. Sufi orders are built on the notion that its masters trace their spiritual lineage back through other masters in an unbroken chain going back to the Prophet Muhammad. Most Sufi orders trace this lineage through Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law venerated by the Shi’as; the Naqshbandi differ by tracing their lineage through Abu Bakr, the first Caliph. This makes the Naqshbandi order more mainstream within Sunni Islam than other Sufi orders. See Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, London: Routledge, 2007; also Svante E. Cornell and M. K. Kaya, “The Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order and Political Islam in Turkey,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 19, September 2015.

¹⁹ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 48–52.

²⁰ Shirin Akiner, “The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003.

who fought the Soviet invasion.²¹ Radical Islamists then rose to prominence in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the chaotic period of the Soviet Union's collapse and the transition to independence from about 1989 to 1992. This was a period of increasing lawlessness, including ethnic riots in the Ferghana Valley that led to the ethnic cleansing of the Meskhetian Turks (exiled from southern Georgia in the 1940s) in summer 1989 and ethnic riots between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh region in 1990. Meanwhile, in Tajikistan, political liberalization gradually led to the collapse of the communist regime, heavily dominated by the northern Leninabad region, which came to be contested by a coalition of secular as well as Islamist opponents, in which the latter formed the core element.

As a result of the general chaos, the weakening of power in Tajikistan, and the rapid succession of inept leaders in Tashkent, Salafi-inspired radicals in 1991 took over the functions of government in the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan's section of the Ferghana Valley, while a more-diverse group of Islamists made a bid for power in Dushanbe. In Uzbekistan, the Adolat (Justice Social Democratic Party) party formed the main vehicle for the power grab, which featured vigilante groups who enforced Islamic dress codes and behavior and demanded the government in Tashkent declare an Islamic state. At this point, the intricate connections between political Islam and organized crime were visible: These vigilantes were formed mainly from heavily criminalized martial arts circles.²² Subsequently, the Uzbek militants became heavily involved in the trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan; parts of the movement appeared to have been motivated and strongly affected by the drug trade.²³

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ferghana Valley became a haven—indeed a battleground for influence—for foreign Islamic missionaries from the Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and beyond.²⁴ At this point, the notorious future leader of the IMU, Tahir Yuldashev, set himself up as the de facto ruler of the Ferghana Valley, and contemporary visitors reported that the Salafis appeared convinced they would prevail in an armed struggle against Tashkent. They also gained tactical sup-

²¹ Victor Spolnikov, "Impact of Afghanistan's War on the Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia," in Hafez Malik, ed., *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 95–116.

²² Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Kamil Malikov, and Aloviddin Nazarov, "Islam in the Ferghana Valley: Between National Identity and Islamic Alternative," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2011; and Naumkin, 2005, p. 262.

²³ Svante E. Cornell, "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," in Svante E. Cornell and Michael Jonsson, eds., *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Postcommunist Eurasia*, Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, pp. 68–81.

²⁴ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 66–70; Michael Fredholm, *Uzbekistan and the Threat from Islamic Extremism*, report no. K39, Surrey, UK: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2003, p. 4.

port from several secular opposition groups that shared the common aim of ousting the Uzbek government.²⁵

Faced with this challenge, the government of the newly independent Uzbekistan at first vacillated. The new leader of Uzbekistan, the relatively unknown Islam Karimov, even traveled in December 1991 to meet with the Salafis, who demanded, among other things, the declaration of Uzbekistan as an Islamic state. In a dramatic episode that has been preserved for posterity on the Internet, Yuldashev forced Karimov, in very hostile conditions, to listen to his lecture on proper governance.²⁶ This experience proved not only humiliating for Karimov but also formative: After returning to Tashkent, he managed to consolidate enough power in the next few months to crack down on the militants in Ferghana and restore control over the restive region. In the ensuing months, the government engaged in a broad repression of Islamist forces, Salafi and non-Salafi alike.²⁷ Karimov's apprehensions concerning political Islam were exacerbated by events in Tajikistan: A civil war broke out there in early 1992, which pitted the post-Soviet government against a diverse opposition force led by Islamists, who were in turn closely connected with the ethnic Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The Uzbek militants exiled from the Ferghana Valley became an important component of that opposition but differed in their orientation. They gravitated toward the emerging Taliban movement in Afghanistan rather than the Northern Alliance. Tajikistan's descent into chaos shook the entire region and strengthened the Uzbek leadership's conviction that stability had to be maintained at all cost and radical Islam must be fought with all available means.

The Uzbek militants reconstituted themselves into the IMU and benefited from the flight of Uzbek Islamists fleeing subsequent crackdowns in Uzbekistan. The 1997 peace agreement in Tajikistan led the IMU to seek closer ties with the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan and gradually to move their base to Afghanistan. Yet they maintained a presence in Islamist-controlled territory in Tajikistan's southern-central areas. From bases in Kabul and Tajikistan, they planned a series of attacks on Central Asia. In early 1999, a series of bomb explosions rocked the Uzbek capital Tashkent and almost killed President Karimov. The IMU was blamed for these terrorist attacks, although its culpability has yet to be convincingly determined. In August 1999, the IMU conducted a military incursion into the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, which focused on the Vorukh and Sokh enclaves in that region: small territorial exclaves belonging to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively, but entirely surrounded by mountainous Kyrgyz territory. While the IMU made political demands, it released hostages for ransom: in particular, four Japanese geologists, for which the organization

²⁵ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 52–60.

²⁶ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011, pp. 319–320. See “Karimov, Namangan” [“Каримов Наманганда”], YouTube video via user turkistontv, August 20, 2011, for the video.

²⁷ Naumkin, 2005, p. 70; Rashid, 2001, pp. 45–55.

extracted a sum believed to be \$2–5 million.²⁸ The IMU detachments then retreated to Tajikistan and subsequently Afghanistan, aided by the intervention of old allies from the Tajik civil war, particularly the former warlord and now-Tajik minister of emergency situations, Mirzo Zioyev. But other IMU units remained in Tajikistan, where they continued to coordinate with their former comrades in arms who were now part of a unity government. They returned the following summer better armed and managed to insert themselves into several areas of Uzbekistan, where they attacked government forces. While they were repelled, it was really only after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following September 2001 that the IMU was dealt a decisive blow and forced back into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, where it merged with other foreign fighters loyal to al Qaeda. The U.S. intervention also had the effect of strengthening the hand of Imomali Rakhmonov's regime in Dushanbe in its internal power struggle with the former opposition leaders, who were gradually purged in the following years.

The overview of the rise of radical Islam in Central Asia would not be complete without treatment of the purportedly nonviolent groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jamaat al-Tabligh. Hizb ut-Tahrir is a global Islamist movement created by Palestinian Islamic scholar Taqiuddin al-Din an-Nabhani in 1953 that, while generally eschewing violence, aspires to build a caliphate uniting all Muslims in which there would be no place for nonbelievers. Adopting a three-stage approach to achieving power, the group plans to first spread Islamic education in society; infiltrate government and spread their message there; and finally, lead to the "crumbling" of secular governments, although the group never specifies how, exactly, that would happen without the use of force.²⁹

From the mid-1990s, Hizb ut-Tahrir began to spread relatively rapidly in Central Asia, giving birth to a veritable cottage industry of academic and policy studies concerning the movement. To this day, most of the literature on this global Islamic movement headquartered in London focuses on its activities in the Central Asian states.³⁰ In the mid-2000s, there was much alarm raised about the proliferation of the organization, including reports of tens of thousands of recruits joining the group, primarily in Uzbekistan but also in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, this literature appears

²⁸ David Leheny, "Tokyo Confronts Terror," *Policy Review*, No. 110, December 2001/January 2002.

²⁹ Baran, 2004, p. 48.

³⁰ The three major works are Baran, 2004; Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb Ut-Tahrir*, London: Routledge, 2010; and Naumkin, 2005, pp. 127–200. Further studies include International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir," Asia Report no. 58, June 30, 2003; Emmanuel Karagiannis and C. McCauley, "Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami: Evaluating the Threat Posed by a Radical Islamic Group That Remains Nonviolent," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, 2006; Alisher Khamidov, "Countering the Call: The U.S., Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Religious Extremism in Central Asia," Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003; Didier Chaudet, "Hizb-ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006, pp. 113–125; Svante E. Cornell and Regine Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, pp. 193–206.

to have diminished around 2008. After 2010, there is little reference in academic and policy circles to the group in Central Asia, and regional governments do not raise alarm about the group. What happened to this purportedly rapidly growing movement? And if it is no longer a threat, why is that the case, contrary to earlier expectations?

A number of splinter groups came out of Hizb ut-Tahrir, some maintaining the commitment to nonviolence and some not. One of these is the curious case of Akromiya, named after its founder, Akram Yuldashev, who split from Hizb ut-Tahrir in the early 1990s. Concentrated in Andijan, Uzbekistan, Akromiya members were successful in operating a thriving Islamic community that included prominent businesses and educational institutions, which were not only tolerated but praised by the Uzbek government. As Jeffrey Hartman has noted, “early in 2004, President Karimov visited one of the Brothers’ [a term for Akromiya members] charitable causes in Kokand for a public relations event and congratulated them on Uzbek national television for their work. On various occasions, Karimov referred to the Brothers’ community members as ‘the pride,’ ‘the stars,’ and ‘the sons of Uzbekistan.’”³¹ But hardly a year later, following a change of the governor of Andijan, this governor’s falling out with the “Brothers,” and the jailing of two dozen businessmen connected to Akromiya, the movement was responsible for the violent uprising that occurred in Andijan in May 2005. The botched Uzbek government response, which ended in a shootout between hostage-taking Islamists and poorly trained interior ministry forces in which up to 200 people were killed, led to widespread condemnation of the Uzbek government, as discussed in the next section.³²

From Central Asia, but Not of Central Asia?

As previously noted, Islamic radicals from Central Asia at present appear to be located primarily outside of the region. This process of internationalization of the radical movement developed alongside the IMU’s move into Afghanistan. There, its base broadened to include Uighurs, Tajiks, and citizens of other former Soviet states. Furthermore, the Central Asian radicals came to be integrated with al Qaeda, and thus the group’s erstwhile focus on regime change in Uzbekistan began to broaden and be affected by the more-global agenda of transnational Salafi-jihadi networks.³³

This eventually led to a split by 2002. While the core IMU attracted growing displeasure from its Taliban hosts for its reluctance to take part in the fight against the United States in Afghanistan, a breakaway group, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU),

³¹ Jeffrey W. Hartman, *The May 2005 Andijan Uprising: What We Know*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, May 2016, p. 20.

³² John C. K. Daly, *Rush to Judgment: Western Media and the 2005 Andijan Violence*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, May 2016.

³³ Didier Chaudet, “Islamist Terrorism in Central Asia: the ‘al-Qaedaization’ of Uzbek Jihadism,” IFRI Russia/NIS Center, No. 35, December 2008, pp. 17–18.

emerged with an agenda more in line with that of the global transnational Salafi jihadi network.³⁴ The IJU was found to have a far reach; in addition to having been responsible for a series of suicide attacks in Uzbekistan in 2004, German authorities also averted an IJU plot on German government targets involving Turkish nationals and German converts.³⁵

By 2011, the agenda of the global jihadi movement had shifted to Syria, meaning that the IMU, still focused on greater Central Asia, was finding it ever more difficult to attract recruits because they had to compete with the pull of a conflict much closer to the Islamic heartland and of much greater symbolic significance.³⁶ Thus arose the main Central Asian fighting groups in Syria: the Imam Bukhari Brigade and Katibat al Tawhid Wal Jihad, both of which are aligned with al Qaeda's franchise in Syria (the Nusra Front) and with a broader coalition called Jaysh al-Fatah, in which the Nusra Front is the main force. As Syria exerted a powerful pull on Central Asian militants, the rump IMU resolved to affiliate itself with the Islamic State and plead allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an attempt to retain relevance and secure funding.³⁷ That led to a final breakdown in the IMU relationship with the Taliban and likely spelled the end of the IMU as a cohesive entity.

Over the past two decades, the locus of Central Asian radicals has moved from the Fergana Valley through Tajikistan and Afghanistan and into the tribal badlands of Pakistan toward the Levant. Estimates of the numbers of Central Asian fighters in Syria vary widely and range from the high hundreds to several thousand. Even higher estimates exist, although their accuracy is contested.³⁸ Regardless, the number of Central Asians in Syria appears to be relatively low in international comparison. While there is considerable variation in figures cited, numbers often circulated suggest that close to 5,000 fighters from former Soviet republics had traveled to Syria. Of these, half are believed to be Russian citizens; the rest are divided among the five Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The best estimates suggest about 500 Uzbeks have traveled to Syria, along with up to 600 Kyrgyz nationals (including ethnic Uzbeks from south Kyrgyzstan), with numbers ranging from 100 to 300 for the other Central Asian states and Azerbaijan. These numbers should be put in context: The larg-

³⁴ Einar Wigen, "Islamic Jihad Union: al-Qaida's Key to the Turkic World," Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009, p. 12.

³⁵ Guido Steinberg, "A Turkish al-Qaeda: The Islamic Jihad Union and the Internationalization of Uzbek Jihadism," Strategic Insights, July 2008.

³⁶ Jacob Zenn, "The IMU Is Extinct: What Next for Central Asia's Jihadis?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 3, 2016.

³⁷ Edward Lemon, "IMU Pledges Allegiance to Islamic State," Eurasianet.org, August 1, 2015.

³⁸ "Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia," International Crisis Group, Briefing no. 72, January 20, 2015; and John Heathershaw and David Montgomery, "Who Says Syria's Calling? Why It Is Sometimes Better to Admit We Just Don't Know," Cedar Network, February 17, 2015.

est contingents of foreign fighters appear to come from Tunisia (up to 6,000), Saudi Arabia (2,500), Turkey (2,000–3,000), and Jordan (2,000). Beyond these Middle Eastern states, European nations are prominently represented: 1,700 French citizens, along with 700 Germans and a similar number of Britons, as well as close to 500 Belgians and 300 Swedes.³⁹

While it is indisputable that young Central Asians are being recruited to the killing fields of Syria, an important question is where that recruitment actually takes place. Indeed, the assumption that they are recruited in their homelands is largely not borne out in fact.⁴⁰ Quite the contrary, the lion's share of recruits are radicalized and recruited while working as migrant workers in Russia.⁴¹ In fact, scholar Leon Aron estimates that between 80 and 90 percent of Islamic State fighters from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were recruited while working as labor migrants in Russia.⁴² This fact led the independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* to conclude that “the road to [the Islamic State] goes through Moscow.”⁴³

Thus, the current situation regarding Central Asian radical Islam is somewhat perplexing. While the problem of radical Islam was indeed a serious one in the 1990s, it seems to have abated to a considerable degree. Since the mid-2000s, the evidence of ongoing radicalization in Central Asia itself has dwindled; and where it has appeared, it has increasingly concerned incidents in south Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, rather than Uzbekistan, which the literature pointed to as the looming hotbed of extremism given its more authoritarian government and its repeated crackdowns on unofficial Islamic groups. Indeed, the most notable terrorist attacks in the region in recent years have taken place in Kazakhstan, with several incidents in 2011–2012, culminating in a much-publicized attack in Aktobe in 2016.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the mainly ethnic Uzbek jihadi milieus that dated to the conflicts in the 1990s integrated with the international jihadi networks and developed a pres-

³⁹ The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, December 2015.

⁴⁰ “Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia,” 2015.

⁴¹ Joanna Paraszczuk, “Most Uzbeks Fighting for IS Came from Russia, Theologian Claims,” *RFE/RL*, March 24, 2015; Noah Tucker, “Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses,” United States Agency for International Development and Municipal Development Institute, 2015; Ryskeldi Satke and Marta Ter, “Are Central Asian Migrants in Russia a Recruiting Ground for Islamic State?” European Council on Foreign Relations, July 27, 2015; and Daniil Turovsky, “How ISIS Is Recruiting Migrant Workers in Moscow to Join the Fighting in Syria,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2015.

⁴² Leon Aron, “The Coming of the Russian Jihad, Part I,” *War on the Rocks*, September 23, 2016.

⁴³ Zinaida Burskaya, “The Road to IGIL Passed Through Moscow” [“Doroga v IGIL Prolegla Cherez Moskvu”], *Novaya Gazeta*, January 18, 2016.

⁴⁴ Yevgeny Pastukhov, “The Problem of Terrorism for Kazakhstan,” *Kazakhstan in Global Processes*, No. 3 (37), 2013. See also Karin Erlan, *The Soldiers of the Caliphate: The Anatomy of a Terrorist Group*, Astana, Kazhanstan: KISI, 2016.

ence first in Afghanistan and Pakistan and then in Syria. In spite of this organizational prominence, the numbers of Central Asian recruits in these theaters pale in comparison to those of more-liberal Middle Eastern countries and to Western European nations. Further, the preponderance of evidence suggests the recruitment of the relatively few Central Asian fighters in Syria occurs not in the region itself, but in Russia.

These developments leave a number of unanswered questions, but one stands out: Why have the expectations of a mushrooming of radical Islam in Central Asia not materialized? In fact, what explains the absence of more widespread radicalization in Central Asia in line with developments elsewhere in the Islamic world?

Cultural and Historical Determinants of Islam in Central Asia

The objective of this chapter is complicated by the fact that it aims to prove a negative: Why has widespread radicalization not occurred in Central Asia? Critics may retort that what should be explained is the occurrence of radicalization and not its absence. Seeking to prove its absence risks falling into the trap of assuming that a rise of religiosity also means a rise in radicalism. As scholars John Heathershaw and David Montgomery have pointed out, some analysis of the region displays an “assumed yet unproven relationship between Islamicization and radicalization.”⁴⁵ While remaining mindful of this issue, two factors make this approach worthwhile: First, it remains a fact that much of the Islamic world as a whole *has* seen growing tendencies toward radicalization, including considerable numbers of young men leaving for jihad abroad. Second, many analysts long predicted the growth of radicalization in Central Asia if the regional regimes did not liberalize their policies toward religion; these governments have, if anything, become even more restrictive.

The evidence suggests that public religiosity has risen in Central Asia, while radicalization has not. In the mid-1990s, scholar Nancy Lubin conducted a survey in Uzbekistan that showed that close to half of the population considered themselves nonbelievers, while slightly higher numbers identified as believers. Of those, many displayed a remarkable lack of knowledge about basic tenets of Islam and reported neither praying nor fasting. Lubin also found that the levels of religiosity differed strongly by age and region. Younger people were considerably less likely to define themselves as believers; and levels of religiosity were higher in the Ferghana Valley than elsewhere in Uzbekistan, with Andijan standing out for its high levels of religiosity.⁴⁶ While there have been no subsequent surveys of this kind, political scientist Kathleen Collins conducted focus group surveys in Uzbekistan in 2004–2005 in which every person

⁴⁵ Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2015, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁶ Nancy Lubin, “Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia,” in Yacov Ro’i, ed., *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, London: Frank Cass, 2005.

interviewed defined himself or herself as a believer, and young people displayed greater interest in religion than older people.⁴⁷

It appeared that a surge in public religiosity took place in the region. Collins reported widespread support for laws based in part on Islamic principles, including sharia, while considerably fewer interviewees, although a visible minority, supported armed jihad in certain conditions. In contrast, the number of respondents who agreed with Islamist views on gender relations was comparatively small.⁴⁸ In a survey also conducted in 2005 in southern Kyrgyzstan, Montgomery found similar evidence of growing religiosity: One-third of respondents supported an Islamic basis for state law.⁴⁹ A 2013 Pew poll found similar results: Between one-tenth (Kazakhstan) and one-third (Kyrgyzstan) of respondents supported sharia law.⁵⁰ These numbers were lower than for Russian Muslims, two-fifths of whom supported sharia, and contrasted widely with figures for South Asia and the Middle East, where more than three-quarters of respondents supported the application of Islamic law. Thus, while the evidence suggests that religiosity in Central Asia has increased notably since the early post-Soviet period, support for religious orthodoxy remained low in comparison with other heavily Islamic regions.

However, the available data suggest that radicalization and religiosity have no positive correlation; they even appear to be negatively correlated, as radicalization appears to have abated while religiosity has clearly risen. The lack of a correlation between religiosity and political Islam is perhaps best illustrated by Pew's figures for Azerbaijan: 88 percent of respondents concur that it is necessary to believe in god to be moral, a figure higher than for any Central Asian state. Only 8 percent, however, support sharia, a figure lower than any Central Asian state.⁵¹ This raises the question whether the radicalization that took place in the late Soviet period in Central Asia was an elite phenomenon, disconnected from society as a whole and focused among particular underground groups.

An important detail in this regard is the Islamic tradition in Central Asia. Indeed, two factors are of particular relevance: the prevalence of the moderate Hanafi tradi-

⁴⁷ Kathleen Collins, "Islamic Revivalism and Political Attitudes in Uzbekistan," *National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, December 2007.

⁴⁸ Collins, 2007, pp. 36–39.

⁴⁹ David Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link Between Religiosity, Radicalism, and Rebellion in Central Asia," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2016.

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, Washington, D.C., 2013. Pew was unable to include the question of support for sharia in Uzbekistan. However, results for Uzbekistan align with other Central Asian states on all other questions asked in the poll, including whether women should wear the veil and attitude toward honor killings. Because of this, there is no reason to expect the result for Uzbekistan regarding sharia to differ markedly.

⁵¹ See Pew Research Center, 2013, pp. 18, 74.

tion across the region and the long history of secularization. The less-strict nature of the Hanafi madhhab is more tolerant of diversities of belief and practice, and Hanafi societies have proven more accepting of secularization compared with other madhabs. Of course, the Hanafi madhhab is dominant almost exclusively outside the Arab world among societies that were Islamized but retained elements of their pre-Islamic culture and beliefs. This factor may have provided additional tolerance of secularization, particularly among Turkic peoples, whose national traditions have remained strong. At the same time, the Hanafi connection in part correlates with geographic proximity to Europe. Most Hanafi societies are located in the Balkans, Turkey, or Central Asia and are overwhelmingly Turkic; the major exception is the Muslims living in the Indian subcontinent. Pew's research shows that views among Hanafi Muslims in South Asia align more with the mainstream Islamic world than with their Hanafi counterparts in the Turkic world.⁵² Thus, an equally if not more important factor may be the Turkic heritage—particularly the fact that these areas were controlled largely by Turkic rulers and not by outside powers—and proximity with and exposure to Europe and European ideas including secularism. This mix of factors led to the development, among the Muslims of Czarist Russia, of modernizing ideas seeking to adapt Islamic education to new realities, a movement known as *Jadidism*. While not secular per se, the Jadid movement was decisively modern in its intention to combine secular learning with Muslim culture.⁵³

In spite of the connections mentioned, Central Asia has been largely disconnected from the Muslim heartland over much of the past century. The implication of this is that the Islamic currents that developed in the Middle East in the 20th century have not had the opportunity to become entrenched in Central Asia. For example, Montgomery's survey in south Kyrgyzstan sought to measure familiarity with Islamic scholars. While many knew of local historical figures such as Ibn Sina or al-Bukhari, few (less than 3 percent) had heard of modern Islamist ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb or Ali Shariati.⁵⁴ This raises the question of whether the lack of radicalization in Central Asia is only a result of the lack of interaction with the Islamic world—in other words, whether a “regression to the mean” of the Islamic world is likely to happen if the region gets more integrated with the rest of the world in the coming decades.

While the answer to this question cannot be known, it is clear that an Islamic renaissance is taking place in Central Asia; as such, the role of Islam in society has plenty of room to grow. That may mean that radical ideas will become more popular

⁵² Pew Research Center, 2013, pp. 18, 74.

⁵³ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999; Abdujabbar A. Abduvakhitov, “The Jadid Movement and Its Impact on Contemporary Central Asia,” in Hafez Malik, ed., *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 65–76.

⁵⁴ Montgomery and Heathershaw, 2016.

in the future. The trajectory undoubtedly will be affected by external as well as internal political factors.

External Islamic Influences

The external influences on Islam in Central Asia are plentiful, the main sources being the Gulf, South Asia, and Turkey. In the Soviet period, as previously discussed, connections were developed between Central Asia and both South Asian Islamic movements and those originating in the Gulf. Those connections were largely underground and had a powerful effect on the radicalization of Central Asian Islamists in the transition to independence. Yet on a broader societal scale, external influences have been able to develop connections only following the transition to independence. It should be noted at the outset that the ability of external Islamic groups to operate in the region has been affected by government policies, not least their general aversion to external religious missionaries of any stripe—with Kyrgyzstan being only a partial exception. Paradoxically, this has tended to favor two contrasting types of movements: those tolerated by the governments and underground and highly secretive groups.

Turkish Islamic movements have tended to receive a warmer welcome than others. Given the efforts by Central Asian governments to support traditional Islam, the Turkish example was initially viewed quite positively. That enabled Turkish Islamic groups to spread relatively freely in the region. The Turkish state, through the foundation of its Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), took a direct role in building or restoring mosques across the region, printing and distributing religious literature, and setting up theology departments on a Turkish model (in all regional countries except Uzbekistan).⁵⁵ In addition, with tacit support from the state, Turkish religious communities have been active in the region. These have included numerous branches of the Naqshbandi movement, particularly the Erenköy lodge led by Osman Nuri Topbaş, as well as the Süleymancı faction, which, although poorly known, operates a large number of mosques and Islamic education facilities abroad, particularly in Germany.⁵⁶ Much more well known are the activities of the Nurcu movement and particularly the movement led by Fethullah Gülen. The Gülen movement (increasingly a separate entity from the Nurcu movement)⁵⁷ has focused on the education sector, and the former Soviet space was the movement's first step outside Turkey, which subsequently led it to branch out to dozens of countries across the world. It focused on opening

⁵⁵ Bayram Balci, "Turkey's Religious Outreach and the Turkic World," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, March 2014.

⁵⁶ Yıldız Atasoy, *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy*, London: IB Tauris, 2005, p. 144.

⁵⁷ İsa Tatlıcan, "Eight Differences Between the Nur Movement and the Gülen Community" ["Nurculuk ile Gülen cemaati Arasındaki 8 Fark"], *Milat Gazetesi*, January 6, 2014.

schools, universities, and dormitories and has achieved considerable success in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan (it was shut down in Uzbekistan in 2001).⁵⁸ Since these schools provided high-quality secular education in a conservative religious environment, they soon became popular for the elites across the region. Yet the deepening conflict between the Turkish government and the Gülen movement, leading to the movement's alleged involvement in a failed coup in July 2016, shattered the Gülen movement's image as an avowedly nonpolitical movement and led to widespread closures of schools. On a broader level, developments in Turkey also indicated that Turkish Islam may be less radical than that of the Gulf or the Indian subcontinent, but no less political. In the past decade, as Turkey's government has become more overtly Islamist, the crucial role played by the Naqshbandi order in this process has been widely noted. Similarly, the Diyanet has become increasingly politicized and so has the Gülen movement, which first allied with and then opposed the government.⁵⁹

The influence of Gulf-based Islam has already been noted; suffice to say, Central Asia is exposed to similar influences as the rest of the Islamic world. The rapid spread of Salafi ideology (in its disparate varieties, including its takfiri and jihadi variants)⁶⁰ has been sponsored by wealthy forces in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia but also Kuwait and Qatar. Many Central Asian Muslims are first exposed to Salafism on the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi school has the innate advantage of being the official form of Islam in the most holy of sites in the Islamic world. Thus, to a foreign Muslim, if his or her form of Islam differs from the one practiced in Saudi Arabia, there is a natural tendency to assume that the one practiced in Mecca and Medina might be the correct form, particularly in territories such as Central Asia, where official Islamic structures were tainted by their collaboration with communist and thus atheist regimes. Of course, this misses the fact that the reform movement led by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the late 18th century altered, rather than returned, the Islam practiced by the actual *Salafs* (followers of the prophet) and was considerably more austere.⁶¹ That fact may be lost on modern recruits, who, because of their migration to cities or foreign lands, feel little attraction to the traditional "folk" Islam of their parents and are attracted instead by the simplicity of the Salafi message and its clear definition of wrong and right based entirely on textual sources (as limited as their readings of these texts might be).⁶² Indeed, the

⁵⁸ Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003.

⁵⁹ Cornell and Kaya, 2015.

⁶⁰ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, pp. 207–239.

⁶¹ Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, New York: Doubleday, 2003.

⁶² Sadek Hamid, "The Attraction of 'Authentic' Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth," in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 385.

attraction of Wahhabi ideas may rest exactly with what some have called their “extreme hostility to any form of intellectualism.”⁶³

In practice, Salafi expansion was directly linked to the funding provided by wealthy Gulf individuals and foundations. These welcomed and funded would-be Islamic scholars to study at Salafi-inspired educational institutions, from which they returned home and contributed to the spreading of Salafi ideology. Similarly, donors from the Gulf provided funding for the construction of mosques but also ensured that the imams appointed to these mosques were Salafi in orientation. This gradually resulted in a growing dominance of radical Salafi ideology in Islamic educational institutions far beyond the Gulf region itself, something Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in a 2015 speech, blamed even the famed Al-Azhar University of having succumbed to.⁶⁴ Similarly, Turkish scholars have noted the gradually growing influence of Salafi ideas over official Turkish Islam, as well as within the Naqshbandi-Khalidi movement itself.⁶⁵ In the case of Central Asia, the Saudi influence is enhanced by the existence of a comparatively large Uzbek and Uighur minority in the kingdom, most of whom arrived a century ago but have rekindled connections with their homeland.⁶⁶

The same process appears to have taken place in Islamic educational institutions in Central Asia, including, tragically, those under the auspices of the Uzbek government. At a 2000 conference on radical Islam in Central Asia, Naqshbandi-Nazimi Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, chair of the Islamic Supreme Council of America, recalled his visit to the Islamic University in Tashkent. The school was created with the explicit objective of controlling the education of Imams in the country. Asking to visit the university’s library, the sheik, after some browsing, turned to his hosts and asked, “Are you aware that you are teaching Wahhabism here?”⁶⁷ Apparently, the library was stocked with publications from the Gulf, many provided as gifts from foundations there, which reflected the narrow selection of *hadiths* (accounts of the prophet) favored by the Salafis. This episode illustrates the pervasive nature of the spread of Salafi ideology. Of course, the Uzbek government has undoubtedly grown more adept at identifying Salafi impulses since 2000, and there is evidence that the ability of Saudi

⁶³ Khaled Abou el Fadl, “The Orphans of Modernity and the Clash of Civilizations,” *Global Dialogue*, Spring 2002, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Jacques Neria, “Egyptian President Sisi Calls for Reform of Islam,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, February 15, 2015.

⁶⁵ Hilmi Demir, “Is Naqshbandism Being Salafized?” [“Naqşibendilik Selefileşiyor mu?”], 21st Century Turkey Institute [21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü], September 14, 2014; Hilmi Demir, “Salafi Wahhabi Propaganda in a Diyanet Mosque” [“Diyanet Camisinde Selefi Vehhabi Propaganda”], 21st Century Turkey Institute [21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü], May 3, 2015.

⁶⁶ Bayram Balci, “Les Ouzbeks d’Arabie Saoudite entre Intégration et Renouveau Identitaire via le Pèlerinage,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2003.

⁶⁷ Author recollection from the conference on the Emergence of Religious Extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute in Washington, D.C., April 11, 2000.

financiers to be active in the country—and the wider region—has decreased considerably as the security structures of the Central Asian states were built up.⁶⁸ Shaykh Kabani's tale suggests how the sheer ubiquity of the global Salafi movement's activities, and its incomparably greater financial prowess, ensures that its influence cannot be so easily halted. Kyrgyzstan stands out as an exception to the higher barriers erected against foreign Islamic influences, as it adopted a more-tolerant approach to nontraditional religious groups. That approach has been widely lauded by Western analysts; yet it also means that Salafi groups, including Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jamaat al-Tabligh, have been far more active in shaping Islamic development in the country.⁶⁹

The final major influence on Central Asia is South Asian Islam, particularly its Deobandi variety, itself a current influenced by Salafism.⁷⁰ Indeed, perhaps the most authoritative theologian of Soviet-era Central Asia, Muhammedjon Rustamov, was known as “Hindustani” because of his studies at the madrasa in Deoband.⁷¹ Madrasas in the subcontinent thus formed an important source of Islamic learning for Central Asian Muslims, and this only grew following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the madrasas operated by the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam in the North-West Frontier of Pakistan became the breeding ground for the Taliban movement. This influence of jihadi groups in South Asia has been most pronounced among the extremist Central Asian groups, which mainly operate in exile. Aside from that, the Deobandi influence is visible through Jamaat al-Tabligh, a Deobandi movement that seeks to promote Islamic values and lifestyle globally. Much like Hizb ut-Tahrir, it is avowedly nonviolent and rather opaque and secretive, but it differs from its London-based counterpart in its lack of political ambitions. Hizb ut-Tahrir focuses almost exclusively on a political agenda; the *Tablighis*, by contrast, focus exclusively on the substance of the religion and individual proselytizing. They are not opposed in principle to the idea of a caliphate but do not pursue political aims.⁷² Jamaat al-Tabligh denounces Sufism as contrary to monotheism but also denounces the political movements inspired by such thinkers as Mawdudi and Qutb.⁷³ While nonpolitical, the creed of Jamaat al-Tabligh

⁶⁸ Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*, Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, p. 132.

⁶⁹ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011; Jacob Zenn and Kathleen Kuehnast, *Preventing Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, Special Report 355, October 2014.

⁷⁰ Arshi Saleem Hashmi, “Historical Roots of the Deobandi Version of Jihadism and Its Implications for Violence in Today's Pakistan,” in Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran, and Abbas Zaidi, eds., *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, p. 137.

⁷¹ See Naumkin, 2005, pp. 43–55; and Michael Fredholm, “Islamic Extremism as a Political Force: A Comparative Study of Central Asian Extremists Movements,” Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University, Asian Cultures and Modernity, research report no. 12, October 2006, pp. 9–10.

⁷² Bayram Balci, “The Rise of Jama'at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties Between the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2012.

⁷³ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de L'Islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2000, p. 42.

is “hardly distinguishable from the radical Wahhabi-Salafi jihadist ideology.”⁷⁴ Indeed, numerous studies have shown that while the decentralized movement is not itself a violent organization, its membership has been a prime target of recruitment for violent groups from Harkat ul-Mujahideen to al Qaeda.⁷⁵ The movement’s character has led to differing responses from regional government, leading to a considerable divergence in its presence. As Bayram Balci, who has studied the movement closely, argues, “the movement is highly present in Kyrgyzstan, quite visible in Kazakhstan, hardly active in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and completely absent in Turkmenistan.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the movement was banned first in Uzbekistan and subsequently in Tajikistan but is tolerated in Kazakhstan while being accepted in Kyrgyzstan, where it has been courted by the government as an antidote to extremist groups.⁷⁷

Foreign proselytism is controversial in any society, and Central Asia is no exception. The arrival of foreign Islamic ideas has been coupled with the spread of other religious groups, including Christian missionaries.⁷⁸ All of these have generated considerable social and governmental resistance. Three Central Asian researchers went so far as to state that the radicals’

dependence on ideology and money coming from Arab religious centers all but guarantees that while their organizational structures may adapt to local circumstances, their ideology will not. The Wahhabis’ radicalism and intransigence toward the traditionalists or conservatives are therefore likely to alienate them from most believers and render them irrelevant.⁷⁹

It has been noted that Hizb ut-Tahrir deployed propaganda prominently featuring anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist themes, which may have been successful in the Middle East and among Middle Eastern–origin targets in Europe, but it fell on deaf ears in Central Asia.⁸⁰ This raises broader questions about Central Asian societies’ receptivity to novel and alien religious influences.

⁷⁴ Alex Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad’s Stealthy Legions,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2005, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Susan Sachs, “A Muslim Missionary Group Draws New Scrutiny in the U.S.,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2003.

⁷⁶ Bayram Balci, “Reviving Central Asia’s Religious Ties with the Indian Subcontinent? The Jamaat al Tabligh,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2015, p. 26.

⁷⁷ Nate Schenkan, “Kyrgyzstan: Islamic Revivalist Movement Quietly Flourishing,” *Eurasianet*, October 25, 2011.

⁷⁸ Mathijs Pelkmans, “Mediating Miracle Truth: Permanent Struggle and Fragile Conviction in Kyrgyzstan,” in Simon Coleman and Rosalind Hackett, eds., *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism*, New York: New York University Press, 2015, p. 181.

⁷⁹ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011, p. 344.

⁸⁰ Anara Tabyshalieva, “Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s Increasing Activity in Central Asia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, January 14, 2004.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the relative lack of radicalization in Central Asia has occurred against the backdrop of a religious revival, including considerable efforts by radical foreign groups to promote their particular understanding of Islam in Central Asia. Yet these efforts, which have been crucial to radicalization elsewhere, to date have been limited, and the reestablishment of religious ties between Central Asia and the rest of the Islamic world is a process that will likely continue. Foreign movements have been restricted by the attitudes and policies of Central Asian governments, but their attention to some extent has also been diverted by the focus of all Islamist groups on developments closer to the heartland of Islam, in particular the civil war in Syria. Therefore, the question arises whether the lack of radicalization in Central Asia is simply a matter of time. Will the same patterns that have happened elsewhere repeat in Central Asia if the region's societies are more exposed to the same currents of thought that have proved influential in the rest of the Islamic world?

Government Policies

The elephant in the room in this discussion is, of course, the policies of Central Asian governments. These policies are frequently derided as authoritarian and counterproductive for long-term stability. The literature on these policies often neglects to differentiate between moral judgment and empirical observation. Because the policies are deemed to be morally repulsive, scholars appear inclined to believe that they are also counterproductive—a vicious cycle of radicalization and repression strengthening each other.⁸¹ The logic is fairly compelling: The broad repression exercised against any independent Muslim groups in Central Asia, together with the systematic crushing of other political dissidents, leaves opposition-minded forces with little choice but to gravitate toward the most extreme and radical opposition to the ruling elites, namely Islamic extremists. While this chapter does not claim to offer a wholesale rejection of this theory, the evidence nonetheless suggests that our understanding of it should become more nuanced. A dispassionate analysis of Central Asian government policies would certainly recognize the often excessive repression that is being exercised; yet it is necessary to recognize that the “repression-radicalization hypothesis” fails to explain the relative paucity of radicalization in the region or the discrepancy among the countries

⁸¹ This thesis is most succinctly argued in Kathrin Lenz-Raymann, *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle—Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*, Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014. Lenz-Raymann bases her conclusion upholding the hypothesis on a comparison of terrorist acts in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, claiming that the greater occurrence of such acts in the latter country, in spite of its more repressive political climate, confirms the hypothesis. But the study is based on a small quantity of cases and on a computer simulation, and it fails to seriously and empirically study other plausible explanations for this discrepancy and cannot overcome the likelihood that its correlation may simply be spurious. Furthermore, following the publication of the study, the incidence of terrorist actions in Kyrgyzstan has visibly increased, while the opposite has been the case in Uzbekistan.

in the region. Indeed, it cannot explain why radicalization appears to have decreased in heavily authoritarian Uzbekistan and especially why the epicenter of Islamic radicalization today—in direct contradiction to the expectations of the hypothesis—appears to be in the relatively more open Kyrgyzstan. In this context, the next section provides a cursory investigation of Central Asian policies regarding religion. It highlights three elements: (1) the maintenance of secular laws and education systems, (2) the restrictions in the information sphere, and (3) the restriction on nontraditional religious movements.

Maintenance of Secular Laws and Secular Education

It is an often-neglected fact that the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan constitute close to half of the slightly more than one dozen (of a total of 50) Muslim-majority states in the world that are secular. The remainder, aside from Turkey and the Balkans, are mainly in West Africa. As in the West, however, secularism comes in different shapes, and the Central Asian governments are often referred to as “militant secularist.” In a sense, they are more correctly described as *laicist* rather than secular in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the term.⁸² The governments have not primarily been concerned with the objective of securing the religious freedom of individuals from the state, which was the purpose of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and, outside France, remains the understanding of secularism in the West today. Rather, following the French and Republican Turkish model, their main concern has been to defend the freedom of the state and its citizens *from* religion.⁸³ For that purpose, the states took upon themselves to regulate and control religion. In doing so, they inherited some Soviet institutions, including state-supported religious bodies, but they also departed from the official atheism of the Soviet Union, which sought to restrict and combat the exercise of religion. Indeed, following independence, thousands of mosques were built across the region, particularly in Uzbekistan. Instead, the Central Asian states developed policies to support the exercise of traditional religions, but explicitly and vehemently opposed the influx of new religious ideas. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, for example, regularly urges citizens to avoid “nontraditional religions.”⁸⁴

Importantly, the state operates in association with certain religious communities. Several of the states—notably Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan—promote, both at home and abroad, the leaders of traditional religious communities. Touring

⁸² Ahmet T. Kuru, “Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies Toward Religion,” *World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 2007, pp. 568–594.

⁸³ See discussion in Svante E. Cornell, Halil Karaveli, and Boris Ajeganov, *Azerbaijan’s Formula: Secular Governance and Civic Nationhood*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, November 2016.

⁸⁴ Andrea Berg, “Kazakhstan: An Atmosphere of Quiet Repression,” Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 9.

their own countries and the world, representatives of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian communities across the region can often be seen together, not only in dialogue but in unison, speaking in favor of tolerance and coexistence and in opposition to any form of religious radicalism and foreign proselytism. In doing so, they invariably praise the state policies of their governments and agree on the danger of instability and schism that novel religious currents constitute. In other words, the secular governments of Central Asian states and Azerbaijan are based on what could be called an informal *concordat* between the state and the leaders of traditional religious communities, joining across religious lines in seeking to protect their flocks against foreign missionaries of all stripes. Of course, the main concern of the governments is not the comparatively small Christian and Jewish communities, but the majority Muslim community. This entails considerable resources being invested in the official religious hierarchies, such as the *muftiats* (administrative territorial entities under the supervision of a mufti), the training of imams, and the construction of mosques, as well as in supervision of the Friday prayers and activities of religious personnel.

It also means that the government maintains the ideal of a secular society and, crucially, that it inculcates this ideal through a secular education system. Furthermore, the state actively works to prevent the inculcation of religious dogma in the young generation even outside the education curriculum. This includes, in several countries, a ban on wearing Islamic garb in schools and measures aimed at preventing the religious indoctrination of youth.⁸⁵ While these restrictions are roundly criticized by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Western NGOs, they do ensure that the state provides a check on the ability of religious groups, domestic or foreign, to influence children in the public space. The fact that the school system is secular also means that the youth are raised in an environment that stresses reason and experience (i.e., the principles of the Enlightenment) rather than divine revelation as sources of knowledge. This is why leading Turkish Islamist thinker and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu castigates the West for its “particularization of epistemological sources” and making revelation “peripheral.”⁸⁶ By following these principles, Central Asian governments enhance the ability of their populations to partake in the modern world and in scientific enterprise. Similarly, it provides some level of protection for women and religious minorities from religious principles that would otherwise restrict their participation in society.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Alexander Sodiqov, “Bill Banning Children from Mosques Adopted in Tajikistan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 28, 2011.

⁸⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993, p. 195.

⁸⁷ June Starr, “The Role of Turkish Secular Law in Changing the Lives of Rural Muslim Women, 1950–1970,” *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1989, pp. 497–523.

Information Sphere

It is an understatement to say that the information sphere in Central Asia is controlled. Television, the major medium through which people stay informed, remains controlled almost exclusively by governments, either formally or informally, and both print media and the Internet remain tightly regulated. Clearly, there are differences across the region: Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have the most restrictive media environments, while Kyrgyzstan has the least controlled. All regional states, however, are ranked as “not free” by Freedom House.⁸⁸ Similarly, the Internet is regulated in the region, and several states make it a practice to ban numerous websites. Most regional states’ Internet is ranked “not free,” with only Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan considered “partly free.”⁸⁹

Aside from government censorship, Central Asia is also largely a self-contained media environment; the only real alternatives to government-controlled media are Russian, and to a lesser degree Turkish, television channels available through satellite. Internet restrictions exacerbate the problem, and language barriers mean that Internet content is available only to a small urban elite, with the exception, once again, of Russian and Turkish language resources. In this sense, Central Asians face considerable challenges in linking up with the rest of the world. It goes without saying that such restrictions impede the social as well as political development of these societies and have a generally harmful effect on their prospects for the future. Yet the Internet’s role in the radicalization of individuals is well established by now and has been dramatically illustrated by the journeys of thousands of European Muslims to fight for the Islamic State or other jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq.⁹⁰ This has the effect of closing one avenue for Central Asian youth that would be vulnerable to radicalization. To be clear, this is not a value judgment in favor of restricting the information sphere. It is entirely plausible, and even probable, that the general social and political costs of such restrictive policies in the information sphere outweigh any benefits. It is equally plausible that this restrictive information sphere contributes to lessening instances of radicalization. That begs the thorny question of the effects of Central Asian government repression writ large.

Effect of Repression

Central Asian governments have tended to err on the side of repression when confronting nontraditional religious movements, whether violent or not. This has been the

⁸⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2015*, New York, April 2015.

⁸⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net 2015*, New York, October 2015.

⁹⁰ Marie Wright, “Technology and Terrorism: How the Internet Facilitates Radicalization,” *The Forensic Examiner*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2008; Maeghin Alarid, “Recruitment and Radicalization: The Role of Social Media and New Technology,” in Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2016.

case in the regional governments' response to the rise of recruitment to Syria and Iraq, although Uzbekistan also reacted by rehabilitating oppositional clerics critical of the Islamic State.⁹¹ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the literature on Islamic radicalism in Central Asia generally argues that political repression causes radicalization. Journalist Ahmed Rashid has been a leading and influential proponent of this theory:

With the democratic and nationalist opposition effectively crushed, the survivors have moved underground and become armed and radicalized by Islamic fundamentalism. . . . Every act of state repression has pushed these militants into adopting even more extreme positions.

His 2001 prognosis was that unless Central Asian leaders “adhere to global standards of behavior . . . Central Asia will continue to plummet into instability.”⁹² From a scholarly perspective, Eric McGlinchey has made essentially the same argument: “Radical Islam in Central Asia manifests a society’s response to the accumulated injustices of severely authoritarian rule.”⁹³ Elsewhere, he has argued that “Islamist movements in Central Asia are first and foremost a response to local authoritarian rule: the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.”⁹⁴ Organizationally, the International Crisis Group has been a leading proponent of this thesis and has consistently linked repression, poverty, and inequality with the rise of radical Islam in the region for over a decade.⁹⁵

This chapter argues that the benefit of hindsight indicates that these claims have, at least until now, failed to be borne out. Instead, much of the evidence from the region is incongruous with the theory. If repression causes radicalism, we would expect Turkmenistan to be the most-affected state in the region, but it appears the least affected. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan should be the least affected, but it may actually be the most affected. Equally confounding is the trajectory of Uzbekistan, which all international rankings show has gotten more rather than less repressive in the past decade, at least until the passing of President Islam Karimov in 2016. While the paradigm suggests it should have seen growing levels of radicalization, if anything, it has seen a decline.

It should be noted that the Central Asia-specific literature does not appear to take into account the divergence and nuance within the general literature on radi-

⁹¹ Noah Tucker, “Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Tajikistan,” *CERIA Brief*, No. 11, February 2016; Noah Tucker, “Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Uzbekistan,” *CERIA Brief*, No. 12, February 2016.

⁹² Rashid, 2001, pp. 45, 55.

⁹³ Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia,” *Current History*, October 2005, p. 340.

⁹⁴ Eric McGlinchey, 2005, p. 559.

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, 2003; “Syria Calling,” 2015.

calization. Indeed, studies of radicalization continue to struggle to find comprehensive explanations for the divergence of levels of radicalization among Muslim communities. Matthew Francis, editor of radicalisationresearch.org, concludes that “none of the major theorists on radicalisation suggest that there is a universal model with predictive certainty.”⁹⁶ Explanations range from poverty, discrimination, social segregation, anger at Western foreign policy, ideology and indoctrination, and individual psychological factors. Interestingly, several overviews of causes of radicalization hardly mention generalized repression at all, focusing only on discrimination against specific groups. By contrast, some scholars have suggested that repression does, indeed, work. Martin Kramer, in an article opposing what he terms a “failed paradigm” in Western academe, concluded that “repression is working. It is a tired academic sawhorse that repression only strengthens its victims.”⁹⁷ One of the few systematic studies of the role of repression on radical Islamic movements, by Mohammed Hafez, concludes that the record is mixed: “repression did work in Syria, Tunisia, and Iraq. However, in Algeria, Egypt, Kashmir, the southern Philippines, and Chechnya, repression has resulted in higher rates of violence and protracted conflicts.”⁹⁸

The policy recommendation of the dominant paradigm has been that instead of repressing political Islam, governments should open their political systems to competition; something that would, in turn, deflate the balloon of radicalism that is being created by a repressive environment and a lack of avenues for opposition. Countries that have followed these recommendations have sometimes seen the opposite occur.

Pakistan is the most obvious example: From the 1970s on, Pakistani leaders—beginning with the secular but opportunistic Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—made concession after concession to Islamists and allowed them to operate freely. Under military leader Muhammad Zia Ul-Haq, the government itself appropriated the agenda of Islamists. The rise of radical Islam in Pakistan cannot be dissociated from the events in Afghanistan. The fact remains that within Pakistan’s political system, the government’s permissive attitude to Islamism did not lead Islamists to moderate their views. To the contrary, they used this permissive environment to operate radical madrasas that generated the Taliban movement and to oppose, increasingly violently, the efforts by Pervez Musharraf and subsequent leaders to curtail their agenda.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Matthew Francis, “What Causes Radicalisation? Main Lines of Consensus in Recent Research,” January 24, 2012.

⁹⁷ Martin Kramer, “The Mismeasure of Political Islam,” in Martin Kramer, ed., *The Islamism Debate*, Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997, pp. 161–173.

⁹⁸ Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 206.

⁹⁹ See Svante E. Cornell, “Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: Islamic or Pragmatic?” in Brenda Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006, pp. 291–323.

Turkey until the mid-2000s appeared to be a successful model of a state that allowed Islamic political activity in a relatively democratic context, but that also had checks and balances that prevented the radicalization of Islamic movements. As a result, Turkish political Islam was forced to portray itself as moderate.¹⁰⁰ Following the military intervention of 1997, the Islamist movement reinvented itself as a “conservative democrat” movement, which received the label of being “post-Islamist.” That allowed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to obtain considerable support from liberal circles and Western powers, which provided important leverage against a state apparatus, led by the military, that sought to thwart its rise to power. Turkey’s turn to a more-inclusive approach toward political Islam appeared, at first, to produce results, given the AKP’s pro-European policies in its first years in power. As it consolidated power, this erstwhile moderation receded. Then, the AKP presided over an increasingly ideological and sectarian foreign policy, which advanced Sunni Islamist causes across the region. Domestically, the AKP began to unravel the secular safeguards in the Turkish system, most effectively through a thorough reform of the education system in 2012.¹⁰¹ And in a scenario reminiscent of Pakistan, the Turkish government’s policies in Syria have contributed to a significant radicalization of a section of the country’s youth. The Soufan Group’s 2015 report estimated that more than 2,000 Turkish citizens had joined jihadi groups in Syria. In parallel, Turkish observers have recently begun to note a strengthening of Salafi ideas among Turkey’s Islamist groups, a phenomenon that was not visible before.¹⁰² In sum, the more-permissive attitude to political Islam has accelerated rather than countered radicalization in Turkey.

The examples of Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 revolution are equally instructive. The Muslim Brotherhood and, even more so, its Tunisian sibling Ennahda, had long been touted as examples of “moderate” Islam that deserved support because of their adherence to democratic principles.¹⁰³ When the Muslim Brotherhood achieved power in Egypt, President Muhammed Morsi moved rapidly to consolidate as much power as possible in unconstitutional ways, indicating the deficiencies in the theory

¹⁰⁰Svante E. Cornell, “The Military in Turkish Politics,” in Bertil Dunér, ed., *Turkey: The Road Ahead*, Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2002.

¹⁰¹Svante E. Cornell, “The Islamization of Turkey: Erdogan’s Education Reforms,” *Turkey Analyst*, September 2, 2015. Also Eric Edelman, Svante E. Cornell, Aaron Lobel, and Halil Karaveli, *Turkey Transformed: The Origins and Evolution of Authoritarianism and Islamization Under the AKP*, Washington, D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2015.

¹⁰²The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, December 2015. Andrew Hammond, “Salafism Infiltrates Turkish Religious Discourse,” Middle East Institute, July 22, 2015; Veysi Sarisözen, “The Salafization of the AKP Base and the Collapse of Pragmatism” [“AKP Tabanında Selefileşme ve ‘pragmatizminin’ inflası”], *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, January 3, 2017.

¹⁰³Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 2007, pp. 107–121.

that moderate Islamists had internalized the values of the democratic process and not just the mechanics.¹⁰⁴ In Tunisia, the collapse of the Ben Ali regime led to Ennahda's assumption of power in a coalition government with non-Islamist parties. This was coupled with the release of thousands of individuals jailed under the previous regime's antiterror laws. Within months, the rapid rise of Salafi and Jihadi mobilization in Tunisia was a fact that the government proved entirely unwilling or incapable to counter.¹⁰⁵ At first, Tunisia's Salafists identified the country as a land of *dawa* (proselytism) and not jihad, but later the Tunisian Salafis focused on recruiting fighters for the killing fields of Syria, making Tunisia the leading source of jihadis in the Levant.¹⁰⁶ But soon enough, violent Salafi-jihadi attacks began to take place, including an attack on the U.S. embassy and assassinations of prominent leftist politicians. This led to the collapse of the government, the introduction of a technocratic government, and belated efforts to rein in the Salafi threat. After large-scale terrorist attacks in 2015, the state took control of more than 80 Salafi mosques in a broad crackdown that Ennahda grudgingly supported.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the opening of the political space for Islamism following the Arab Spring in no way helped moderate Islamist movements. Only Tunisia, where Ennahda never gained control of state institutions in the first place, offers some hope for continued democratic political contestation.

Many criticisms about repression in Central Asia tend to be strongly influenced by a condemnation of the policies of Central Asian regimes writ large, rather than a specific focus on the issue of radical Islam. Indeed, the criticism of policies in the field of religion is often part and parcel of a broader criticism of authoritarian and repressive policies; moreover, the criticism appears to be motivated by ethical considerations rather than political expedience. In other words, it seems that critics of repression often oppose it because they consider it wrong, not because of evidence that it is counterproductive. In the same vein, Hafez argues that whatever the evidence on the effectiveness of repression, "the sole reliance on repression must also be rejected on ethical grounds—human rights and democratic principles are ends in themselves."¹⁰⁸ Without taking issue with that statement, the examples provided suggest that the consequences of allowing unrestricted operation of radical groups may indeed in the short term be congruent with democratic principles; yet allowing these groups to operate in this

¹⁰⁴Nervana Mahmood, "Morsi's Power Grab Should Be No Surprise," *Al-Monitor*, November 26, 2012.

¹⁰⁵Samy Ghorbal, "Tunisia: Why Is Youth So Permeable to Salafist Sirens?" ["Tunisie: pourquoi la jeunesse est-elle si perméable aux sirènes salafistes?"], *Jeune Afrique*, July 8, 2015.

¹⁰⁶Stefano M. Torelli, Fabio Merone, and Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2012; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia's Long Game: *Dawa, Hisba and Jihad*," The Hague, the Netherlands: ICCT Research Paper, May 2013.

¹⁰⁷Carlotta Gall, "Tunisia's Secular Government Cracks Down on Mosques in Aftermath of Massacre," *New York Times*, July 23, 2015.

¹⁰⁸Gall, 2015, p. 207.

manner may cause equal if not greater harm to social peace and human rights than the repression of these groups entails.

The question addressed in this chapter is whether the theory that repression feeds radicalization is supported by evidence. Whether in the Central Asian context or in the Islamic world more broadly, this does not appear to be the case. The figures concerning foreign fighters in Syria, cited earlier, are illuminating: Considered on a per capita basis, roughly one in 100,000 Uzbek citizens is fighting in Syria and Iraq, compared with one in 10,000 Kyrgyz citizens. That stands in contrast to one in 1,800 Tunisians or one in 3,000 Jordanians. If the numbers of European Muslim fighters are compared with the total Muslim populations of Western European countries, the figures are similarly higher: one in 3,000 Swedish Muslims and one in 1,200 Belgian Muslims. These figures provide a clear pattern: In absolute as well as relative numbers, foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq tend overwhelmingly to come from liberal democracies in Western Europe or from the states in the Middle East with the most liberal political systems (Tunisia, Turkey, Jordan, Morocco). By contrast, countries considered more repressive are underrepresented. That is not only the case for Uzbekistan but also for Egypt, which is only believed to have a few hundred citizens in Syria from a population of 80 million. In the Central Asian context, the country with the highest representation per capita is Kyrgyzstan, which also happens to be the country with the most liberal political system in the region.¹⁰⁹

The recent evidence from Kyrgyzstan is particularly informative, as it was considered the exception in Central Asia: The “island of democracy”¹¹⁰ kept a relatively open political system, showcased a vibrant civil society, and provided a significant contrast to its more-authoritarian neighbors. The paradigm that repression in Central Asia would spurn radicalism would suggest that Kyrgyzstan would be exempt from this expected pattern of radicalization. Yet Kyrgyz observers anecdotally report considerable growth in Islamic extremism,¹¹¹ and a rapidly growing number of Kyrgyz citizens have been reported to travel to fight in Syria. In January 2016, officials estimated that 430 Kyrgyz had joined the fight.¹¹² By summer 2016, Kyrgyz officials sounded the alarm on a major jump in “adherents of extremist views,” while reporting the number of citizens traveling to Syria had reached 600.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Richard Florida, “The Geography of Foreign ISIS Fighters,” Citylab.com, August 10, 2016. See also Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, “What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?” National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2016.

¹¹⁰John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* New York: Routledge, 1999.

¹¹¹Aidai Masykanova, “Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan Is No Myth,” *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2016.

¹¹²“Report: Over 400 Kyrgyz Nationals Fighting Alongside Terrorist in Syria, Iraq,” Fars News Agency, January 6, 2016.

¹¹³“Kyrgyzstan Reports Big Jump in Extremism,” *Eurasianet*, June 15, 2016; “Kyrgyz Official: 600 Nationals Fighting in Syria, Iraq,” *RFE/RL*, August 3, 2016.

The incidence of radical Islam in Central Asia does not appear to correspond with general levels of repression. A more promising explanation, more in line with the existing scholarship on radicalization, could lie in particular forms of discrimination targeted at certain groups. Indeed, Heathershaw and Montgomery have observed that

[i]f jihadism were to follow poverty and authoritarianism, we would expect to find it throughout Central Asia and to a far greater extent than in Europe. The reason for this is that the jihadist acts represent not universal struggles of transcendent ideologies, but rather specific and rare political conflicts between local groups and the state. In Tajikistan, the salience of jihadism has declined since the end of civil war despite increased authoritarianism, thus far belying alarmist reports like those of the ICG.¹¹⁴

A closer look at the geography of Islamic radicalism provides a potential window into the drivers of radicalization: Ethnic minorities appear to be a specific locus of radicalization. As political scientist Mariya Omelicheva notes, in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Hizb ut-Tahrir is seen by authorities as an “ethnic Uzbek” phenomenon.¹¹⁵ The radicalization of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan has been visible for some time, notes McGlinchey.¹¹⁶ Following the 2010 ethnic riots in southern Kyrgyzstan, reports of growing radicalization in the community have been plentiful;¹¹⁷ but it is also noted that different foreign groups target different communities. In Kyrgyzstan, the more politically oriented Hizb ut-Tahrir is almost exclusively an ethnic Uzbek phenomenon; in contrast, the less political Jamaat al-Tabligh has almost exclusively recruited among the ethnic Kyrgyz.¹¹⁸ In Uzbekistan, however, Hizb ut-Tahrir appears for all practical purposes to have ceased being an effective organization, as state policies have made the political environment too constraining for the group to operate. While most reporting on the organization’s activities dates to the early 2000s, Uzbek security services made Hizb ut-Tahrir a key target of its efforts, leading to the detention by 2007 of more than 4,000 alleged members or sympathizers of the movement.¹¹⁹ Those numbers likely overstate the number of Hizb ut-Tahrir members in the country, as the dragnet was reported by human rights observers to be so wide as to include numer-

¹¹⁴ Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2016, p. 10 (pagination in unpublished manuscript).

¹¹⁵ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2010, pp. 167–186.

¹¹⁶ McGlinchey, 2005.

¹¹⁷ McGlinchey, 2005, p. 562.

¹¹⁸ Balci, 2015, pp. 26–27.

¹¹⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2008*, Washington, D.C., May 2008, p. 179.

ous individuals who had only minor exposure to the movement.¹²⁰ In the decade that has passed since, this effectively appears to have broken the movement's growth in the country, leading it to focus energies elsewhere. Lifting the perspective further to the broader postcommunist space, it is significant that the most-serious instances of radicalization have occurred in areas coinciding with an ethnic-based grievance against an alien government. The prime example is the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya and Dagestan; another is Chinese Xinjiang;¹²¹ a third is the experiences of Central Asian migrant workers in Russia. The Uzbeks of south Kyrgyzstan fit into this picture. South Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya, Xinjiang, and the migrants in Russia are all communities being radicalized and confronted with a government dominated by another ethnicity, and they perceive discrimination from that government. A variation on this theme could contribute to understanding the radicalization that took place in the Ferghana Valley in the late Soviet period. It has been widely noted that in intralite rivalries in the Soviet period, leaders from the Ferghana Valley were increasingly marginalized, leading to a sense of alienation from the government in Tashkent.¹²² While it would need to be tested in a serious comparative study, the hypothesis that Islamic radicalization is linked, if anything, to *specific* grievances rather than general repression appears to hold considerably greater explanatory power than the existing paradigm of radicalization. This aligns with findings in research about conflicts in the recent decade, which has emphasized the importance of horizontal inequalities—"inequalities in economic, social and political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups"¹²³—to understand the grievances that lead to conflict. As Østby puts it, "horizontal inequalities may enhance both grievances and group cohesion among the relatively deprived and thus facilitate mobilization for conflict."¹²⁴ In other words, grievances based on ethnic and religious differences are being channeled through the prism of Islamic radicalism; something that may help explain why the radicalization of Central Asians, to the extent that it exists, appears to take place outside their titular republic.

¹²⁰It should be mentioned that the possibility of the incarceration of so many alleged radicals could have a radicalizing effect in the penitentiary system down the road. This remains a subject for future research, if and when these individuals are released from sentences that were often 20 years or more.

¹²¹Yitzhak Shichor, "Blow Up: Internal and External Challenges of Uyghur Separatism and Islamic Radicalism to Chinese Rule in Xinjiang," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2005, pp. 119–136.

¹²²See S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2011.

¹²³Frances Stewart, "Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses," in Frances Stewart, ed., *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 3.

¹²⁴Gudrun Østby, "Polarization, Horizontal Inequalities, and Violent Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2008.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

This overview of the evolution of radical Islam in Central Asia has shown that the past decade's developments did not correlate with the expectations of the dominant paradigm of the early 2000s, which assumed that a combination of poverty and repressive regimes would inexorably exacerbate the problem and lead to a growth of Islamic radicalism in the region. That this did not happen is all the more significant because the trend in the Islamic world writ large has been of growing instances of radicalization and a mushrooming of jihadi groups.

In seeking to examine the reasons why this radicalization has eschewed Central Asia, no definitive answers are possible. It is clear that the radicalization that took place in the early 1990s was a peculiar development in the Soviet period itself and not so much the post-Soviet politics of Central Asia. In the post-Soviet period, however, there has been a reassertion by Central Asian society, supported by the state, of traditional forms of Islamic belief, one that nevertheless does not appear to be linked with a significant process of radicalization. Indeed, in the past decade, radicalism has been a process involving Central Asians mainly *outside* of Central Asia, in Russia, and in the battlegrounds of Afghanistan and later Syria. Central Asia itself, meanwhile, has remained largely aloof from the broader intellectual developments in the Islamic world; the limited radicalization that has taken place appears disproportionately focused among ethnic minority populations. Whether this will change over time, as the Soviet era recedes and the region embraces closer relations with the rest of the world, remains to be seen.

Furthermore, the consequences of Central Asian regimes' policies are considerably more complex than normally portrayed. While these regimes clearly make use of repression against oppositional groups, whether Islamist or not, the effects of their policies may be multifaceted. Their official secularism, reflected in laws and education systems, may provide an important immunization effect against radicalism, particularly in combination with the resurgence of the traditional Hanafi Islam of the region. The practices of the region's governments undoubtedly have many harmful effects, and their authoritarian tendencies have been extensively detailed in the academic literature and by advocacy groups. Yet these policies also entail that young Central Asians attend secular schools and would face great challenges in locating radical clerics or mosques, much less immersing themselves in a radical Islamic milieu. Even online, their ability to access radical content is heavily circumscribed, a fact decidedly hindering radicalization.

Whether or not Central Asia will continue to be spared the radicalization taking place among Muslims elsewhere remains to be seen. It is likely to depend, to a considerable degree, on whether the region's governments are able to adapt to changing circumstances and articulate positive visions of their nations' future that are perceived as legitimate among their respective peoples. In the Middle East, where the popular

legitimacy of many Arab states was considerably weaker, and their national identities not linked to a specific ethnicity or language, authoritarian regimes largely failed to do so. As a result, while monarchies with traditional legitimacy have fared reasonably well thus far, a number of republican and revolutionary regimes have collapsed, with well-known consequences in Syria and Egypt. Such lessons are often cited to provide analogies for Central Asian states; yet as this chapter has shown, these relatively young states are very much charting their own course and responding to conditions that are unique to their region.

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Special Feature

Religion and Intergroup Conflict: A Social-Psychological Approach

Steven L. Neuberg and Gabrielle Filip-Crawford

Events around the world make clear that religion can play significant roles in the creation and maintenance of intergroup conflict and that such conflicts often have implications beyond their immediate realm. We present a social-psychological approach to better understand these effects of religion. We begin with an overview of existing social-psychological research on the processes that shape intergroup conflict processes more generally (e.g., competition over scarce resources, values incompatibility) and show how different features of religion may either facilitate or hinder these processes—thereby increasing or decreasing the likelihood of intergroup conflict, respectively.

We then highlight one social-psychological approach, hypothesizing that religious infusion—the extent to which religious beliefs, practices, and discourses infuse the daily private and public life of a group—may make intergroup conflict more likely by enhancing values-based conflicts and by empowering otherwise weak groups to engage in collective violence against more powerful counterparts. We present findings on these hypotheses, which the Global Group Relations Project produced and designed to address some of the methodological challenges inherent in empirically investigating the effects of religion on conflict.

We suggest that this work, along with other research employing a social-psychological approach, is useful for analyzing conflict situations, for forecasting the emergence of conflict situations, for informing policies, and for creating interventions to defuse potential conflicts in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.

A Social-Psychological Approach

Social-psychological approaches to understanding behavior focus on how and why social situations and circumstances shape the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of people and groups. We review the major insights about intergroup relations that have emerged from these approaches.

A notable social-psychological observation is that people are biased toward benefiting their own groups over other groups and, more generally, toward thinking about their social worlds in “us-them” terms.¹ This cross-cultural *coalitional psychology* is likely an evolved feature of human nature,² originating from humanity’s ability to survive its harsh and unpredictable environments through forming enduring cooperative alliances with others. This coalitional psychology is especially likely to be engaged—with downstream implications for eliciting outgroup prejudices, discrimination, and aggression—when coalitional identities are salient and people perceive their groups to be under threat.

However, just because people often think and act in coalitional terms does not mean they always do. Aggressive coalitional action, in particular, is costly—in terms of “lives and treasure,” as politicians are wont to say—and so groups are more likely to engage in intergroup conflict when they believe doing so potentially provides significant benefits or avoids significant costs of inaction. Research in social psychology and related disciplines has provided strong evidence for factors that increase both the motivation to engage in intergroup conflict and the capacity to do so.

Drivers of Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup prejudices and conflict often emerge out of real or perceived *competition over resources and power*.³ Perceptions of a group-based resource threats may be accurate, validly reflecting competing resource needs among groups. This need not always be so, however. For example, a scarcity of resources may be incorrectly blamed on a group that may not actually be impeding one’s access to resources. Moreover, agents of influence may “manufacture” perceptions of resource scarcity to serve alternative goals.

¹ See, for example, Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954; Marilynn B. Brewer, “In-Group Bias in the Minimal Intergroup Situation: A Cognitive-Motivational Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 1979; Henri Tajfel, “Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 33, 1982, pp. 1–39.

² Robert Robert, John Tooby, and Leda Cosmides, “Can Race Be Erased? Coalitional Computation and Social Categorization,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 98, No. 26, December 2001; Mark Schaller and Steven L. Neuberg, “Danger, Disease, and the Nature of Prejudice(s),” in James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna, eds., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 46, Oxford: Academic Press, 2012; and Oliver Sng, Keelah E. G. Williams, and Steven L. Neuberg, “Evolutionary Approaches to Stereotyping and Prejudice,” in Chris G. Sibley and Fiona Kate Barlow, eds., *Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

³ See, for example, D. T. Campbell, “Ethnocentric and Other Altruistic Motives,” in D. Levine, ed., *The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1965*, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1965; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 61, No. 1, January 2009; Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer, “Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability,” *World Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 1964; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, February 2003; Muzafer Sherif, O. J. Harvey, B. Jack White, William R. Hood, and Carolyn W. Sherif, *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*, Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1988.

Prejudices and conflict are also more likely between groups holding *incompatible values*.⁴ Because values shape societal norms, policies, and laws in ways that tangibly affect people's lives, people are prejudiced and discriminate against groups that endorse (or appear to endorse) values different from their own.

Groups are also more motivated to engage in conflict with other groups when they believe themselves to be *more deserving*—of contested resources or of having their values shape public policies. To the extent to which groups and their members feel able to justify and legitimize their claims against others—in terms of their “earned” status, moral superiority, or past injustices done to them—prejudices and conflict become more likely.⁵

Even with motivation to engage in coalitional conflict, aggression is unlikely unless a group also believes it has the *capacity* to aggress effectively against the other group.⁶ Such capacity can be provided by a group's existing resources, organizational structure, and social norms. For example, groups whose members share common values and practices, have an accepted hierarchical authority structure, possess efficient communication networks, and are socially structured by strong injunctive norms are particularly inclined toward group action and effective at mobilizing their members.⁷ Such “coherently organized” groups will be better able to recruit the tangible human,

⁴ See, for example, David C. Barker, Jon Hurwitz, and Traci L. Nelson, “Of Crusades and Culture Wars: ‘Messianic’ Militarism and Political Conflict in the United States,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 2, April 2008, pp. 307–322; Monica Biernat, Theresa K. Vescio, Shelley A. Theno, and Christina S. Crandall, “Values and Prejudice: Toward Understanding the Impact of American Values on Outgroup Attitudes,” in Clive Seligman, James M. Olson, and Mark P. Zanna, eds., *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium*, Vol. 8, Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1996, pp. 153–189; Rocio Garcia-Retamero, Stephanie M. Müller, and David L. Rousseau, “The Impact of Value Similarity and Power on the Perception of Threat,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April 2012, pp. 179–193; Irwin Katz and R. Glen Hass, “Racial Ambivalence and American Value Conflict: Correlational and Priming Studies of Dual Cognitive Structures,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 55, No. 6, 1988, pp. 893–905; Donald R. Kinder and David O. Sears, “Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism Versus Racial Threats to the Good Life,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1981, pp. 414–431; Milton Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1968; and Shalom H. Schwartz, Naomi Struch, and Wolfgang Bilsky, “Values and Intergroup Social Motives: A Study of Israeli and German Students,” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3, September 1990, pp. 185–198.

⁵ See, for example, Christian S. Crandall and Amy Eshleman, “A Justification-Suppression of the Expression and Experience of Prejudice,” *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 129, No. 3, 2003, pp. 414–446; Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, *Social Dominance Theory: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999; John T. Jost and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “The Role of Stereotyping in System-Justification and the Production of False Consciousness,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 1, March 1994, pp. 1–27.

⁶ David S. Siroky, Gabrielle Filip-Crawford, Carolyn M. Warner, Anna Berlin, and Steven L. Neuberg, “The Perfect Storm: The Joint Contribution of Relative Deprivation and Resource Mobilization on Collective Violence,” unpublished manuscript, 2017.

⁷ Roger V. Gould, “Collective Violence and Group Solidarity: Evidence from a Feuding Society,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3, June 1999, pp. 356–380.

financial, and rhetorical resources needed to engage and maintain determined intergroup hostilities.⁸

Religion and Intergroup Conflict

In light of the aforementioned drivers of conflict, there are convincing reasons to believe that certain features of religion will have a strong potential for increasing the likelihood of intergroup conflict. First, religion can enhance a general inclination toward coalitional thinking and interpersonal commitments. Religions are sometimes defined in contrast to one another (e.g., Christianity as a split-off from Judaism, Islam as a split-off from Christianity, Protestantism as a split-off from Catholicism) and provide many material and behavioral markers of distinctiveness (e.g., jewelry, clothing, public practices, rituals). Moreover, to the extent that a particular religion's doctrine is rigid and not accepting of ambiguity or alternative views and is taught to the young or impressionable via similarly inflexible processes and institutional mechanisms, this doctrine is likely to encourage the development of a black-white cognitive style—another risk factor for us-them thinking.⁹

Second, as discussed, values incompatibility increases the likelihood of conflict. Because religions shape values, and the values of different religious groups are sometimes perceived as incompatible with one another, we might expect these groups to be in conflict with one another.¹⁰ When the incompatible values are viewed as sacred by the groups holding them and thus not able to be compromised, the potential for conflict grows.¹¹

Third, because the ability to justify and legitimize prejudices and their discriminatory implications increases their likelihood, religious teachings and discourse that emphasize moral superiority or past unjust deprivations can provide false justification for hostile acts against other groups. Historical examples include the use of religious missionaries to “bring salvation” to non-Christian natives as a defense for the taking of valuable resources from native lands or references to the need for moral purity as justification for the “cleansing” of outgroup members from one's lands.

⁸ See, for example, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁹ Allport, 1954; and Steven L. Neuberg and Jason T. Newsom, “Personal Need for Structure: Individual Differences in the Desire for Simple Structure,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 65, No. 1, July 1993, pp. 113–131.

¹⁰ See, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22–49; Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹¹ Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges, “Religious and Sacred Imperatives in Human Conflict,” *Science*, Vol. 336, No. 6083, May 2012, pp. 855–857.

Fourth, certain features of religion may increase the likelihood of intergroup conflict by enhancing intragroup solidarity and trust, group coordination toward common goals, and members' willingness to sacrifice for the group.¹² Religion is more than just doctrine and beliefs. A religion's specific practices, socialization functions, organizational and communication structures, and community and institutional embeddedness may also facilitate intergroup conflict by increasing a group's capacity to mobilize its human, financial, and rhetorical resources.¹³ Moreover, religious groups often require costly signals of commitment from their members—for example, personal practices such as maintaining dietary laws or prayer schedules and public participation in community rituals and events.¹⁴ These signals of commitment strengthen ties among group members and make it more likely that members will sacrifice for one another (and punish one another for not sacrificing). These inclinations increase a group's capacity to engage in effective aggression against others. Even if a conflict is not among religious groups *per se* (i.e., among ethnicities, nations, or political parties), the enhanced mobilization capacity provided by religion will increase these groups' ability to effectively aggress against one another. This is an example of religion's role in enhancing group capacity.

There are many reasons why religion may increase the likelihood of intergroup conflict. But should we expect certain features of religion to, instead, promote intergroup peace and harmony? After all, most religions teach (at least sometimes) versions of the “golden rule” that promote tolerance and acceptance of others, and some religious (and interfaith) organizations actually have peacemaking as their purpose for existence (e.g., Religions for Peace).

Unfortunately, empirical evidence that religion reduces conflict and prejudices is relatively sparse.¹⁵ Some recent research suggests that focusing religious adherents on the coalitional features of their group tends to facilitate intergroup conflict, whereas focusing them on the broader prosocial, peaceful beliefs endorsed by their animating

¹² See, for example, Scott Atran and Joseph Henrich, “The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive By-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions,” *Biological Theory: Integrating Development, Evolution, and Cognition*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2010, pp. 18–30; Jeremy Ginges, Scott Atran, Sonya Sachdeva, and Douglas Medin, “Psychology Out of the Laboratory: The Challenge of Violent Extremism,” *American Psychologist*, Vol. 66, No. 6, 2011, pp. 507–519; Jeremy Ginges, Ian Hansen, and Ara Norenzayan, “Religion and Support for Suicide Attacks,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2009, pp. 224–230.

¹³ For example, Gould, 1999; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001.

¹⁴ Atran and Henrich, 2010; Joseph Bulbulia, “Religious Costs as Adaptations That Signal Altruistic Intention,” *Evolution and Cognition*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2004, pp. 19–41; and Joseph Bulbulia and Richard Sosis, “Signalling Theory and the Evolution of Religious Cooperation,” *Religion*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2011, pp. 363–388.

¹⁵ For example, Deborah L. Hall, David C. Matz, and Wendy Wood, “Why Don't We Practice What We Preach? A Meta-Analytic Review of Religious Racism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2010, pp. 126–139.

gods may reduce intergroup conflict.¹⁶ This is interesting and important work but, in all, there remain very strong theoretical and empirical reasons for why religion may be especially likely to facilitate intergroup conflict.

We have focused on intergroup conflict processes assuming they generalize across contexts, and, to a large extent, they do. In making that claim, however, we are not denying important roles for locale-specific processes and circumstances. Of course, local political dynamics will influence whether a group decides to aggress against another. Of course, unique local interpretations of religious doctrine and participation in religious practices may shape how groups interact with one another. However, our position—supported by research on other social and psychological processes—is that there exists important features of human motivation, emotion, cognition, and behavior common across societies and cultures and that scientific progress toward understanding human behavior is made more quickly if those commonalities are identified. Behavior in any domain is shaped both by general, near-universal processes *and* specific, local forces.

The Global Group Relations Project and Survey

The previous section presented an overview of the most prominent drivers of intergroup conflict and a brief analysis—with some supporting data—of how religious features may shape those drivers. Unfortunately, however, the amount of strong empirical data exploring the ways in which religion shapes conflict processes is sparse. There are two reasons for this: Conceptually, religion and conflict are each multifaceted and few empirical studies have gathered data able to address this complexity. Operationally, attempts to draw conclusions with the potential to cut across specific locales confront significant data-gathering obstacles related to financial expense and the complexity of conducting cross-cultural research. This has led most scholars to adopt the strategy of cobbling together existing data sets—requiring significant conceptual and operationalization compromises in the process. In response to these challenges, we report findings from a recently designed methodology and data set meant to address some of those challenges. We highlight the potential of this methodological approach and the resulting data set by asking how thinking about religion *as culture* may help us better understand its implications for intergroup conflict.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan, 2009; Jeremy Ginges, Hammad Sheik, Scott Atran, and Nichole Argog, “Thinking from God’s Perspective Decreases Biased Valuation of the Life of a Nonbeliever,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 113, No. 2, January 2016, pp. 316–319; Jesse L. Preston and Ryan S. Ritter, “Different Effects of Religion and God on Prosociality with the Ingroup and Outgroup,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 11, 2013, pp. 1471–1483.

¹⁷ Adam B. Cohen, “Many Forms of Culture,” *American Psychologist*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 2009, pp. 194–204; and Adam B. Cohen and Steven L. Neuberg, “Religious Cultures and Religious Conflict,” in Shinobu Kitayama and

The Framework

The relationship between religion and conflict is complex for various reasons. First, religion is a multifaceted construct, including dimensions related to doctrine, spiritual practices, organizational and communication structures, socialization functions, and community and institutional embeddedness. Second, there are numerous mechanisms through which conflict can emerge, and these operate in myriad scales, ranging from those driven by political structures and institutions to those driven by small group interactions and individual psychological processes. Third, conflict itself can be conceptualized and operationalized in ways that differ both quantitatively and qualitatively—from the holding of prejudices to interpersonal discrimination to symbolic aggression to individual and collective violence. Fourth, religion-related conflict can come in multiple forms, which are readily conflated with one another; these forms include inter-religion conflicts, religion versus secular conflicts, and religion-facilitated ethnic or national conflicts. Fifth, religion may contribute to conflict in ways that are not readily recognized as religious conflict, as when religion shapes communities, institutions, and psychologies in ways that create social contexts in which even nonreligion-based conflicts may emerge.

Appreciating this complexity of the religion-conflict relationship and leveraging the theoretical and methodological expertise needed to begin capturing it, the Arizona State University Global Group Relations Project comprised a team of researchers from the disciplines of social psychology, political science, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, communication science, mathematics, and quantitative psychology. With support from the National Science Foundation, this team generated the global survey of expert respondents on which our following analyses rest.

The survey was designed to test a large number of questions about the many ways in which features of religion may shape forms of intergroup conflict, assessing more than 150 variables (some presented here).¹⁸ Drawing from our earlier review, however, we focus on a small subset of these variables, exploring specifically how the extent to which religion infuses throughout a group's private and public life alters conflict processes driven by values incompatibility and resource competition.¹⁹ We view religious infusion as a metafeature of religious culture: Religions may hold different beliefs and doctrines or have distinct rules and rituals. Nonetheless, each religion—at least in principle—can be strongly (or weakly) infused within a community. Moreover,

Dov Cohen, eds., *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*, 2nd ed., New York: Guilford, forthcoming.

¹⁸ The full survey and data from it are freely available online at “Global Group Relations Project Dataverse,” dataverse.harvard.edu, undated.

¹⁹ Steven L. Neuberg, Carolyn M. Warner, Stephen A. Mistler, Anna Berlin, Eric D. Hill, Jordan D. Johnson, Gabrielle Filip-Crawford, Roger E. Millsap, George Thomas, Michael Winkelman, Benjamin J. Broome, Thomas J. Taylor, and Juliane Schober, “Religion and Intergroup Conflict: Findings from the Global Group Relations Project,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2014, pp. 198–206.

infusion is not an inherent feature of any religion, as the same religion can be highly infused in one location but not in another.

Religious Infusion and Values Incompatibility

Because values shape laws, public policies, social norms, and individual decisions, they constrain the actions of community members—even the actions of those who do not share those values. Others' incompatible values are thus likely to be viewed as threatening, especially by groups whose own values are woven tightly into everyday activity, because the possible imposition of those incompatible values could substantially alter desired features of current group life. Because values are tightly interwoven into everyday life for groups that are religiously infused, these groups may be especially likely to be hostile toward those with incompatible values.

Religious Infusion and Resource-Power Competition

Conflict is especially likely to be directed by powerful groups against weak groups because the costs of conflict borne by powerful groups are relatively low compared with the potential benefits of acquiring additional resources.²⁰ In contrast, low-power groups may be deterred from engaging in conflict because the benefit of potentially gaining additional resources is likely to be small relative to costs likely imposed by a more-powerful counterpart. This cost-benefit calculus that usually deters low-power groups from engaging in conflict with high-power counterparts can be altered, however, especially if the disadvantaged groups possess strong organizational structures.²¹ Religious infusion may enhance that strength by increasing intragroup solidarity and trust, group coordination toward common goals, and members' willingness to sacrifice for the group.²² Thus, low-power but highly religiously infused groups may be more willing to face and endure the potential costs of conflict with high-power groups.²³

Expert Survey Methodology

To test hypotheses about the relationships between different religion and intergroup conflict variables, we recruited scholarly experts on societies around the world to pro-

²⁰ For example, Håvard Hegre, "Gravitating Toward War: Preponderance May Pacify, but Power Kills," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 2008, pp. 566–589.

²¹ For example, Michael A. Allen and Benjamin O. Fordham, "From Melos to Baghdad: Explaining Resistance to Militarized Challenges by More Powerful States," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4, December 2011, pp. 1025–1045; Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Symmetric Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Summer 2001, pp. 93–128; and Laurence R. Iannaccone and Eli Berman, "Religious Extremism: The Good, the Bad, and the Deadly," *Public Choice*, Vol. 128, No. 1–2, July 2006, pp. 109–129.

²² For example, Atran and Henrich, 2010; Ginges et al., 2009; and Ginges et al., 2011.

²³ Atran and Ginges, 2012; Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Spring 2007, pp. 97–131.

vide quantitative estimates of groups' standings on the range of variables alluded to in the previous section (see "Global Group Relations Project Dataverse," undated). This approach to data gathering leverages psychological research on judgmental accuracy and expertise,²⁴ has been employed within political science,²⁵ and often better predicts outcomes than does so-called objective measurement.²⁶ By covering many sites and groups (including groups not experiencing conflict) and quantitatively assessing variables consistently across all sites and groups in ways designed *a priori* to capture our focal constructs, we were able to take advantage of the strengths of both case study and large *n* methodologies while avoiding some of their weaknesses.²⁷

Site Selection

Our sample comprised 100 study sites at the country level, with each site represented by two groups. To compensate for the rarity of severe intergroup conflict relative to the potential for it,²⁸ we oversampled conflict by selecting 25 sites *a priori* based on either current (as of 2009) or recent conflict between groups in them. Oversampled sites included, for example, Cyprus (Turks and Greeks), Northern Ireland (Catholics and Protestants), and Rwanda (Hutu and Tutsi).

The remaining cases were randomly sampled, without replacement, from United Nations member states with populations greater than 0.01 percent of the world population. Because we were interested in fundamental conflict processes that might operate across different kinds of groups, the 75 randomly selected sites were randomly assigned to represent one of six instantiations of intergroup relations: ethnic-ethnic, religion-religion, secular-religious, state-state, state-ethnic minority, or state-religious minority. Once a site was assigned to represent one of these group types, we identified relevant

²⁴ On accuracy, see David C. Funder and Stephen G. West, "Consensus, Self-Other Agreement, and Accuracy in Personality Judgment: An Introduction," *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 61, No. 4, December 1993, pp. 457–476; on expertise, see K. Anders Ericsson, K. Anders, Neil Charness, Robert R. Hoffman, and Paul J. Feltovich, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; and Robert J. Sternberg and Joseph A. Horvath, *Tacit Knowledge in Professional Practice*, Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999.

²⁵ For example, Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis," *World Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 87–119.

²⁶ For example, Bruce Bueno de Mesquito and Yi Feng, "Forecasting China's Political and Economic Future," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1997, pp. 14–27; Garrett Glasgow, Paul G. Lewis, and Max Neiman, "Local Development Policies and the Foreclosure Crisis in California: Can Local Policies Hold Back National Tides?" *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2012, pp. 64–85; Liesbet Hooghe, Ryan Bakker, Anna Brigevech, Catherine de Vries, Erica Edwards, Gary Marks, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Vachudova, "Reliability and Validity of the 2002 and 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys on Party Positioning," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 49, pp. 687–703.

²⁷ See Neuberg et al., 2014, for methodological details.

²⁸ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4, December 1996, pp. 715–735; and Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2011," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2012, pp. 565–575.

groups of sufficient population size within each site and randomly selected two of these for our study; for the state-state cases, we identified bordering countries, and one was randomly selected for inclusion. As examples, site-groups included the Gogo and Sukuma ethnic groups in Tanzania (ethnic-ethnic), Christians and Sunni Muslims in Pakistan (religion-religion), secularists and Protestants in Argentina (secular-religion), Laos and Thailand (state-state), Moldova and Ukraine (state-ethnic minority), and Malaysia and Buddhists (state-religious minority).

Recruitment of Expert Respondents

We identified English-speaking doctoral-level researchers with demonstrated expertise in the selected sites, determined by published peer-reviewed articles about the site and other indicators of relevant scholarly visibility. We excluded potential informants who appeared to be members of the groups about whom they would be providing information to reduce the likelihood of “insider” favorability biases.

From midsummer through late fall 2009, each potential informant was individually recruited via email; the invitation email addressed how they were identified as experts and discussed issues of privacy and confidentiality. Informants were not offered payment; instead, we appealed to their identity as scholars and their commitments to generate useful knowledge. If interested, experts were directed to the Internet survey site for instructions, where they received survey instructions and completed the survey.

Experts were asked to provide data about the two groups within their assigned site (e.g., about Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda). Survey items assessed a range of political and institutional variables (e.g., media communication, authority structures, government restrictions, third-party interference), religious variables (e.g., transnational religious networks, proselytizing practices, religious instruction), and social-psychological variables (e.g., ethnic and national identities, cognitive styles, heterogeneity of groups, contact with other groups); all were presented in standardized form across sites and groups. Instructions discussed the use of quantitative response scales and encouraged respondents to trust their expertise and intuitions. Experts were instructed to respond in ways that would be coherent within the site (i.e., would capture any existing differences between the two groups) and across sites (i.e., would capture any differences between their site/groups and other sites/groups within the broader, global frame of reference). Experts were not told of any of our hypotheses and items did not survey their hypotheses or theories. Experts merely responded, on nine-point scales, to items assessing our constructs of interest.

For the findings reported from Neuberg et al. (2014), 471 experts provided data for at least one of the reported variables and covered 97 of the 100 sites. These experts had spent, on average, almost 21 years studying their sites (range: two to 60 years); 75 percent self-identified as political scientists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, or economists.

Measures and Data Analytic Approach

This section focuses on questions about how religious infusion may alter processes related to values incompatibility and resource competition—both known from past research to increase conflict. We assessed value incompatibility at the level of the site (e.g., Northern Ireland) with the item: “To what extent are the set of values held by {e.g., group = Catholics} and {e.g., group = Protestants} actually incompatible with one another?” We assessed the resource-power differential at the level of the site by creating a composite from items, assessing each group’s access to resources and power, thereby providing a measure of each group’s resources and power relative to one another. We operationalized religious infusion at the group level as a composite of three items (e.g., “To what extent, on average, is religious ritual infused into the social/public life of {Group Members, e.g., Catholics}?”).

We also assessed different forms of conflict at the level of group:

- *Prejudice* = “To what extent do {e.g., Catholics}, on average, hold negative prejudices against {e.g., Protestants}?”
- *Interpersonal discrimination* = “To what extent do {e.g., Catholics}, on average, interpersonally discriminate against {e.g., Protestants} (e.g., by avoiding cross-group friendships, romantic relationships, work relationships)?”
- *Symbolic aggression* = “To what extent do {e.g., Catholics} perpetrate symbolic acts of aggression against {e.g., Protestants} (e.g., by desecrating graves, bombing symbolically important sites)?”
- *Individual violence* = “To what extent do {e.g., Catholics} perpetrate violent acts of physical aggression against {e.g., Protestants}, such as assaults, murders, or rapes?”
- *Collective violence* = “To what extent do {e.g., Catholics} perpetrate violent acts of physical aggression against {e.g., Protestants}, such as riots or police/military actions?”

Prior to analyses, we aggregated responses on all variables across expert informants within each site; depending on the measure, the median number of experts per site was three or four, and we analyzed the data employing interchangeable dyadic models within structural equation modeling.²⁹

²⁹ David A. Kenny, “Models of Non-Independence in Dyadic Research,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1996, pp. 279–294; Joseph A. Olsen and David A. Kenny, “Structural Equation Modeling with Interchangeable Dyads,” *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2006, pp. 127–141.

Findings: Religious Infusion, Values Incompatibility, and Resource Competition

We found that religious infusion shaped the ability of values incompatibility and resource competition to predict various forms of conflict.³⁰ First, corroborating past work, we found that groups whose values were incompatible were more likely to be prejudiced and to interpersonally discriminate against one another. This relationship, however, depended on the groups' levels of religious infusion: Value incompatibility strongly predicted prejudice and interpersonal discrimination *only* for groups relatively moderate or high in religious infusion.³¹

Second, groups having a resource power advantage were more conflictual than their disadvantaged counterparts, but this also was moderated by religious infusion. Whereas disadvantaged groups low in religious infusion tended to avoid extreme acts of aggression, disadvantaged groups high in religious infusion tended to engage in relatively high levels of violence. That is, whereas disadvantaged groups low in religious infusion seemed to have been deterred from conflict by their more powerful counterparts, disadvantaged groups for whom religion plays a dominant role in everyday life were apparently willing to assume significant tangible costs potentially imposed by the more powerful groups.

An important aspect of these findings is that religious infusion is not limited to predicting the actions of religious groups alone. Rather, religious infusion predicts an increased likelihood that other kinds of groups—ethnic groups, states—also engage in conflict. We suspect this is because religious infusion enhances a group's *capacity* to effectively engage in conflict: Religious infusion may increase the likelihood that people feel connected and committed to one another, thereby increasing their willingness to sacrifice for one another. Religious infusion may also increase the density, reach, and connectivity of social and communication networks, thereby making it easier for groups to marshal resources needed for collective conflict and for group members to monitor one another, thereby enforcing participation in collective action. We are currently exploring these and related ideas.

In sum, findings from the Global Group Relations Survey show that religious infusion may play a large role in shaping the ways that values incompatibility and resource competition predict conflict.

³⁰ Neuberg et al., 2014. Groups higher in religious infusion engaged in more prejudice, interpersonal discrimination, individual violence, and collective violence against their paired counterparts than did groups lower in religious infusion (all $ps < 0.05$). Given the findings, however, viewing religious infusion as a simple stand-alone predictor of conflict would be ill advised; religious infusion sometimes predicts increased religious conflict and sometimes not, depending on the level of values incompatibility and resource-power differences between the paired groups.

³¹ Note that the survey question assessing a group's values did not specify whether these values should be religious in nature or based on any other moral framework.

How These Findings Are Relevant to the FSU States

The Global Group Relations Survey Project did not focus specifically on the FSU states. Given this, do our findings represent those states such that conclusions and implications drawn from these data could be seen as relevant to those states or to the groups within them?

First, 13 of the 15 FSU states are represented within our data set; the two exceptions are Georgia and Belarus. The 13 states represent five of the six intergroup relations types studied (the exception being secular-religion relations). Specifically, the data set included data on relations between Muslims and Orthodox Christians within Armenia; between adherents of Sunni Islam and the state of Azerbaijan; between Estonia and Latvia; between Turkmenistan and Iran; between Protestants and Sunnis within Kazakhstan; between ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyz within Kyrgyzstan; between Lithuania and Poland; between ethnic Ukrainians and Moldova; between ethnic Chechens and Russia (the only site among these preselected in our oversampling of conflict); between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; and between ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians within Ukraine.

Although the small sample of FSU cases precludes statistical analyses as a set, we can assess if the overall findings discussed earlier change when the FSU cases are excluded. A change in the patterns of findings following exclusion would suggest that the mechanisms driving conflict for the non-FSU cases are qualitatively different than the mechanisms driving conflict for the FSU cases. All findings were stable with the FSU cases removed, however. Moreover, scatter plots for the analyses in this chapter reveal that the FSU cases readily fit within the overall ranges of variable values; no FSU cases appear as outliers. In sum, then, we see no special concern in applying our findings to FSU states.

Implications of Social-Psychological Approaches for Policy and Practice

The Global Group Relations Project was not designed to provide insights into the FSU states. Rather, its aim was to derive and test broad hypotheses about the role of religion in intergroup relations, with a focus on identifying near-universal principles and processes. Nonetheless, we believe our approach, and social-psychological approaches more generally, raises issues relevant to (1) understanding the effects of religion and conceptualizing religion-based intervention to reduce conflict within the FSU states and around the world and (2) creating processes to create an infrastructure for generating effective policy.

Implications for Forecasting and Intervention

Understanding the variables that cause or predict conflict helps guide which variables to monitor for changes. Our findings suggest that there is value in monitoring for

changes in religious infusion, values incompatibilities, resource-power differentials, beliefs about relative deprivation, and relative mobilization capacity. Other social-psychological approaches suggest the value of monitoring groups for shifts in group identifications, “us-them” narratives, rigid- and rote-based educational practices, group self-regard, and discussions of deservingness, among others. Each of these variables can be readily operationalized in a monitoring system and tracked.

Despite our evolved tribal psychologies and (often well-justified) inclinations toward intergroup distrust and perceptions of other groups as threatening,³² the history of our species provides sufficient evidence that people and groups do, under certain circumstances, find ways to get along and sometimes even thrive with one another. The findings discussed certainly suggest targets for intervention—for example, reducing actual or perceived resource discrepancies, altering perceptions of values incompatibilities, or interfering with religious infusion by providing alternative and superordinate cultural identities. For more than 70 years, social-psychological research has articulated many alternative approaches to remediating intergroup conflict.³³ However, clear demonstrations of *religion* itself being useful for reducing intergroup prejudices and conflict are sparse.³⁴ Perhaps the best conclusion we can draw from the literature is that religion—to the extent it enhances coalitional identities, motivations, and capacities—tends to facilitate intergroup conflict, but that it has the *potential* to reduce intergroup conflict when it focuses its adherents on broader peaceful, prosocial beliefs.

That said, we see a possibility for leveraging the power of religious infusion to reduce conflict. Religiously infused groups tend to be socially coherent, well networked, and interpersonally connected. These features enable social influence to flow readily through a group, thereby enabling it to enhance and to effectively marshal capacity to engage other groups in conflict if motivated. However, these same features of religiously infused groups should also be especially well-suited to influence its membership toward other directions. Specifically, to the extent that credible leadership within religiously infused groups espouses tolerance for other groups, by emphasizing the more broadly prosocial messages within their religious texts, these groups may be less likely (than what might otherwise be expected) to engage other groups with aggression.

One preliminary finding from our data set addresses this possibility. We focused on groups at high risk for conflict—groups high in religious infusion, with values incompatible with those of their counterpart group, and possessing less resources and less power—and found that groups whose leaders and religious texts promoted messages of tolerance were less likely to engage in the more severe forms of conflict (i.e.,

³² For example, Schaller and Neuberg, 2012; and Sng, Williams, and Neuberg, 2016.

³³ For reviews, see Chris G. Sibley and Fiona Kate Barlow, eds., *Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

³⁴ For example, Hall, Matz, and Wood, 2010.

symbolic aggression, individual violence, and collective violence). Conversely, conflict was especially high among groups whose leaders did not promote messages of tolerance. Interestingly, messages of tolerance from government sources did not predict lower levels of conflict. Especially for religiously infused groups, perhaps, messages of tolerance need to come from trusted, within-group sources to have an effect.³⁵

Implications for Data-Gathering and Analysis

Much scholarship on religion and conflict has occurred in the absence of comprehensive, quantifiable data. By their very nature, even the best case studies are unable to generate conclusions about fundamental processes that we can confidently generalize to other cases. Moreover, many quantitatively focused attempts have been limited by their reliance on existing data sets not initially designed to test the researchers' focal hypotheses; such data sets therefore contain only weak operationalizations of some of the focal constructs and no operationalizations of others.

The Global Group Relations Survey was able to counter such weaknesses by using standardized, theory-driven, quantitative measures across many locales and with multiple informants within each locale to reduce the potential impact of any informant's biases. The survey also retained the case study strength by employing informants' experts in each locale, thereby acquiring through their responses large stores of explicit and implicit knowledge.

This approach has enabled the discovery of new relationships between religion and conflict—discoveries that are empirically meaningful in their own right and that also enable important tests of theory. Much remains to be discovered from the current data set, but we are confident that additional findings will emerge that provide insight into general principles of religion's effects on different forms of intergroup conflict. We view the current data set and the findings emerging from it as a useful tool for analysts hoping to forecast shifts in conflict around the globe as well as in more specific regions such as the FSU states.

We suggest that the value of this approach can become exponentially greater with additional investment. One constraint on what can be inferred from the current data set is that it is cross-sectional; that is, it provides data about only one point in time (summer–fall 2009). This is useful, as one can still observe relationships among variables and gain insights into the processes of interest and monitor and forecast their development. The value of this approach would be greatly enhanced, however, if data on the same sites could be gathered longitudinally, enabling both more tests of hypothesized relationships and, especially important, the ability to draw stronger inferences about causality.

³⁵ Gabrielle Filip-Crawford, Steven L. Neuberg, Benjamin J. Broome, Anna Berlin, and Carolyn M. Warner, "Can Religious Messages of Tolerance Reduce Intergroup Conflict? Evidence from the Global Group Relations Survey," St. Paul, Minn.: St. Catherine University, forthcoming.

A second constraint is that the reliability of expert responses for each site depends partially on the number of respondents providing data; although reliability is adequate (recall that almost 500 experts provided responses for our focal analyses), the value of this methodological approach would be enhanced with a greater number of expert informants.

A government-sponsored system that could address both of these constraints can be imagined, and thereby provide analysts (e.g., in the U.S. Department of State and intelligence agencies) a wealth of data from which to develop especially powerful forecasting tools. For example, by having thousands of foreign service employees complete a brief survey (less than an hour) modeled after the Global Group Relations Survey upon leaving their posts, there could, in a few years, be highly reliable estimates of many desired parameters over time. This would enable more-sophisticated modeling of the data and thus the development of increasingly accurate forecasting tools; such tools would be further enhanced with ongoing data gathering and analysis.

Conclusion

The strengths of our conceptual and methodological approach are that we can, cross-societally, gather and analyze relevant variables and draw broad, somewhat generalizable conclusions about near-universal factors and processes that shape intergroup conflict. Such findings provide researchers and analysts with a reasonably firm starting point for assessing the potential for conflict—and for its resolution—within particular sites of regions. The best gains in understanding and forecasting will come from tight, collaborative work integrating complementary approaches focusing on processes both universal and culturally specific.

Kazakhstan: Islamic Revival and Trajectories of State-Society Relations

Nargis Kassenova

The ongoing revival of Islam in Kazakhstan has created complex political and social dynamics. At the dawn of independence, the government saw Islam as a factor that could consolidate the new national identity and fill the spiritual niche left vacant by the decline of morality during the Soviet communist period. Atheist policies were discontinued and personal religiosity and religious education were encouraged. The government also helped to establish the national religious authority structure: the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (Muftiate).

The new Islamic identity was also used to create new links to the international community. Kazakhstan set up diplomatic relations with key Muslim countries, such as Iran, Pakistan, and the Gulf countries, seeking both moral and material support. In 1995, it joined the OIC (now Organization of Islamic Cooperation), and in 2011, Kazakhstan served as the group's chair. Although Muslim countries (with the partial exception of Malaysia) have not generally been seen as models for development, the attractiveness of their substantial financial resources stimulated Kazakhstan to introduce Islamic banking and thus create a base for deeper cooperation with the Islamic world.¹

However, over time, the perception of the Islamic revival in Kazakhstan increasingly acquired a negative tint and became securitized. This trend was triggered by terrorist activities and growing Islamic militancy in neighboring countries and reinforced by the Global War on Terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. A series of terrorist acts in a number of cities in Kazakhstan in 2011–2012 incurred small physical damage but caused a great shock to the state and society and further intensified debate over Islamic radicalism and extremism.

The government has made consistent attempts to control and manipulate the process of Islamization. The adopted policies go beyond the light regulation of the

¹ Davinia Hoggarth, "The Rise of Islamic Finance: Post-Colonial Market Building in Central Asia," *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 2016, pp. 115–136.

religious sphere that could sit comfortably with the principle of separation of state and religion, stipulated in the legislation of the country.² These efforts are aimed at drawing some legitimacy from the mutual endorsement of political and religious authorities, which de facto represents the cooptation and control of the latter by the former, and eliminating the potential challenge of politicized Islam by using repression and propaganda mechanisms.

The policies and practices can be criticized both on normative grounds and in terms of their effectiveness. This chapter attempts to take the discussion beyond the endorsement or criticism of what the state is doing and put the issue into a broader framework of state-society interaction, such as that developed by Joel Migdal.³ Such framing allows us to make a nuanced account of the considerable capacity of the state to dominate the society and its limited ability to shape it.

Migdal's analytical frame is built on the idea of contestation among various social organizations, including the state, for social control over people. This control is acquired if the organization can provide individuals with components for their "strategies of survival" that are "roadmaps used to guide one through the maze of daily life, ensuring one's existence and, in rare instances, pointing the way toward upward mobility."⁴ These components include symbols, rewards, and sanctions. Importantly, "such strategies provide not only a basis for personal survival but also a link for the individual from the realm of personal identity and self-serving action (a personal political economy) to the sphere of group identity and collective action (a communal moral economy)."⁵

This framework—which integrates the material and the moral; uses symbols, rewards, and sanctions; and links personal identity to group identity and collective action—seems particularly appropriate for the analysis of the complex relations between state and society in the religious sphere in Kazakhstan. It is based on the assumption of an individual making a personal choice (in this case, to become more religious and possibly political), constrained by circumstances, but not limited to the calculation of pros and cons (as one would expect in a rational actor model). The symbolic level and processes of framing identity are of great importance. Finally, the model is especially relevant for states that have not consolidated dominance over societies that

² Article 1 of Kazakhstan's Constitution states, "The Republic of Kazakhstan pronounces itself a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are an individual, his life, rights and freedoms" (Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, August 30, 1995. Article 3 of the Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations (2011) states, "The State shall be separate from religion and religious associations" (*The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of October 11, 2011, No. 483-IV: On Religious Activity and Religious Associations*, October 11, 2011).

³ Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

⁴ Migdal, 1989.

⁵ Migdal, 1989, pp. 27–29.

are confused and fragmented by major social disruptions. Kazakhstan can be considered such a state, where the society has been undergoing disruptions introduced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, independence, market reforms, and strong exposure to globalization.

This chapter presents an analysis of the current relationship between state and society in the religious sphere, focusing on the tensions and contradictions of the pairing and reflecting on possible future implications for the security and development of Kazakhstan. The first challenge that this chapter identifies is a potential Islamic radicalization feeding off various discontents with the political and economic system. The second challenge is a strengthening of the social conservatism that has accompanied the Islamic revival, growing divisions in the society, and potential contestation and clashes over social norms that might result in serious tensions and even destabilization of the country as seen in many Middle Eastern and North African countries.

Presently, Kazakhstan is not facing major security risks having a religious aspect. Radical elements are few and marginal, and the Islamist trend in the country is embryonic at best. However, this chapter argues that larger-scale problems might arise in the future, and the trajectory of Kazakhstan's security and development will be determined by the ability of the state and society to mitigate the challenges created by the ongoing Islamic revival. The existing literature on Islamism and how it shapes and is shaped by complex political and social processes in various Muslim societies should provide lessons and food for thought in our reflection on the matter.

Islamization and Fragmentation of Society

State of Islamization: Sociological Portrait of Kazakh Youth

There has been a pronounced Islamic revival in Kazakhstan since the end of the Soviet period. The number of mosques shot up to 2,320 in 2013 from 68 at the dawn of independence, more than in any other Central Asian country.⁶ These mosques fill up on Fridays, and many young people attend prayers. Growing numbers of Kazakhs fast during the holy month of Ramadan and perform hajj.⁷ Women frequently wear headscarves, and Islamic fashion shops are appearing in bazaars and malls. More food products are marked as halal. Mullahs' participation in funerals and weddings has become a standard feature of people's lives.

⁶ S. Seksenbayeva, "Kazakhstan Holds the First Place in Central Asia for the Number of Mosques" ["Kazakhstan zanimayet pervoe mesto v Tsentralnoi Azii po kolichestvu mecheti"], BNews.kz, May 15, 2013.

⁷ According to Amangeldi Abdykalik, president of the Haj company Nur Kazakhstan, the number of Kazakhstani going on Haj grew from 300–500 in the mid-1990s to 5,000 in 2014–2015. See "Amangeldy Abdikalyk: For the Years of Independence the Republic of Kazakhstan Sent About 35 Thousand Pilgrims," *islamsng.com*, February 9, 2015.

At the same time, Kazakhstanis remain a fairly secular society, especially compared with other Muslim countries. This is perhaps unsurprising given the very low start in terms of religiosity and the strong position of atheism in Soviet Kazakhstan. As a result of the 70-year-long enforced secularization process, Islam virtually disappeared as an organizing religious doctrine and survived as rituals or as “folk Islam.” Unlike neighboring Uzbeks, Kazakhs did not have established social networks that would reproduce Islamic identity.⁸

The current state of the Islamic revival is reflected in two recent sociological studies exploring and measuring the religiosity of Kazakhstani youth: “Ethnic and Religious Identification of Kazakhstani Youth” by the Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists of Kazakhstan (ASiP) in 2016 and “The Youth of Central Asia: Kazakhstan” based on the poll conducted by the Institute “Public Opinion” in 2014 (commissioned and published by Friedrich Ebert Foundation and referred to in this chapter as the FES study).⁹

Both studies demonstrate a number of important features. First, Islam is first and foremost a marker of ethnic identity. If one is born in a Kazakh family, one is almost automatically a Muslim. According to the ASiP poll, among the believers, 97.9 percent of Kazakh language–speaking Kazakhs and 80 percent of Russian language–speaking Kazakhs are Muslims. The FES poll gives a similar result of 96.9 percent of Kazakh respondents identifying themselves as Muslims.

Second, the level of religiosity remains relatively low. Although around 71 percent of ASiP poll respondents consider themselves believers (76.5 percent among Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs) and 29 percent see themselves as nonreligious, the majority of believers are passive. Around 48.4 percent participate in the life of their religious community (51.6 percent of Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs), 26.2 percent regularly conduct the rituals (27.8 percent of Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs), 18.2 percent read five times prayer (*namaz*), 21 percent regularly participate in the Friday prayer (Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs, 2.4 times more than Russian-speaking Kazakhs), 26.1 percent always fast, and 37.6 percent do not fast during Ramadan.

Third, despite the proliferation of religious education and information, the depth of religious knowledge remains superficial. Only 44.7 percent of Muslims think that they have some religious knowledge, 38.9 percent receive it in the mosque, 20.1 per-

⁸ Alma Sultangaliyeva, “Return of Islam’ to Kazakhstan” [“Vozrasheniye islama’ v Kazakhstane”], Almaty, Kazakhstan: Foundation of Alтынбек Sarsenbayev, 2012, p. 23.

⁹ B. Bekturganova and M. Nurgaliyeva, *Ethnic and Religious Identifications of the Regional Youth*, Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists, 2016. The report is prepared by ASiP on the basis of the polls conducted in April–May 2016 and financed by a Soros Foundation Kazakhstan grant. Respondents included 1,404 youth between 15 and 29 years old from 14 provinces of Kazakhstan; See Friedrich Ebert Foundation, *The Youth of Central Asia. Kazakhstan*, 2016. The publication is based on the results of the national survey conducted by the Institute of Public Opinion in 2014. Respondents included 1,000 youth between 14 and 29 years old from 14 provinces and two major cities of Kazakhstan.

cent from religious literature, 15.4 percent from the Internet (religious websites, videos, sermons on YouTube, chats, and email), and 12.7 percent from religious education organizations. Further, only 36.4 percent of Muslim respondents read the Quran, and 6.7 percent read religious literature regularly.

Fourth, the overall level of inter-religious tolerance remains high, but it is the lowest among Kazakh-speaking believers. Most young Muslims (87.6 percent of the 89.3 percent of all respondents) describe their attitude toward people not sharing their religious views as “friendly,” “tolerant,” and “neutral”; 54.6 percent (55.9 percent of all respondents) positively assess inter-religious relations in their regions; and 52.6 percent (57.1 percent of all respondents) are ready to be friends with representatives of other religious groups. Further, 38.1 percent (41.6 percent of all respondents) are ready to study and work together, and 33.7 percent (38 percent) are ready to be neighbors. Of the 75.6 of all believers, 72.6 percent of Muslims accept studying and working under the guidance of a person of another confession. However, the study notes a higher level of intolerance among active Kazakh-speaking believers: 12.8 percent do not want to have any relations with nonbelievers, and 11.1 percent strongly do not accept studying or working under the guidance of a person of another confession.

Fifth, the level of secular preferences is high but cannot be taken for granted in a longer perspective. In total, 45.8 percent of all believers said that the religion of a person in government does not matter, although only 11.2 percent think that nonreligious people/atheists should hold highest governmental posts. However, 33.9 percent of Muslim respondents (26.6 percent of all respondents) would like to see people professing Islam in the government. The least-secular respondents were Kazakh-speaking Muslims, 36.9 percent of whom want to see Islam play a role in state governance in Kazakhstan. According to the FES study, 17 percent of respondents who are believers support the idea of increasing the role of religion in the government, while only 4.7 percent think it should play a lesser role.

Social Fragmentation: “Traditional” Versus “Nontraditional” Islam

Islamization in Kazakhstan has not led to the creation of a unified community of believers or the emergence of a social organization capable of exercising control and contesting the state in this regard. The growth and intensification of the Islamic community has instead been accompanied by the religion’s increasing fragmentation. To a great extent, this is because Kazakhstani Muslims and prospective Muslims are increasingly exposed to external influences. The choice of one’s “strategy of survival” is affected by the availability of different packages of ideas and symbols that help to locate and shape individual identity and external financial flows and networks needed to materialize these new identities.

The government recognizes the ongoing fragmentation and explicitly divides the Islamic community into “traditional” and “nontraditional” (i.e., sectarian/radical Islamic) groups and movements. The government has drastically different policies

toward the two groups, including strong support for the former and suppression of the latter.

Traditional Islam

The Sunni Hanafi school is one of the most prominent schools of traditional Islam in Central Asia. Compared with other schools, it features flexibility, adherence to rational judgment (*ra'y*), and the wide use of *ijma* (reliance on a collective, consensual opinion of scholars). Throughout history, it has proved flexible enough to incorporate pre-Islamic popular customs and rights and legitimized some tribal and customary law.¹⁰ The non-Orthodox character of local Islam is also explained by the fact that the conversion of nomads of the Kazakh steppe to Islam at the early stage was mainly carried out by such Sufi missionaries as Nakhbandiya, Yassawiya, and Kadiriya who came from the cities of Maverranah in the 12th–16th centuries.¹¹

Traditional Islam is supervised by the Muftiate, whose representatives play a key role in defining and redefining “tradition.” It provides information about accepted norms including the correct way of conducting prayer; the proper role and behavior of men, women, and children; and proper dress. For example, in 2013, it issued a fatwa on the Muslim scarf, explaining that Kazakh traditional women’s clothes are in compliance with sharia, and there is no need for Kazakhstani women to follow the Arab and Pakistani national styles and wear the *nikab*.¹²

The Muftiate is supervised and supported by the state. The government endorses the Muftiate as the only legitimate Islamic authority in the country and provides it with financial assistance. In return, it receives support and legitimation of its policies from the Muftiate. In fact, the Muftiate lacks real autonomy and plays the role of a quasistate agency responsible for the religious sphere, defined in strictly cultural terms.

Over the years, the Muftiate acquired an important ally in local Islamic media companies, such as the Islamic television channel Asyl Arna and the Musylman Publishing House. These media companies produce television programs, websites, books, and magazines on Islam, helping to create a virtual national *umma* (a community of Muslims bound together by religion) out of the emerging Muslim middle class.¹³ These companies are in the business of Islamization, but they also function as a social organization promoting a certain set of norms. Importantly, in the case of Kazakhstan, they are not competing with but trying to complement both the clergy and the state. In

¹⁰ Zumrat Salmorbekova and Galina Yemelianova, “Islam and Islamism in the Ferghana Valley,” *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union*, in Galina Yemelianova, ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 213–214.

¹¹ Sultangaliyeva, 2012, p. 141.

¹² “Fatwa of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan Regarding the Muslim Scarf,” Azan, March 21, 2013.

¹³ Wendell Schwab, “Virtual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan: The Case of Asyl Arna’s Social Media,” *Central Asian Affairs*, Vol. 3, 2016, pp. 301–329. As of October 2016, the Asyl Arna page on VK (V Kontakte) has more than 312,500 followers, and on Facebook, more than 38,600 followers.

fact, in 2015, Asyl Arna, the Muftiate, and the Ministry of Culture and Sport signed a memorandum on cooperation.¹⁴

The messages that the Muftiate and actors such as Asyl Arna are spreading are scripturalist and socially conservative. They try to enforce the “modest woman,” “virtuous wife,” and “good mother” roles on women, clearly prioritizing family over work.¹⁵ The Muftiate’s *fatwa* (ruling on Islamic law) on abortion is out of line with the pro-choice policy and practice in the FSU and independent Kazakhstan. It allows abortions only for medical reasons.¹⁶ Its position on sexual minorities or such issues as change of gender is even harsher and more uncompromising. For example, in 2013, the Muftiate issued a fatwa on homosexuality stating that it is a sin. It pointed out the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa (the founder of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence), who noted that since such intimate relations do not result in children outside of marriage, these people deserve reprehension and administrative punishment. However, Hanafi lawyers allow the death sentence if there is a political or social necessity.¹⁷ In 2016, the Shariah and Fatwas Department of the Muftiate issued a decision regarding gender change, denouncing such operations as *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law).¹⁸ By contrast, in theocratic Iran, sex-change operations are allowed under a fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1987.

The social conservatism of the Muftiate is constrained by the Soviet secularization heritage upheld by the state, including such achievements as emancipation of women, gender equality, and fully and strongly secular education with natural sciences as the core of the program. Thus, tensions are embedded in the partnership between the government and Muftiate. For example, tensions arose over the issue of wearing the hijab in schools. In 2016, the Ministry of Education introduced a ban on wearing the hijab in schools, and the Muftiate had to agree with this decision and call on parents to follow it by making an argument that in Islam, only adult women have to cover themselves and girls can be exempt from it, and the priority for parents and Muslims should be giving secular education to their children.¹⁹

Likely because of its special relations with the government, the Muftiate has not shown any interest in having an independent political agenda and challenging the

¹⁴ Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan, press release, July 2, 2015.

¹⁵ Schwab, 2016, pp. 324–325.

¹⁶ Fatwa of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan, “Decision on Abortion” [“Zhasandy tusik zhasat-udyn ukimi”], undated.

¹⁷ Fatwa of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan, “Homosexuality from the Islamic Point of View” [“Gomosexualism s islamskoi tochki zreniya”], December 11, 2013.

¹⁸ Opinion of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan, “Decision Regarding the Change of Gender” [“Resheniye v otnoshenii smena pola”], January 12, 2016.

¹⁹ Tengri News, “At the SBMK They Expressed Opinion About Wearing Hijab at Schools” [“V DUMK vyskazalis o noshenii hijaba v shkolah”], October 24, 2016.

existing status quo. It does not champion Islamic democracy or an Islamic version of human rights. It is authoritarian in its internal culture and in the way that it interacts with Muslim communities that are not integrated into the Muftiate system. There are reports that independent mosques and imams have been pressured into joining the system by local authorities.²⁰ The system is also not conducive to the emergence of independent charismatic imams.

This nonautonomous and ultimately subservient position of the official religious authority has created distrust among some believers, which weakens the position of the Muftiate in its contest with alternative Islamic movements for the hearts and minds of Kazakhstani Muslims. It also stimulates exploration for alternatives within the Hanafi tradition.

It is also important to note the presence in Kazakhstan of a considerable group of Muslims educated and socialized into Islam in Turkish schools associated with the Gulen movement.²¹ These schools have fully secular curricula with an emphasis on scientific disciplines and the study of languages. However, according to Bayram Balci, through these schools “without actively proselytizing, the Gulen movement transmits a certain Islamic and universalist ethic to its pupils.”²² This is done through the example of the Gulenist teacher, who embodies the values of work, “respect and tolerance of the other, cleanliness as well as mental and physical hygiene, politeness, courtesy and good manners of the *edip* of the society of the Muslim Middle East.”²³ These Kazakhstani Muslims do not challenge the status quo or religious authorities, but their sets of values and role models originate from a different, non-Kazakh tradition.

Finally, Sufis are a much smaller component of traditional Islam in Kazakhstan. Sufism was one of the main forces behind the Islamization of Central Asia in the 12th–16th centuries, and in this sense, it constitutes the core tradition of the region. However, the individually centered nature of *tarikats*, the trance-inducing techniques they are using, and the veneration of sacred places, such as tombs of great Sufis, are not supported by other traditional Islamic authorities. The Muftiate’s position is that some *tarikats* have breached sharia and “persisted in their ignorance.”²⁴

²⁰ Dmitry Matveev, “They Try to Close the ‘Nurdaulet’ Mosque Through the Court” [“Mechet ‘Nurdaulet’ pytayutsya zakryt cherez sud”], *Evrika*, December 10, 2012.

²¹ The Gulen movement is a social movement led by the U.S.-based Turkish Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen. The movement promotes a tolerant Islam that emphasizes altruism, modesty, hard work, and education. It runs many schools in Turkey and throughout the world. Gulen was an ally of Turkish President Erdogan, with whom they shared an Islamist agenda, but fell out with him in 2013 and was accused of organizing a coup d’état in 2016. As a result, the Gulen movement was announced a terrorist organization.

²² Bayram Balci, “The AKP/Gulen Crisis in Turkey: Consequences for Central Asia and the Caucasus,” *Central Asia Policy Brief*, No. 16, April 2014.

²³ Balci, 2014, p.4.

²⁴ “A Question to Imam. What Is Sufism and Who Are Sufis?” [“Vopros imamu. Chto takoe Sufism i kto takiye sufisty?”], *azan.kz*, undated.

In 2005, the authorities closed the Sufi group School of Shakarim of Ismatullah Maksim, a missionary from Pakistan, when news headlines publicized information about harsh abuses of students. In parallel, employees of the national television channels of Kazakhstan who made programs of cultural and religious issues were accused of being followers of this sect and fired.

“Nontraditional” Salafi Islam

If traditional Islam in Kazakhstan can be described as scripturalist, socially conservative, and politically conformist, then the “nontraditional” Islamic groups, generally referred to as Salafi, are extremely scripturalist, extremely socially conservative, and politically anti–status quo. They reject the local tradition and insist on adherence to “pure” Islam and a literal reading of the Quran.

The Salafi seek to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam, collectively known as *al-salaf al-salihin* (pious predecessors), since only they practiced “authentic” and “pure” Islam. As noted by Shirah Maher, it is a philosophy that believes in progression through regression. Among the key Salafi concepts are *tawhid* (monotheism), *aqida* (doctrinal purity), and *kufir* (disbelief)/*takfir* (excommunication).²⁵ Generally the Salafi denounce local Islamic traditions as *bid’a* (sinful innovations).

The Salafi ideology started spreading in Kazakhstan in the 1990s, triggered by an exposure of Kazakhstanis to foreign religious education, with many young people receiving grants to study in the Middle East and South Asia. Another source of influence that appeared later was the strengthening of the Salafi trend in the North Caucasus region of Russia, which allowed for Russian-language propaganda of fundamentalist ideas. Salafi *jamaats* (“groups/assemblies”) appeared all over the country, but acquired particularly strong positions in Western Kazakhstan. Western provinces (Western Kazakhstan, Atyrau, Mangystau, and Aktobe) were traditionally less religious than the southern areas, which made the transformation surprising at first. The explanations offered in hindsight focused on poor economic conditions and low living standards that contrasted with the riches that these oil-producing areas provided for the budget of the state and elites, the lack of religious tradition that made people more vulnerable to imported ideology, and geographic proximity to the North Caucasus.²⁶ As of 2016, officials noted that, overall, there are 15,000 “staunch supporters” of Salafi

²⁵ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, London: Hurst and Company, 2016, p. 7.

²⁶ Ktk.kz, “How Could Radicals Find Weak Spots of Kazakhstan” [“Kak radikalny smogli naschupat slabye mesta Kazakhstana”], interview with Sultan Akimbekov, director of the Institute of World Economy and Politics under the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, leader of the nation, June 8, 2016; Ermek Irgaliyev, “Business ‘Roofs’ of Salafis in Kazakhstan—Expert” [“Biznes ‘kryshuet’ salafitov v Kazahstane”], interview with religious studies expert Askar Sabdin, 365info.kz, December 15, 2016.

ideology in the country.²⁷ It is also reported that around 80,000 citizens read Salafi websites (roughly around 0.6 percent of the adult population).²⁸

Despite the rigidness and “purism” of Salafi beliefs, there are considerable differences among Salafi groups when it comes to their strategies of interaction with the state and society at large. On one side of the spectrum are “quietists,” who prefer as much autonomy and isolation as possible; on the other, there are carriers of more radical and confrontational approaches, especially toward the “infidel” (*kafir*) state.²⁹

In the middle of the spectrum are Hizb ut-Tahrir, considered to be the largest and best organized Islamist group in Central Asia. It is an international fundamentalist party launched in the 1950s with the goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate. Its ideology is strongly anti-Semitic and anti-Western. In Central Asia, Hizb ut-Tahrir proponents appeared in the 1970s in Uzbekistan and gathered strength in the late 1980s and 1990s. Their presence in south Kazakhstan, bordering Uzbekistan, became notable in the early 2000s, and then Hizb ut-Tahrir spread quickly to other regions of the country.³⁰

The success of Salafism can be explained by its relative doctrinal flexibility and its ability to adjust to local conditions and to modify its tactics accordingly. Hizb ut-Tahrir is also softer than other Salafi groups in applying the concept of *kufir* and has consistently emphasized nonviolent means to promote the message of salvation. It emphasizes preparing the elites and public opinion for a “bloodless coup” and establishing a caliphate. Therefore, its members are active proselytizers. The group’s most effective “weapon” in spreading its views is its readiness to help the underprivileged and provide assistance in times of need, thus creating a sense of solidarity and fostering loyalty with disadvantaged populations. This policy is particularly successful with women, often the most underprivileged in society.³¹

Although Hizb ut-Tahrir insists on using nonviolent means (there has not been a single terrorist act with its participation as of 2016), the group was put on the list of extremist organizations and banned in Kazakhstan in 2005. The official explanation of the ban referred to elements of “political extremism” in the activities of the organization, such as distributing literature and leaflets containing extremist messages

²⁷ Tengri News, “15 Thousand Kazakhstanis Are Staunch Supporters of Salafi Ideas” [“15 tysyach kazakhstantsev yavlyayutsya ubezhdannymi storonnikami idei salafisma”], June 10, 2016.

²⁸ Tengri News, “80 Thousand Kazakhstanis Visit the Websites of the Salafi Ideology” [“80 tysyach kazakhstantsev poseschayut saity salafitskoi ideologii”], June 10, 2016.

²⁹ Wiktorowicz, 2006, divides the Salafi community into purists, politicians, and jihadis. Purists focus on nonviolent methods of propagation, purification, and education. Politicians emphasize the application of the Salafi creed to the political arena. And jihadis take a more militant position calling for violence and revolution.

³⁰ Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, 2009, p. 223.

³¹ Asel Murzakulova, “Searching for Social Justice: The Problem of Women Joining Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan,” in Thomas Kressmann, ed., *Gender in Modern Central Asia*, Zurich: Lit Verlag, pp. 125–138.

with “plans to abolish existing constitutional structures”³² and inciting interreligious and interethnic hostility. It was also noted that the organization was “actively taking advantage of existing socio-economic difficulties and unresolved problems.”³³ According to one report, on the eve of the ban in 2004, there were 300 Kazakhstani in Hizb ut-Tahrir.³⁴

Toward the end of the decade, it became clear that Salafi groups in the country were ready to engage in violence in response to repressions by the state. In 2011 and 2012, Kazakhstan experienced a series of terrorist attacks in Aktobe, Astana, Atyrau, and Taraz. The attacks were poorly prepared and caused minimal damage, but they shocked the state and society, as neither had experienced this kind of violence before.

The attacks were claimed by an unknown terrorist organization called Jund al-Khilafa (“soldiers of the caliphate”), which triggered speculation on its real or manufactured character. According to Erlan Karin, Kazakhstan’s most prominent expert on Islamic radicalism, it was an organization formed by Moez Garsallaouille, a Belgian citizen of Tunisian origin, with jihadists fighting in Waziristan in 2011.³⁵ Three Kazakh members of the group formed their own al-Zahir Baybars Batallion and took control over *jamaat* in Atyrau that carried out the attacks. Garsallaouille was a “media muja-hideen” who ran his own jihadist website, Minbar Media Project, that posted Jund al-Khilafa messages and videos.³⁶ This allowed the organization to have a considerable virtual presence despite its weakness and low effectiveness on the ground. Of the 70 people killed in the 14 terrorist attacks, 51 were alleged terrorists, including those who died as a result of mishandling explosives.³⁷

The Jund al-Khilafa messages attacked the government’s policies toward believers, particularly the law on religious activities and a purported “war against Muslims” that Jund al-Khilafa argued the government was waging.³⁸ Importantly, most attacks were aimed at law enforcement structures, including suicide attacks on National Security Committee buildings in Aktobe and Astana. The antigovernment attacks continued

³² The Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “The List of Prohibited on the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan Foreign Organizations” [“List zapreshchennyh na territorii RK inostrannyh organizatsii”], undated.

³³ The Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan, undated.

³⁴ Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir—Islam’s Political Insurgency*, Washington, D.C.: The Nixon Center, 2004, p. 78.

³⁵ Erlan Karin, “Soldiers of Caliphate”: *Myths and Reality* [“Soldaty Khalifata”: *Mify i realnost*], Almaty, Kazakhstan: Vlast, 2014, pp. 111–113.

³⁶ Karin, 2014, pp. 116–124.

³⁷ Serik Beissebayev, “Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan: From Criminal Networks to Jihad,” *The Central Asia Fellowship Papers*, No. 15, February 29, 2016, p. 3.

³⁸ Karin, 2014, p. 26.

in 2016, when an armed group of Islamists tried to take over a military unit of the National Guard in Aktobe and one man attacked a police station in Almaty.³⁹

Scholar Serik Beissembayev studied the social background and motivation of convicts charged with engaging in religious extremist and terrorist activities, which revealed a number of features beyond the theme of revenge against a repressive state.⁴⁰ First, radicalization was generally preceded by an identity crisis. Young men from mostly nonreligious families encounter Salafi Islam during a period in their lives when they feel unsettled and unadjusted (e.g., leaving the family unit, being unemployed). This confirms the frame of radicalization developed by Quintan Wiktorowicz, who argued that crises in life create a precondition for a “cognitive opening”—when an individual becomes receptive to alternative views that have been unacceptable earlier.⁴¹ The link between individual crisis and adoption of a new identity and sets of values and norms resonates with Joel Migdal’s argument that disruptions experienced by a society create conditions for new social norms.⁴²

Second, the respondents shared a narrative of finding the meaning of life in Islam. Following its literal norms made life “easier” and gave them “peace of mind.”⁴³ Religion provided the respondents with clear and simple guidelines for behavior and equipped them with individual “strategies of survival” with “god-given” rewards and sanctions. Initially, many of the respondents turned to “traditional” Islam, but after being disappointed with corruption in the clergy, turned to proponents of “pure” Islam in an effort to remove the cognitive dissonance between religion and corruption.

Third, the study does not find any direct link between social and religious marginalization and radicalization. Radicalization can affect persons with different social and educational backgrounds.

According to official sources, in 2013, more than 500 people were jailed in Kazakhstan for engaging in religious extremist and terrorist activities.⁴⁴ The National Security Committee reported that there were 24 “radical Salafi” *jamaats* with 495

³⁹ Eurasianet.org, “Kazakhstan: At least 10 Killed in Unrest Blamed on Extremists,” June 5, 2016; BBC News, “Kazakhstan Attack: Four in Almaty Killed ‘by Islamist,’” July 18, 2016.

⁴⁰ Beissembayev, 2016, p. 8.

⁴¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam,” Memphis, Tenn.: Rhodes College Department of International Studies, March 20, 2003; Beissembayev, 2016, p. 8.

⁴² Migdal, 1989, pp. 269–270.

⁴³ Beissembayev, 2016, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Tengri News, “Hundreds of People Are Imprisoned on Extremism Charges in Kazakhstan” [“V Kazakhstane sotni chelovek sidyat za extremism i terrorism”], March 26, 2013.

members in the country.⁴⁵ In addition, it is estimated that around 300 Kazakhstani citizens joined the war in Syria and Iraq on the side of the Islamic State.⁴⁶

On the opposite, apolitical side of the spectrum are Salafi “quietists.” They reject the state and society by trying to live separately in their communities and following their own rules. They are an understudied phenomenon because of their closed character. The local media regularly report about clashes between local authorities, schools, and the Salafis who refuse to send their children to school without hijabs (banned by the Ministry of Education).⁴⁷ They prefer not to interact with the state nor with their neighbors. The sources of their income can be mysterious, and there are reports of Salafis occupying niches in the mobile phone–repair business, the “gray economy” of bazaars, and receiving money from abroad.⁴⁸

State Policies Toward Islam: Changes over Time

Although the legislation of Kazakhstan stipulates the separation of state and religion, the state has been actively interfering in the religious sphere. Authorities understand the important potential of religion and the links between religious developments and the security of the political system. Therefore, since the early 1990s, they have been searching for effective ways to control this sphere, going from the fairly liberal regime in 1991–2003 to the model of suppression and cooptation from 2004 to the present.

Stage One (1991–2003): Liberal Regime

Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991 as a postcolonial, postatheist state. On the one hand, Islam was embraced as an important element for the creation of the new separate identity and for building the nation. On the other, secular heritage from the Soviet past and its association with modernization in popular thought, along with the Soviet administrative methods of regulating religious affairs, remained strong. This created tensions and contradictions in the state policy toward religious affairs.

The country declared itself a secular democratic state. In 1992, the adoption of the new Law on Freedom of Confessions and Religious Associations defined the principles of the relations between state and religious organizations: separation of religion from the state, equality of all confessions, a ban on religious political parties, and the

⁴⁵ Tengri News, “KNB (National Security Committee) Counted 24 Radical Salafi Jamaats in Kazakhstan” [“KNB naschitali v Kazakhstane 24 radikalnyh salafitskikh jamaata”], February 20, 2013.

⁴⁶ Radio Azattyk, “Abykayev: There Are More than 300 Kazakhstanis in the IS (Islamic State)” [“Abykayev: v ryadah IG bole 300 kazakhstantsev”], November 18, 2014.

⁴⁷ Nazira Darimbet, “Salafi Fault Line–2” [“Salafitskiy razlom–2”], Radiotochka.kz, August 17, 2016.

⁴⁸ Kairat Matrekov, “Why ‘Bearded Men’ Are Engaged in Sales of Second-Hand Mobile Phones. Review of Kazakh Press” [“Pochemu ‘borodachi’ uvlechany prodazhei beushnyh ‘sotok?’ Obzor kazakhskoi pressy”], 365info.kz, July 21, 2016.

right of religious organizations to have property and conduct economic activities.⁴⁹ As previously discussed, the government supported the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (Muftiate), established in 1990, and helped it to create an Islamic education network. In 1993, the government signed an agreement with its Egyptian counterpart for establishing the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture “Nur-Mubarak” in the city of Almaty to train imams and other experts in religious studies.⁵⁰

The new legislation allowed foreign foundations to carry out charity activities, which resulted in a flood of Islamic funding and mushrooming of religious organizations. The government eventually started to worry about foreign influences and felt the need to regulate the sphere. In 1998–2001, the government tried to introduce amendments to the law regulating religious affairs: to make the procedure of registration for foreign organizations more difficult, to strengthen the control and regulating functions of the state, and to ban missionary and propaganda activities of foreign religious groups and organizations.⁵¹ One amendment required that the registration of local Islamic organizations only be approved upon receiving a recommendation of the Muftiate. Since the proposed changes breached international legal standards, they were vetoed by the Constitutional Council.⁵²

However, concerns about the challenge of Islamic extremism were only growing. Militant incursions of the IMU from Afghanistan into Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, explosions in Tashkent and Bukhara in 1999 and 2004, the rise of jihadism in Russia, and terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe that triggered the international Global War on Terrorism convinced the government of Kazakhstan to push stricter regulations on the religious sphere.⁵³

Stage Two (2004–2016): Suppression and Cooptation

In 2004 and 2005, the state adopted amendments to the law that introduced obligatory registration for religious organizations and missionaries. Failure to register, including for having an insufficient number of members (fewer than ten), resulted in banning activities by the organization. It also entrusted the “authorized body” (the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice set up in 2006) with carrying out

⁴⁹ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Freedom of Confession and Religious Associations,” adopted on January 15, 1992, lost force on October 11, 2011.

⁵⁰ In 2012, as a result of the political upheavals in Egypt, the university was renamed into the Kazakh-Egyptian Islamic University “Nur.” See “Egyptian University Nur-Mubarak Renamed,” *tengrinews.kz*, March 5, 2013.

⁵¹ Dina Vilkovsky, “Arab Islamic Organizations in Contemporary Kazakhstan: Foreign Influence on Islamic Revival” [*Arabo-islamskiye organizatsii v sovremennom Kazakhstane: vneshnee vliyaniye na islamskoe vozrozhdeniye*], Almaty, Kazakhstan: Institute of World Economy and Politics, 2014, pp. 66–67.

⁵² Vilovsky, 2014.

⁵³ N. Bilisbekov, “Development of the All-State System of Combatting Terrorism” [*Razvitiye obshchegosudarstvennoi sistemy borby s terrorizmom*], Anti-Terrorist Center of the Republic of Kazakhstan, undated.

a review of religious materials.⁵⁴ The review was to “weed out” sects and destructive cults.⁵⁵ On top of this, the government launched the new Law on Combating Extremism, which was heavily focused on religious extremism. This was defined very broadly as “inciting religious hatred or discord, including that, which is connected with violence or calls to violence, and also the use of any religious practice that constitutes a threat to security, life, health, moral, and rights and freedoms of citizens.”⁵⁶ It allowed courts at all levels to make decisions on the nature of terrorist and extremist organizations.⁵⁷ The list of such organizations banned in Kazakhstan was immediately filled with such full-fledged terrorist organizations as al Qaeda, IMU, and Lashkar e-Toiba, but also featured the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir.

As a result, in 2007–2008 dozens of Hizb ut-Tahrir members were sentenced to five to seven years in prison for “inciting social, ethnic, racial and religious hatred.”⁵⁸ Human rights defenders protested the procedure of holding trials behind closed doors and a series of violations of due process. Human Rights Watch reported a case of eight Muslim missionaries who were arrested, tortured in detention, and convicted on charges of terrorism, inciting ethnic enmity, and unlawful possession of weapons.⁵⁹ In 2009, an estimated 200–250 Islamists were serving time in Kazakh prisons.⁶⁰

Another wave of changes to the legislation regulating religious affairs occurred in 2011. Although the draft law on Religious Activities and Religious Organizations was heavily criticized both domestically and internationally, the terrorist acts that took place that year facilitated its adoption.⁶¹ The law canceled the registration of all religious organizations and forced them to reregister following new requirements. These requirements increased the necessary number of members to 50 at the local level, 500

⁵⁴ Roman Podoprigrora, “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations. Commentary to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan” [O svobode veroispovedaniya i religioznyh obyedineniyah. Kommentariy k zakony Respubliki Kazakhstan], Astana, Kazakhstan: Jurist Publishing House, 2007.

⁵⁵ Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Religious Affairs, *Methodology Manual on Issues of Religious Studies Expertise* [Metodicheskoe posobiye po voprosam provedeniya religiovedcheskoi ekspertizy], Astana, Kazakhstan, 2013.

⁵⁶ To demonstrate how arbitrary accusations of “inciting religious hatred” can be, a Norwegian Helsinki Committee report provides information on the six-month detention, including one month of the psychiatric hospital without any evidence of a special medical condition, of an atheist writer Alexander Kharlamov in the city of Ridder in 2013. Norwegian Helsinki Committee, *Below Freedom of Religion or Belief Standards: State Policy in Kazakhstan, Arbitrary Protection in the Kyrgyz Republic*, Oslo, Norway, 2014, p. 35.

⁵⁷ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Combatting Extremism,” adopted February 18, 2005.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, *An Atmosphere of Quiet Repression: Freedom of Religion, Assembly and Expression in Kazakhstan*, December 1, 2008, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, 2008.

⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, “Central Asia: Islamists in Prison,” International Crisis Group, briefing no. 97, December 15, 2009, p. 7.

⁶¹ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Religious Activities and Religious Organizations,” adopted October 11, 2011.

at the provincial level, and 5,000 at the national level. If unregistered, the organization could not continue its activities without facing administrative punishment. The law made it a legal offense to practice collective prayer outside designated areas and forbade distribution of religious literature outside the offices and religious buildings of registered religious organizations.

The law expelled religion from public places, introducing a ban on the conduct of public worship, religious rites, ceremonies, and meetings on the territory and in the buildings of state bodies and organizations, including the Armed Forces, other troops and military formations, judicial and law enforcement agencies, and educational organizations. However, it also increased the intervention of the state into the religious sphere by making theological expert examination of religious literature, materials, and texts compulsory for registration of a religious organization.⁶²

During the 2011 state-religion reforms, the head of the newly created Agency for Religious Affairs Kairat Lama Sharif even proposed the formula “one nation—one religion” and intended to develop the concept of the development of “moderate Islam.” He referred to the practice of main secular states to support one religion if it is the religion of most of the population.⁶³ The idea was criticized and soon suspended.

In an attempt to foster the “correct” type of Islam, the government increased its financial support for Islamic education. In 2010, it set up the Fund for Support of Islamic Culture and Education under the Ministry of Culture and Information.⁶⁴ The Ministry of Education introduced a specialization in Islamic studies and started allocating grants for those who decided to pursue this path. The number of grants to the Kazakh-Egyptian Islamic University for educating imams and Islamic studies experts has been growing annually, reaching 150 in 2015.⁶⁵

Following the guidance of the government, in 2015 the Muftiate developed the “Concept of Development of Religious Education till 2020,”⁶⁶ a document that aims to instill a strong component of secular discipline in programs of religious educational institutions. This way, the status of the madrassas can be raised to that of colleges and

⁶² Legal Information System of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “The Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations” [“Zakon o religioznoi deyatelnosti i religioznyh organizatsiyah”], *adilet.kz*, October 11, 2011.

⁶³ Interfax Kazakhstan, “State Agency for Religious Affairs Develops a Concept ‘On Development of Moderate Islam in Kazakhstan’” [“Gosagentstvo po delam religii razrabotaet kontseptsiyu ‘O razvitiu umerennogo Islama v Kazakhstane’”], June 17, 2011.

⁶⁴ Kazinform.kz, “The Work of the Fund for Support of Islamic Culture and Education Is Aimed at Propaganda of Tolerance and Toleration—Balgabek Myrzaev” [“Rabota fonda podderzhki islamskoi kultury i obrazovaniya napravlena na propagandu tolerantnosti i veroterpimosti—Balgabek Myrzayev”], October 18, 2010.

⁶⁵ G. D. Bilyalova, “Religious Knowledge Should Be Drawn from Secure Sources” [“Religioznye znaniya nado cherpat tolko iz proverennyh istochnikov”], *niac.gov.kz*, undated.

⁶⁶ Interfax-Kazakhstan, “The Concept of Religious Education till 2020 Adopted in Kazakhstan” [“V Kazakhstane prinyali kontsepsiyu razvitiya religioznogo obrazovaniya do 2020 goda”], November 24, 2015.

its graduates can apply for public service positions.⁶⁷ At a conference on Islam and secular society in 2016, the chair of the Committee for Religious Affairs Galym Shoi-kin stated that the government would introduce a requirement for all imams to have both religious and secular education. He pointed out that they need to have knowledge about the secular subjects of psychology, political science, jurisprudence, and many others “to be in step with the spirit of the time” and allow them to resolve conflicts in society.⁶⁸

These new religious cadre are intended to help the government combat the spread of “nontraditional” Islamic ideologies and ideas. Some of the students can enroll in special propaganda groups consisting of Muftiate representatives and other specialists who travel across the country to meet people and persuade them to stay away from “destructive movements.”⁶⁹ They can also work in “rehabilitation centers” for victims of extremist and pseudoreligious movements, along with psychologists and lawyers.⁷⁰

In 2016, when two terrorist attacks again rocked the country, a special Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society was created. One of the major tasks it immediately faced was to reassess the state’s attitude toward Salafism. The Muftiate and public opinion put considerable pressure on the government to ban the movement.⁷¹ In October, Minister Erlan Yermekbayev stated that while Salafism was potentially destructive in Kazakhstan (but traditional in some other countries), the legal ban is not necessary, noting that Kazakhstani society is mature and wise enough to resist the spread of this alien movement.⁷²

The more-liberal position of the ministry and references to the resilience of Kazakhstan’s “mature and wise” society can be explained by the diplomatic background of the minister, a former ambassador and deputy minister of foreign affairs. The hesitation to ban Salafism might reflect an understanding of the limitations of repressive

⁶⁷ Interfax-Kazakhstan, 2015.

⁶⁸ Zakon.kz, “Committee for Religious Affairs: Imams Should Have Two Types of Education” [“Komitet po delam religii: imamy dolzhny imet dva vida obrazovaniya”], March 24, 2016.

⁶⁹ Interfax-Kazakhstan, “Chairman of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan, Chief Mufti Yerzhan Kashy Malgashyuly: Religion Is Becoming a Necessary and, No Doubt, a Positive Factor of the Development of the State” [“Predsedatel Duhovnogo upravleniya musulman Kazakhstana, Verhovnyi muftiy Yerzhan kazhy Malgashyuly: Religiya stanovitsya neobhodimym i, bezuslovno, pozitivnym faktorom razvitiya gosudarstva”], February 3, 2016.

⁷⁰ One such rehabilitation center is Akniyet, which claims to have helped 256 Kazakhstanis recover from radical religious ideas. See “Rehabilitation Center ‘Akniyet’ Helped 256 Kazakhstanis to Abandon Religious Radical Ideas,” kazislam.kz, September 23, 2016.

⁷¹ Tengri News, “SBMK (Muftiate) Calls for the Ban on Salafi Activities in Kazakhstan” [“DUMK prizyvayet zapretit deyatelnost salafitov v Kazakhstane”], July 13, 2011; Zhuldyz Almatbayeva, “About Salafites in Kazakhstan: ‘Several More Terrorist Acts, and Possible Pogroms’” [“O salafitah v Kazakhstane: ‘Eshe neskolko teraktov, i vozmozhny pogrom’”], regnum.ru, August 17, 2016.

⁷² Forbes.kz, “Yermekbayev: Kazakhstanis Are Ready to Handle the Influence of Salafism” [“Yermekbayev: Kazakhstantsy gotovy spravit'sya s vliyaniem salafizma”], October 14, 2016.

mechanisms in dealing with such a complex phenomenon and also of Kazakhstan's international standing as a country that recognizes the constructive role and potential of religion and promoting interconfessional accord.

In 2003, President Nazarbayev initiated the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana. The conduct of this high-profile event has since become a staple of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and image-building. In his address to the delegates of the first congress, Nazarbayev explained the decision to hold such an event by referring to the long tradition of coexistence of different religions in the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan and the growing importance of religion in the world where "billions of people face the challenge of adaptation to technological innovations and tough requirements of the global market."⁷³ He also emphasized the role of religion in the national consolidation of peoples in Eurasia.

Kazakhstan's authorities have been eager to advertise the country's model of interethnic and interconfessional accord. For example, as chair of the OSCE in 2010, Kazakhstan decided to focus on the promotion of tolerance and interconfessional harmony, arguing that it has important know-how in this regard.

In summary, the state policy toward religion in Kazakhstan is built on the dichotomy of "correct" and "traditional" religions and "suspicious," "destructive," and "non-traditional" ones. The Muftiate, as the conduit of "correct Islam," is supported and coopted by the government, which allows it to play a dominant role in the Islamic life of the country. The "nontraditional" movements and independent imams are suppressed by joint efforts of the state and religious authorities. What started after independence as full liberalization of the sphere of religious affairs and the separation of state and religion gradually transformed into a system of control and repression, reminiscent of the Soviet times, but lacking its ideological clarity. The state insists on its secularity and tries to keep the political space and public institutions (such as schools) free from religious manifestations while investing in the growth of religious education and interfering in religious life. As Alma Sultangaliyeva argues, by emphasizing the ethnic-cultural role of Islam, the state promotes the social importance of Islam in society, increases religiosity and religious knowledge, and in this way "re-Islamicizes" society.⁷⁴

⁷³ "Address of the President of Kazakhstan Republic N. A. Nazarbayev at the Opening Session of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions," religions-congress.org, September 23, 2003.

⁷⁴ Sultangaliyeva, 2012, p. 54.

Contestation Between the State and Religious Movements

Symbols and Rewards

State policy toward religion in Kazakhstan is a combination of the desire to appear as a progressive state respecting freedom of religion and the perceived need to tightly control and manipulate religious affairs. The methods of such control can be traced to the country's Soviet heritage. However, compared with the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has a much weaker set of symbols, rewards, and sanctions to offer or to impose on its citizens. Therefore, it can be more strongly contested by other social organizations, including newly emerging ones.

One example of such contestation is the popularity of Hizb ut-Tahrir and other Salafi groups. At the level of symbols, they can draw on powerful religious concepts and imagery and build on the already deeply rooted Islamic identity of the people. They can powerfully invoke such values as equality and justice as key values in Islam. Their message is simple and emotional and therefore attractive. They explain the evils and injustices of this world by deviation from the true Islam and advocate the reconstruction of an ideal society or an Islamic caliphate living in accordance with sharia law.

Salafi movements offer substantial rewards—and not only in the afterlife. They recruit supporters from a broad social spectrum but primarily from socially and economically disadvantaged youth and women—a significant number who have been unemployed. They empathize with these hardships and offer practical assistance.

Their symbols and rewards fuse into “strategies of survival” that are appealing to people disoriented and searching for identity and support. Importantly, they have a very clear idea of a certain order that helps to organize communities and groups even in difficult environments such as prisons. In fact, they seem to prosper in such environments. The International Crisis Group report focusing on Islamists in Central Asian prisons emphasizes the transformative and order-making potential of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. It draws on the example given by the head of a Kyrgyz prison: “It was a total mess. Prisoners were beating each other up. When the Islamists were brought in they needed just two months—then everybody started going to prayers. Even the *obshchak* (prison kitty). There were hardly any drug addicts anymore.”⁷⁵ They also help prisoners after release by giving them an address of a mosque where they can find shelter and support.

In contrast, the state has little to offer in terms of symbols and rewards. There are official ideological schemes combining patriotic education, the first president–leader of the nation's personality cult, emphasis on interethnic and interconfessional peace and harmony, and developmental rhetoric, but they fail to inspire the same level of conviction.

⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, “Central Asia: Islamists in Prison,” International Crisis Group, briefing no. 97, December 15, 2009, p. 11.

tion and commitment as Islamist teachings. The latest embodiment of such schemes is the concept of *Mangilik El* (“eternal people”) first proposed by President Nazarbayev in 2014 and then elaborated in the Patriotic Act “Mangilik El” adopted by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan in 2016. It defines seven immutable pillars: (1) loyalty to the historical mission of independence and pride in Astana, (2) unity, peace, and accord, (3) secular state and high spirituality, (4) sustainable economic growth based on innovations, (5) society of common labor (everyday and painstaking labor of all Kazakhstans), (6) common history, culture, and language, and (7) national security and participation of Kazakhstan in resolution of global and regional problems.⁷⁶

Behind the slogans, the reality is less lustrous. There are problems getting properly rewarded for “everyday and painstaking labor,” as well as systemic corruption. There is little trust in the justice system. There is growing inequality in access to quality education and weakening of social mobility.

In the absence of strong symbols and rewards, the state has to rely more on sanctions. Fear of harassment by the state and imprisonment is something that can affect a person’s choices in life. However, the fear of hell and god’s punishment can, for some, be even greater.

The slogan “secular state and high spirituality” implies the dichotomy of secularity and spirituality, but in practice the ethics of everyday behavior are largely assigned to the latter. There is little conceptual justification in government public statements or policy of secularity beyond it being the “spirit of the time.” For example, in the previously discussed contestation over banning the hijab in schools, the authorities defended their position by referring to the tradition of Kazakh women not wearing the hijab and that it is a foreign practice. While this might be the most practical and convincing justification for the general public, it is noteworthy that the policy is not justified on secular grounds, as it could be, for example, in regard to gender equality.

Islamists Inside the State

While the state positions itself as a guardian of secularity, there is an emerging trend of Islamism spreading among political elites. In 2005, Kairat Satybaldy, nephew of President Nazarbayev and then-head of the Human Resources Department of the National Security Committee, announced the launch of the new social movement, Ak Orda (named after the president’s residence in Astana). The announcement was made at the rally of the Islamic charity foundation Duniye with the participation of the head Mufti of Kazakhstan. Satybaldy stated that there is no need to look for a national identity, since Kazakhs have Islam, and that religion should play a more important role in public and political life and help to fight corruption, prostitution, and poverty. Later in a newspaper interview, he said that three religions should be allowed in Kazakh-

⁷⁶ Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, “Patriotic Act—‘Mangilik El,’ Full Text” [“Patrioticheskii akt—‘Mangilik El’. Polnyi tekst”], April 26, 2016.

stan: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The Ak Orda movement was registered in the Ministry of Justice and included the Kairat charity foundation and the Association of National Sports (representing eagle hunting, horse racing, camel racing). The idea was to turn the movement into a political party and appeal to spectators at the competitions (30,000–40,000 people) as future voters.⁷⁷ The transformation of the movement into a party did not take place (the constitution bans the creation of religious parties), but Satybaldy and his allies continue to hold important political positions and command considerable resources.⁷⁸

Another example of a high-profile proponent of Islamism is Asylbek Mussin, deputy of the Atyrau city council and son of the head of the president's administration, Aslan Mussin. In 2009, he created the Izgi Amal ("true faith") society (also known as "Quranites" or "rational monotheists"). It argued that the Quran is the only source of Islam, with Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi schools being the deviations. It is "enlightened" Islam that should become the spiritual and intellectual base for unifying the "civic nation" and inspire and discipline national elites.⁷⁹ Mussin claimed that the movement had more than 100,000 supporters, and it was reported that the membership included people in the president's administration, state agencies, and state holdings Samruk and Kazyna.⁸⁰ The movement rejecting the Sunna and the strict regulations originating from it was denounced by the Muftiate, which in 2009 issued a fatwa against the Quranites.⁸¹ In 2012, Mussin left the country when his father was removed from the president's administration for allegedly patronizing the leaders of an organized criminal group in Atyrau province.⁸²

These two cases demonstrate that the state itself is not immune from Islamization processes and that members of political elites can find Islam attractive and useful for mobilization and to create order. As succinctly observed by Sultangaliyeva, for those whose social and economic situation has worsened, Islam can provide a strategy of survival; for the elites, the religion can offer a strategy of legitimization.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ermek Kalizhanov, "'Ak Orda' Is a 'Bet' More than Life?" ["'Ak Orda'—'stavka' bolshe, chem zhizn?"] *Zakon.kz*, August 23, 2005.

⁷⁸ For example, Deputy of the Majilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan Bekbolat Tleukhan, supporting a supervising a network of mosques and imams (see "Bekbolat Tleukhan, Wahhabi or Not?" *azh.kz*, October 12, 2011).

⁷⁹ Sultangaliyeva, 2012, p. 61.

⁸⁰ Ivan Tikhonov, "Islamic Premiere," *Novaya Gazeta*, April 3, 2009.

⁸¹ Sunna Press, "SBMK (Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kazakhstan) Imposed a Just Takfir (Accusation of Infidelity) on Quranites" ["DUMK vynes spravedlivyi takfir (obvnenie v neverii) koranitam"], June 20, 2013.

⁸² Makpal Mukankyzy, "The Trial on the Case of the 'Criminal Group Created by Ryskaliyevs' Has Started" ["Nachalsya sud po delu o "sozdannoi Ryskaliyevymu gruppirovke"], *Radio Azattyk*, January 23, 2014.

⁸³ Sultangaliyeva, 2012, pp. 56–57.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

The current model of state policy toward religion in Kazakhstan contains internal contradictions. The state is secular and protects the political and public space from religion, but at the same time it strongly interferes in religious affairs, positioning itself as a gatekeeper, supervisor, and funder. As an authoritarian state, it does not allow for substantial social autonomy. It recognizes the powerful capacity of Islam to mobilize social movements and create templates for social and political order and therefore suppresses it. At the same time, it tries to turn it to its own advantage by coopting and controlling “traditional” Islam. By drawing on the Islamic element in the national identity, it compensates for the weakness of its own symbols.

How sustainable is this model of suppression and cooptation of religion, and what are possible trajectories along which it could develop? How effective are repressive mechanisms, and what can be the consequences of their use? What are the implications of the cooptation policies that the state in Kazakhstan is pursuing? How are these policies likely to affect the development of the state and society?

Suppression and repressive measures do seem to constrain the development of Islamist movements in Kazakhstan, if, for example, compared with the more-liberal environment in Kyrgyzstan. However, these measures can be counterproductive both in the short- and long-term perspective. In the short-term perspective, they could produce a cycle of radicalization. Harsh suppression of previously more moderate Islamists and their sympathizers could stimulate their militancy and lead to an increase in the number of successful or foiled terrorist acts, which would result in an even harsher response by the state. Maryia Omelicheva, drawing on research on Islamist movements, makes the conclusion that preemptive and targeted state repression may reduce political violence and diminish the level of popular support for Islamist groups, but when it becomes indiscriminate, violent dissent can increase.⁸⁴

There is also the issue of prisons as breeding grounds of Islamic radicalism. The International Crisis Group report warns that the growing number of Islamists in prison mean that more inmates, often with a record of violence, are drawn into the Islamist ideological orbit. In the future, they may apply those skills, either in prison or outside, to the promotion of their new faith.⁸⁵

In the long-term perspective, the suppression of independent Islam (both “traditional” and “nontraditional”) can result in its social and intellectual marginalization. Isolated from public debate and feeding off a sense of victimization, underground Islamist discourses could grow increasingly conservative and intolerant. By contrast, more public intra-Islamic debate, as well as pressures from the proponents of secularism, could result in an Islam more sophisticated and compatible with modern life.

⁸⁴ Omelicheva, 2010, pp. 167–186.

⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, 2009, pp. 10–11.

While state suppression of independent Islam can result in stagnation and marginalization of its discourses, the cooptation of religion by the state can also foster stagnation, conformism, and corruption, mirroring the state of affairs inside the state, along with a conservatism of religious tenets and structures. Young people in search of their “strategies of survival” and guidelines in life that seem right, just, and up-to-date with modern realities can be disappointed in the official coopted and uncharismatic religious authorities and turn to alternatives.

The policy of cooptation and suppression does not guarantee the expected result of “controlled” Islam. As noted by Sultangaliyeva, the experience of other parts of the “Islamic world” shows that the official policy of cultivating “loyal Islam” to counterbalance “spontaneous” Islamization cannot prevent the emergence of Islamist opposition.⁸⁶ The “spirit of the time” seems to support the rise of Islamist political and social movements, along with the rest of identity politics.⁸⁷

The results of the sociological studies previously discussed indicate that Kazakh-speaking youth in Kazakhstan tend to be more religious and conservative and less tolerant. With the decrease in ethnic and religious pluralism taking place in the country, this trend might be on the rise.⁸⁸ It is deeply worrying in this regard that both “traditional” and “nontraditional” Islamic discourses in Kazakhstan are predominantly socially conservative, and there are no prominent manifestations of prodemocracy or “liberal” Islam.

Even if democracy can largely be compatible with Islam, the tension between Islamic tenets and liberal values is more difficult to resolve. According to Tarek Osman, author of *Islamism: What It Means for the Middle East and the World*, the Islamists’ acceptance of plurality (often more pronounced than that of many secularists in the Arab world) “hardly ever translated into acceptance of civil liberties as equal to the tenets of Islamic law” and “the vast majority of Islamists never put internationally recognized civil, gender, and human rights on the same footing as Sharia rules.”⁸⁹ He also rightly notes the fact that the Islamists’ acceptance of plurality and some civil liberties is conditional, subject to their own interpretations of what could (or could not) be tolerated under Islamic rules.

The big challenge for Kazakhstan’s state and society in the future may be to manage both an Islamic revival and democratization without losing the achievements

⁸⁶ Sultangaliyeva, 2012, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods. Religion and Democracy on Three Continents*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁸⁸ The share of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan increased from 40.3 percent in 1990 to 64.6 percent in 2012, according to the data of the Committee for Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (see “Official Statistical Information > Emergency Data (Instant Information, Bulletins) > Population,” stat.gov.kz, undated).

⁸⁹ Tarek Osman, *Islamism: What It Means for the Middle East and the World*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016, pp. 249–250.

of secularism, such as gender equality, secular science-based education, and secular law. It is hard to predict how fast and how deep the process of Islamization will be in Kazakhstan. Timur Kozyrev, a prominent Kazakhstan religious expert, argues that given the very low starting level of religiosity and the reluctance of people to adopt Islamic self-restrictions, Kazakhstani society may largely resist Islamization.⁹⁰

However, it would not be prudent to take for granted the secularity of Kazakhstan's state and society in the medium and long term. The domestic, regional, and global social and political trends favor the growth of Islamism. Among them are, in the region of Central Asia, the postcolonial search for identity; growing inequality; and the weakness and suppression of secular ideologies addressing the question of social justice; and, in neighboring countries, the availability of external ideas and funding to feed local Islamist networks. In Kazakhstan, the conditions are ripe for the emergence of bottom-up, grassroots Islamic movements for people in search of moral guidelines, justice and solidarity, and also ways to advance in life (religious organizations and networks can work as social lifts). There is also a possible scenario of an elite group or groups taking up Islamist ideology in their struggle for power, particularly past the current regime led by President Nazarbayev, when the country enters into a new political stage.

Suppression and cooptation policies foster authoritarian and conservative sets of values and stifle the development of more pluralist and liberal Islam. They can be sufficient to protect the secularity and security of the state in the near future, but they do not build a foundation for medium- and long-term stability when the current post-Soviet authoritarian system starts to unravel.

⁹⁰ Timur Kozyrev, "Islam in Kazakhstan: Identity, Society, State" ["Islam v Kazakhstane: Identichnost, obshchestvo, gosudarstvo"], e-center.asia, undated.

Ukraine: Religious Confessions in Competition Under the Dominance of Political Discourse

Vadym Vasiutynskyi

The diverse confessional mosaic of mostly Christian denominations in Ukraine—from Protestants, and Roman and Greek Catholics to the three different shades of Orthodoxy (Autocephalous, Kyiv Patriarchate, Moscow Patriarchate)—is a reflection of historical processes through which Ukraine was subsumed by the empires on its western (e.g., Austro-Hungarian) and eastern borders (Russian empire, Soviet Union). It also illustrates the Ukrainians' insistence on preserving the many unique manifestations of their culture and identity. Despite some lingering prejudices, interconfessional struggles over property, or influence over believers' hearts and minds, interconfessional relationships have not been a prominent source of instability in post-Soviet Ukraine. Yet, increasingly, confessional affiliation has become a political statement, a marker of social identity, and an indicator of an individual's civilizational choice. This chapter provides an historical overview of the evolution of different religious confessions in Ukraine, outlines the sources and nature of interconfessional relationships today, offers initial evidence of confessional choice in Ukraine as a sociopolitical rather than religious preference, and presents Ukrainians' perception of the role of religion in conflict in Donbas. It concludes with a discussion of potential implications of politicization of religion and offers recommendations for ensuring that religion contributes to stability—not conflict—in Ukraine.

Religious Confessions in Ukraine, Past and Present

The modern confessional structure of Ukrainian society is the result of long historical development. Kyivan Rus (the Ukrainian protostate) adopted Christianity at the end of the 10th century. Christianity replaced pagan beliefs and has remained the dominant

religion in Ukraine today. However, the interconfessional relations have been characterized by a dynamic and complex interplay of different interests throughout history.¹

Historically, the two main lines of confessional confrontation in Ukraine arose between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodoxy and between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. As a result of social processes of the 11th to 13th centuries and the insistent aspirations of church and secular authorities in Kiev, the Autocephalous metropolis was formed. The metropolis was transferred to Moscow in the 14th to 15th centuries, which allowed the proclamation of the autocephaly of the ROC.

At the same time, Poland gradually increased its influence in the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands that were a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (14th to 16th centuries) and finally incorporated them into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (16th to 18th centuries). This led to a fierce competition between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. A historic compromise was achieved in the form of a Uniate (Greek-Catholic) church, which preserved the Orthodox rite, but remained under the jurisdiction of the Vatican.

As a result of the partition of the Poland in the 18th century, a larger part of the Ukrainian lands became part of the Russian Empire, which led to the uncontested domination of Russian Orthodoxy there. Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Greek Catholic Church were gradually eliminated. Both churches remained active in the southwestern territories, however, which were part of the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) empire.

After the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, new attempts were made to revive the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church, in alignment with a more general struggle for Ukrainian independence in 1917–1921. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was created then, only to be later banned and, ultimately, destroyed by the Soviet authorities. The same fate befell the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) in western Ukraine after its accession to the Soviet Union during World War II.

In the late 1980s–early 1990s, the establishment of freedom of religion ushered the revival of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), the UAOC, and the UGCC. The previously dominant ROC became the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. While formally autonomous, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church kept its canonical connection with the ROC, and hence has been subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP).

According to the Department for Religious and Ethnic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, as of 2016 there were 34,183 religious communities belonging to 81 confessions in the country. In addition to the previously mentioned groups, Ukraine is home to a number of other Christian denominations such as Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other religions including Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and paganism.

¹ Ivan Vlasovsky, *Essay on the History of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 10 Vols.* [*Нарис історії Української Православної Церкви: у 10 т.*], Kyiv, Ukraine: Edition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate, 1998; Anatoliy Kolodnyi, ed., *The History of Religion in Ukraine in 10 Vols.* [*Історія релігії в Україні: у 10 т.*], Kyiv, Ukraine: Ukrainian Center for Spiritual Culture, 1996.

Confessions with the largest number of communities are the UOC-MP, UOC-KP, and UGCC, followed by the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals), UAOC, Ukrainian Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses.² Table 6.1 summarizes confessions with the largest numbers of communities in Ukraine.

As confessional affiliation is considered to be a private matter, it is rather difficult to gauge how many people are affiliated with each confession and religious community. Although multiple surveys have explored this question, the varied methodologies used in the surveys impede our ability to present an accurate confessional picture. Additionally, because of Russia's aggressive actions on the territory of Ukraine, longitudinal comparisons are further challenged by the impossibility of access to the Crimea and in Donbas for data collection. Still, the existing survey research can provide at least an initial idea into the religious composition of the Ukrainian society.

In 2016, Custom Market Research Company TNS surveyed 3,500 respondents aged 16 years and older in all regions of Ukraine, except in the annexed Crimea and the occupied parts of Donbas. Seven percent of respondents identified as very religious, 49 percent as moderately religious, 28 percent as undecided but inclined to believe

Table 6.1
Religious Confessions with Most Communities in Ukraine

Confessions	Number of Affiliated Communities
Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)	12,334
Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate)	4,921
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church	3,366
All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals)	2,532
Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church	1,188
Ukrainian Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist Church	1,036
Roman Catholic Church	933
Jehovah's Witnesses	928
Other 73 confessions	5,340

SOURCE: Compiled based on the information from "On Annual Statistical Reporting on State-Confessional Relations in Ukraine for the Year 2016 (Religious Organizations)," risu.org.ua, March 29, 2017.

² "Religious Organizations in Ukraine (as of January 1, 2016)" ["Релігійні організації в Україні (станом на 1 січня 2016 р.)"], risu.org.ua, April 11, 2016.

5 percent as undecided but inclined not to believe, and 9 percent as atheists.³ Among the believers, 60 percent were members of the UOC-KP, 24 percent of the UOC-MP, 7 percent of the Greek Catholic Church, 3 percent of Protestant churches, 1 percent of the Roman Catholic Church, and 5 percent of other confessions.⁴

In another 2016 study, researchers from the Razumkov Center surveyed 2,018 adult respondents across Ukraine, with the exception of the Crimea and parts of the Donbas. In this study, 65.4 percent of the respondents identified as Orthodox, including 25 percent as adherents to the UOC-KP, 15 percent to UOC-MP, 1.8 percent to the Autocephalous Church, and 21.2 percent self-identified as “just Orthodox.” Among the non-Orthodox respondents, 6.5 percent identified as Greek Catholics, 1 percent as Roman Catholics, 1.9 percent as Protestants, 7.1 percent as “just Christians,” 1.1 percent as Muslims, 0.2 percent as Jews, 0.2 percent as Hindus, and 16.3 percent reported no religious affiliation.⁵

A study with a nationally representative sample of Ukrainians, conducted by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology (Kiev) in 2006, sheds additional light on Ukraine’s diverse confessional composition and the nature of Ukrainians’ religiosity. The survey yielded that about one-half of the Ukrainian population (50.4 percent) considered themselves to be religious (18.6 percent were not religious, 31 percent were undecided). At the same time, the respondents’ religiosity was more theoretical than practical in nature: Only one in seven religious respondents (14.1 percent) reported strict compliance with religious rites, about one-half (49.7 percent) followed them periodically, one-quarter (25.8 percent) observed religious traditions merely as a cultural phenomenon, and one in ten (10.4 percent) did not observe them at all. Among the various sociodemographic groups of the population, women, older people, pensioners, agricultural workers, entrepreneurs, housewives, villagers, residents of the western regions, and persons with low incomes were relatively more religious and prone to observing rituals. Ethnic Russians, engineering and technical workers, government employees, students, people with high incomes, and residents of Kiev and southern (except for Crimea) and eastern regions were less religious relative to the rest of the sample.

In terms of confessional preferences, the 2006 study also revealed a wide diversity of affiliations: the UOC-KP (10.4 percent), the UOC-MP (10.4 percent), the UGCC (7.8 percent), the UAOC (1.2 percent), the Roman Catholic Church (1.4 percent), the Christian Baptist Church (1.6 percent), the Seventh Day Adventist Church (0.5 per-

³ The remaining 2 percent did not answer this question.

⁴ “Religion in the Ukrainians’ Lives: What Do Ukrainians Believe?” [“Релігія в житті громадян України: у що вірять українці?”], TNS, 2016.

⁵ “To Which Religion Do You Belong?” [“До якої релігії Ви себе відносите?”], Razumkov Center Survey, 2000–2016; “To Which Orthodox Church Do You Belong?” [“До якої саме православної Церкви Ви себе відносите?”], Razumkov Center Survey, 2000–2016.

cent), the Pentecostal Church (0.8 percent), the Old Rite Orthodox Church (0.3 percent), Charismat confession (0.5 percent), Subbotnik (0.1 percent), Jews (0.3 percent), Reformist (0.1 percent), Muslim (0.8 percent), Krishnait (0.2 percent), Buddhist (0.2 percent), “other” (2.2 percent), and atheists (9.8 percent). In addition, 18.4 percent identified as “believers with no particular confessional affiliation” and 33.7 percent as “just Orthodox.”

Together, it appears that a great number of Ukrainians do not feel religious faith needs to be tied to a formal religious institution and that the majority of believers are Christian and most frequently Orthodox. While cross-survey and multiyear comparisons are challenging (because of the constraints just discussed), it appears, however, that since 2006, fewer people continued to identify as “just Orthodox” and more have chosen a specific confession since. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this may be the result of the pressures for religious determination exerted by the sociopolitical processes ongoing in Ukraine.⁶

One finding is particularly interesting: According to the results of the polls conducted in 2016, the number of followers of the UOC-KP is higher than the number of followers of the UOC-MP, but the UOC-MP has a higher number of officially registered communities. This is because, in reality, the majority of adherents of the UOC-KP attend the temples of the UOC-MP, which runs more than twice as many churches as the UOC-KP. People may not attach great importance to the question of the Patriarchate to which their nearest church belongs and may only care about the official name of the church, the Ukrainian Orthodox.⁷ As if capitalizing on this, the churches of the UOC-MP often do not advertise that they belong to the sphere of influence of the ROC and may even somewhat mask their affiliation, especially in the Ukrainian-speaking regions.⁸ For example, in Kiev, the doors of the churches of the UOC-MP are inscribed with “Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kyiv Diocese,” which reflects its affiliation to the UOC-MP, but sounds similar to the name “Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate.”

According to the 2006 study, mostly people of the older generation, ethnic Ukrainians, and residents of predominantly Ukrainian-speaking regions belonged to the UOC-KP and mostly older ethnic Russians living in predominantly Russian-speaking regions (and Crimea) claimed to be following the UOC-MP. The followers of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church mainly resided in Ukraine’s western regions.

⁶ This assumption is indirectly confirmed by data from Razumkov Center that suggest that in 2016, only 21.2 percent of respondents identified as “simply Orthodox,” fewer than in our survey in 2006. However, it is important to keep in mind that the survey conducted in 2016 did not take into account the preferences of the inhabitants of Crimea and Donbas, who are predominantly affiliated with the UOC-MP.

⁷ “Religious Organizations in Ukraine (as of January 1, 2016),” 2016; “Religious Self-Identity and Prayer in Ukraine” [“Релігійна самоідентичність і молитва в Україні”], Kiev International Institute of Sociology, July 18, 2016.

⁸ “Religious Self-Identity and Prayer in Ukraine,” 2016.

The majority of Greek Catholics predominantly resided in the three Galician regions in western Ukraine, mostly ethnic Ukrainians, rural residents, and agricultural workers. There were relatively few Roman Catholics, who mostly belonged to minority groups (e.g., Polish) and resided in western regions of Ukraine. The percentage of atheists turned out to be slightly higher in the eastern industrial Russian-speaking regions.

It appears that while the levels of religiosity are not very high and many prefer to abstain from ties with a specific religion or denomination, the majority of Ukraine's believers belong to Orthodox Christianity and choose between two major church competitors: UOC-KP and UOC-MP. Based on research by TNS and the Razumkov Center, this also holds true today.

The Nature of Interconfessional Tensions in Ukraine

The confessional diversity of the Ukrainian society, while a positive indicator of pluralism and democracy, also carries the risk of conflicts between members of different religious denominations, especially when interconfessional relations are continuously evolving in a volatile sociopolitical context. In this section, I suggest five potential sources of interconfessional tensions in Ukraine and discuss how they are reflected in the nature of interconfessional dynamics today.

Sources of Interconfessional Tensions

Theological and Canonical Differences

The first group of causes is related to theological and canonical differences. These differences are largely theoretical and scholastic and are mainly debated by clergy. These debates reach the mass of the faithful in a simplified form and often serve as a secondary argument in disputes over other divisive factors. Therefore, I only ascertain the presence of the theological-canonical factors in confessional confrontations but do not analyze them in detail.

Politics and Ideology

The intertwining of religious and political issues is ubiquitous in many modern societies (e.g., there is a connection between the state and Orthodoxy in Russia, the state and the Catholic Church in Poland). As the Ukrainian society has faced crossroads of critical civilizational choices, religious disagreements—while heated at times—have been closely aligned with and subordinate to political discords but have not carried great prominence on their own.⁹

⁹ Vadyn Vasiutynskyi, ed., *Psychology of Mass Political Consciousness and Behavior* [Психологія масової політичної свідомості та поведінки], Kyiv, Ukraine: DOK-K Publishers, 1997.

Psychological Factors

Fears of the unknown and uncertainty often form the foundation of intergroup mistrust and prejudice. These uncertainties can be also adaptive for helping group members build positive in-group identity at the expense of finding negative attributes in the identity of others.¹⁰ These psychological phenomena also help delineate who belongs and who does not. At the time of high sociopolitical polarization, the lines of us-versus-them political groupings often coincide with the group boundaries of religious denominations.¹¹

Competition for Power

The fourth potential source of interconfessional tensions is competition for power, influence, and place in the social hierarchy. Arguably, such competition is present in interactions between all religious confessions in Ukraine. On the surface, the struggle is primarily for public status, but more globally for the power over people's minds, which entails not just theological but also political-ideological and sociopsychological influence. This struggle for influence occurs in two ways: first, in pursuit of greater numbers of enlisted and converted believers, and second, in seeking closeness to the state power, which usually provides additional advantages.

Property Disagreements

Disagreements over property have largely resulted from the confiscations of religious properties by the state during the Soviet era and arguments over their reappropriation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The most resonant regarded the division of temples that took place in the 1990s, but some of the debates over religious property are still ongoing.

Overview of Interconfessional Tensions in Ukraine

These different sources of disagreements often come together in effecting interconfessional tensions in Ukraine. The historically established linguistic, sociopolitical, and cultural differences effectively divided Ukraine into two parts: central-western, which is predominantly Ukrainian-speaking and pro-Ukrainian in terms of identity, values,

¹⁰ Dmitry Ohlansky, *Psychology of the Masses* [Психология масс], Saint Petersburg, Russia: Piter Publishers, 2001, p. 240–244.

¹¹ S. P. Belavin, *The Social and Psychological Mechanisms of Forming "Own–Other" Images of the Representatives of Ethno-linguistic Communities* [Соціально-психологічні механізми формування образів "свій–чужий" у представників етнолінгвістичних спільнот: Дисертація], dissertation, Kyiv, Ukraine, 2014; Vadym O. Vasyutinskiy and Olena A. Lishchynska, *The Citizens' Attitudes Towards Religions and Spreading of "Unconventional" Religions: The Results of Public Opinion Polls in Ukraine* [Ставлення громадян до релігії та до поширення "нетрадиційних релігій": результати вивчення громадської думки населення України], Kyiv, Ukraine: Institute of Social and Political Psychology, 2006; V. O. Vasyutinskiy, ed., *Russian-Speaking Community in Ukraine: Social and Psychological Analysis: Monograph* [Російськомовна спільнота в Україні: соціально-психологічний аналіз: монографія], Kirovohrad, Ukraine: Imeks-LTD Publishers, 2012, p. 25–26, 63–95.

and a political vector away from Russia; and south-eastern, which is predominantly Russian-speaking and leaning to maintaining close economic, political, and cultural ties with Russia.¹² While the geographical and linguistic divisions are far from absolute, the power struggles between the “orange” and “pro-Russian” forces since 2004, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the Russia-fueled military crisis in eastern Ukraine have brought the existing divides to the surface and deepened their severity.¹³

Such acute polarization made religion a symbol of political identification and an additional marker to help delineate “us” versus “them.” The polarization drove many of those who were previously ambivalent about religious labels to adopt a more explicit religious identity. The discord between the pro-Ukrainian churches on one side (UOC-KP, UAOC, and UGCC)¹⁴ and the pro-Russian UOC-MP became an important manifestation of political divisions within the country. The intertwining of interconfessional relationships with identity politics in Ukraine effected a great degree of mutual distrust and antipathy between the adherents of these churches.¹⁵ Today, the tensions are mostly simmering, as the extensive prior experience of peaceful coexistence of Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking Ukrainians helps buffer ethnolinguistic and interconfessional conflicts around the country. Yet, if the political confrontation rises, propelled, for example, by the reanimation of Russian aggression or a continued downturn of Ukraine’s economy, the likelihood of the worsening of interconfessional relations may become unavoidable.

The tensions between the UOC-KP and the UOC-MP appear to be most prominent. While similar theological elements prevail in their canons and ceremonial activity, there are a number of fundamental differences. First, according to the formal status, the UOC-KP is an independent church, albeit not recognized by the world Orthodox community, which makes its position less secure in the global religious hierarchy,

¹² Dnistrianski Myroslav, *Ethnopolitical Geography of Ukraine: The Problems of Theory, Methodology, and Practice* [Етнополітична географія України: проблеми теорії, методології, практики], Lviv, Ukraine: Litopys Publishers, 2006; Vasyutynskiy, 2012; Vasiutynskyi, 1997, p. 42–67.

¹³ “Public Opinion on NATO: A New Look” [“Громадська думка про НАТО: новий погляд”], Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, July 6, 2016; Vladimir Paniotto, “How Has the Attitude of Ukraine’s Population to Russia and Russia’s Population to Ukraine Changed Between April 2008 and May 2016?” [“Як змінювалося ставлення населення України до Росії та населення Росії до України з квітня 2008 до травня 2016?”], kiis.com.ua, June 22, 2016.

¹⁴ There does not seem to be psychological tensions or notable political and ideological disagreements among the UOC-KP, the UAOC, and the UGCC today, but the leadership of the UOC-KP and the UAOC periodically engage in what appears to be the contestation over the sphere of influence (see “Negotiations on Unification of the UOC-KP and UAOC Ended in a Scandal” [“Переговори про об’єднання УПЦ КП і УАПЦ закінчилися скандалом”], *zz.te.ua*, December 15, 2011; “Kyiv Patriarchate Attitudes to the UOC-MP and the UAOC. The Result” [“Ставлення Київського Патріархату до УПЦ МП та УАПЦ. Підсумок”], *cerkva.info*, undated. In addition, the question of reappropriation of religious property created a considerable discord between these confessions in the 1990s.

¹⁵ “Wars for Souls. In Ukraine, Conflicts of Property Transition from One Church to Another Are Increasing” [“Війни за душі. В Україні наростають конфлікти переходів парафій з однієї церкви в іншу”], *tsp.ua*, June 12, 2016.

whereas the UOC-MP remains an affiliate of the globally recognized ROC. Second, the UOC-KP uses Ukrainian language in worship and fellowship with believers, while the UOC-MP conducts services in Church Slavonic (in the Russian version), and sermons are in Russian (although there has been a recent shift to conducting sermons in Ukrainian). Third, in their political alignments, the UOC-KP acts as an openly pro-Ukrainian church, and the UOC-MP insists—with a varied degree of transparency—on Ukraine’s continued alignment with Russia.

The competition between the pro-Ukrainian churches and the UOC-MP is also visible in an acute struggle for domination in society and for opportunities to influence state power. While the Ukrainian Constitution instructs clear separation of state and religion, the preferences of the Ukrainian political class in favor of either the UOC-KP or the UOC-MP (or the Greek Catholic Church) has been a clear indicator of the political dynamic in the country. In this sense, the conciliatory policy of the “orange” Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, who tried to balance the UOC-KP, UOC-MP, UAOC, and UGCC, was noteworthy. Then–Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich’s preference for the UOC-MP was obvious, as well as his intentional distancing from other churches.

It should be noted that the current Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, has a rather clear ecumenical position. As the idea of banning the UOC-MP because of its explicit or implicit support of Russian military aggression has been gaining popularity in Ukrainian public opinion, an increased confrontation with Russia or continued domestic economic downturn may lead the Ukrainian authorities to take a more unfriendly official stance toward the UOC-MP. On the one hand, the Ukrainian leaders may use this divide to increase political pressure on Russia and its supporters in Ukraine; on the other, they may be tempted to capitalize on the religious divides to distract from their own domestic shortcomings. The strengthening of the civil society in Ukraine and greater and more vocal commitment of the UOC-MP and its followers to the pro-Ukrainian agenda may help buffer the Ukrainian leaders’ possible exploitation of religious divides for attainment of political objectives.

The UOC-KP and UOC-MP have also engaged in tense property disputes. Representatives of the UOC-MP, who previously controlled all Orthodox churches (in Soviet times, the churches did not belong to the church; they were state property, and the church only rented them from the state), believed that this situation should be preserved, and newly emerged confessions should build new premises for themselves. The leaders of the UOC-KP, as well as the UAOC and UGCC, argued that if a particular community joined their following, they have the right to take over the religious property of that community, including the church buildings.

The struggles over property were also dramatic between the UAOC and UGCC in western Ukraine. This competition was relatively mild in cities that had many temples, but in small settlements with only one temple and roughly equal numbers of supporters, disputes over property grew fierce and have even involved physical violence.

Rarely, the two communities would come together to build a new temple, but most often one of the sides was pushed to bear all of the expense of the construction. Also, well known in Ukraine are the situations in Kiev and Lviv, where formerly Catholic churches were used as concert halls in Soviet times. After the fall of the Soviet Union, believers still had to share the temples with secular concerts. The court system was unable to decide on the issue. A similar situation in Vinnytsia was resolved when believers simply destroyed the original expensive organ. These property disputes still serve as a source of mutual distrust and apprehension.

The historically heated tensions between the Orthodox and Catholic confessions in Ukraine have been substantially tamed by now, primarily because of a significant reduction in the proportion of Roman Catholics. Still, even today, Roman Catholics are often perceived to be agents of Catholic proselytism, and their benevolent attitudes questioned as insincere.¹⁶ As Greek Catholics employ the Orthodox rite and conduct worship in Ukrainian, attitudes toward them are more positive, and they are viewed as similar to the Ukrainian Orthodox. In addition, their visible pro-Ukrainian political activism has helped form a solidarity-based unity with the pro-Ukrainian Orthodox believers.¹⁷

Additional tensions exist between the Orthodox and Protestants. The latter are often stigmatized as sectarians: alien, hard-to-understand odd members of society. The tension appears to stem primarily from the followers of the UOC-MP, who tend to view Protestants as agents of Western influence directed against Russia and its influence in Ukraine.¹⁸ There is also a fairly intense struggle among various Protestant churches “for a place under the sun.”

Another dimension of tension exists between traditional and nontraditional churches. Psychological reasons prevail in this type of confrontation: Adepts of newly emerging unconventional beliefs arouse suspicion and rejection, they seem too exotic, and their appearance in Ukraine is deemed unnecessary, unwarranted, and is perceived either as part of a conspiracy against society or as a harmful whim of irresponsible

¹⁶ Alexei Ilyich Osipov, “How Is Orthodoxy Different from Catholicism and Protestantism?” [“Чем православие отличается от католицизма и протестантизма?”], Pravmir.ru, March 25, 2015; “Orthodoxy and Protestantism,” [“Православие и протестантизм”], dorogadomoi.com, undated.

¹⁷ “Liubomyr Huzar on the Ukrainian Unified Apostolic Church” [“Любомир Гузар про єдиноапостольну Українську церкву”], tkachenko.ua, undated; “Political Analysis of the Role of Leading Churches and Christian Organizations in Electoral Processes in Western Ukraine: Dissertation” [“Яцишин У. В. “Політологічний аналіз ролі провідних церков і християнських організацій у виборчих процесах в Західній Україні: Дисертація”], Lviv, 2011.

¹⁸ This is one of the unfavorable statements of Orthodox ideologists about Protestants in the “Russian world” (“Orthodoxy and Protestantism,” 2011):

Protestants come from other countries, do not know Russian history, do not know Russian faith, do not know the Orthodox Church, they have no idea about Russian people and start teaching them about God. They believe that they are true Christians, while Orthodox are supposedly only some kind of deviation from the true ancient Christianity. A typical example of pride and arrogance that are [sic] common to all Western peoples.

citizens.¹⁹ Orthodox believers also worry about the perceived encroachments by supporters of new churches on traditional values and way of life. In addition, the pro-Ukrainian Orthodox often suspect them of anti-Ukrainian sentiments, and the pro-Russian of anti-Russian.

The problem of competition between Christianity and Islam is not critical in Ukrainian society, partially because there are very few Muslims in Ukraine. A cautious attitude toward followers of Islam has been mostly transmitted by the media through the influx of information about Muslim refugees to Europe and the associated cultural and socioeconomic challenges; the news of terrorist attacks committed under the flag of Islamic extremism also stir fears and prejudices among the Ukrainians. Possibly because of this, Muslims have faced some opposition from local residents and authorities in attaining permits to build mosques and minarets.

The opposition of Orthodox Christians and Muslims became more apparent in Crimea after its annexation by Russia. This opposition is not based on religion, however, but on the ethno-political conflict between the pro-Russian majority (ethnic Russians and partly ethnic Ukrainians) in Crimea and the Crimean Tatar minority, most of whom strongly objected the annexation. It was the Crimean Tatars (and not the ethnically Ukrainian population of the peninsula) who formed the main pro-Ukrainian force in the face of Russian occupation and has remained pro-Ukrainian since.²⁰ Today, the main factor of aggravation of interconfessional relations in Crimea is the official policy of the Russian leadership aimed at silencing ideological opponents and eradicating anti-Russian sentiments. In Crimea, the tensions between Orthodoxy and Islam do not have religious content but are subordinated to general political processes.

Although anti-Semitism was a grave sociopolitical problem in Ukraine for several centuries, today there is little (if any) political and ideological rivalry between Christians and Jews because of the small number of Jews remaining in Ukraine and almost complete absence of mutual proselytism.²¹ Although prejudice toward Jews still lingers in Ukrainian society (Jews in Ukraine and in most other post-Soviet countries experience prejudice not as a religious but rather as an ethnic and cultural group), arguably there is no anti-Semitism at the official level today.²² Because of the small Jewish population, there have been very few property disputes over former Jewish synagogues. Most of them were destroyed during the Soviet era, and some were turned into func-

¹⁹ Vasyutynskiy and Lishchynska, 2006.

²⁰ Nikita Gromov, "Crimean Tatars and Russian Officials: 'Reset' as a Compromise" ["Крымские татары и российские чиновники: «перезагрузка» в качестве компромисса?"], *Ib.ua*, October 17, 2016.

²¹ There was mass emigration of Jews in the last decades of the 20th century; according to the All-Ukrainian Census, the number of Jews declined from 840,300 in 1959 to 103,600 in 2001.

²² In Ukraine, no political party in the Rada today proclaims explicit anti-Semitic slogans. In the 2014 presidential election, two Jewish candidates jointly received more than 5 percent of the vote, while the leaders of two right-wing radical parties, which are suspected of anti-Semitism, received less than 2 percent.

tional buildings, at best, theaters, and at worst, warehouses. In areas that still have somewhat numerous Jewish communities, congregants were able to return to some of the temples, such as the Brodsky Choral Synagogue in Kiev, which used to be a puppet theater. However, it seems unlikely today for the majority of surviving synagogues to be restored to their religious status.

Sociopolitical and Psychological Differences

Are there systematic differences between people who choose different confessions? Detecting such variance among members of different religious groups may help glean what factors may serve as catalysts—or, at the very least, facilitators—of polarization, should the political crisis heighten further. My colleagues at the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine and I examined this question as part of several studies, conducted between 2006 and 2016. Two of these studies, conducted in 2006²³ and 2013,²⁴ surveyed nationally representative samples of Ukrainians; the most recent study, conducted in 2016, surveyed 214 Kiev residents.²⁵ Across all of these studies, respondents were asked to indicate their religious preference and about various aspects of their personal, sociopolitical, and economic life. In the following discussion, we focus on the responses of respondents who belong only to the most numerous groups: UOC-KP, UOC-MP, Greek Catholics, and atheists.

Interesting trends emerged in the analyses of several sociopolitical orientations: (1) political-ideological and language preferences (measured by such items as “It is necessary to hold a referendum as soon as possible and restore the union of the fraternal Soviet peoples”; “An independent Ukraine can have only one state language—Ukrainian”;²⁶ “If the Ukrainians spoke less Russian, then Russians would have been

²³ The study surveyed 2,000 respondents across Ukraine.

²⁴ This study was conducted in December 2013, in the midst of the events that ultimately led to what Ukrainians coined as the “Revolution of Dignity.” The study surveyed 2,008 people across Ukraine.

²⁵ The sample was representative of the age and gender structure of the urban population; among the respondents, there were atheists (11.4 percent), believers who did not belong to any religion (20.4 percent), Orthodox believers who did not identify with a particular denomination (36 percent), the followers of UOC-KP (11.9 percent), and the followers of UOC-MP (14.7 percent). Representatives of all other confessions accounted for only 7 percent of the sample; hence their number was insufficient for statistically substantiated conclusions.

²⁶ Over the years, studies have shown that language preference is an important marker of social identity and political preferences (Vasyutinskiy, 2012). Supporters of the Ukrainian language dominance tend to also value sovereignty, national self-determination outside of Russian influence, and a democratic way of development. Support for bilingualism in Ukraine has also been associated with a preference for tolerance of Ukraine’s closer alignment with Russia. Relatedly, surveys of the sociological group “Rating” showed that Ukrainian-speaking respondents were significantly more likely (91 percent) to support the national independence of Ukraine than their Russian-speaking counterparts (45 percent) (see “Dynamics of Patriotic Moods,” ratinggroup.ua, August

less tempted to ‘drag’ them in the ‘Russian world’”), (2) protest readiness (e.g., “If mass protests begin in our district, I am going to participate”), (3) assessment of leadership (e.g., “In Ukraine, there are no worthy leaders able to lead the country and defend its true interests”), (4) leanings toward political paternalism (e.g., “It’s not new laws, but strong leaders that Ukraine needs to solve its problems”), (5) view of religion as the bulwark of morality (e.g., “Today religion is the last bastion of morality and decency”), and (6) attitudes to nontraditional religions (e.g., “The nontraditional churches should be given a chance to fit in with our culture”).

Believers of the UOC-MP most eagerly supported the idea of restoring the Soviet Union, which is in line with their general proclivity to support closer ties with Russia.²⁷ Further, followers of UOC-MP and atheists were most reluctant to support policies and opinions that favored the Ukrainian language over the Russian language in Ukraine.²⁸ Conversely, the followers of the UOC-KP and the Greek Catholics were least likely to support the idea of restoring the Soviet Union and were more inclined to support policies and opinions favoring the dominance of the Ukrainian language.

Adherents of the UOC-KP were most likely as compared with others to show paternalistic tendencies in discussing approaches to resolving the country’s issues: More than others, they felt that strong leaders, not laws, are necessary to move the country forward. Atheists, on the other hand, were least likely to support this position. Overall, the attitudes of representatives of the most numerous confessions were in line with their expected political orientation: Assessment of the politically aligned leaders was more positive than of the political leaders on the opposing side. Atheists (and representatives of minority religions) were most likely to be skeptical about authorities in general.

Both the adherents of the UOC-KP and the UOC-MP shared the view that religion was the bastion of morality in a society. Not surprisingly, nonbelievers or believers with no particular religious affiliation were least likely to see religion as a bulwark of morality. Followers of the UOC-MP tended to exhibit most unfriendly attitudes toward nontraditional churches, which reflects the generally more uncompromising

15, 2014). Also, Ukrainian speakers were more likely to view the nationalist, anti-Soviet military organization Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists–Ukrainian Insurgent Army as a participant in the struggle for Ukrainian independence in the 1940s (51 percent versus 21 percent of Russian-speakers) and to consider the Holodomor of 1932–1933 a genocide against the Ukrainian people (83 percent versus 47 percent) (“Dynamics of Attitude Toward Holodonor,” ratinggroup.ua, November 22, 2016).

²⁷ For example, in our 2013 study, the followers of UOC-MP were more frequent supporters of the infusions of Russian capital than members of other churches.

²⁸ The latter can be explained by the fact that during the Soviet era, atheism was more common among the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine who lived primarily in industrial centers of eastern Ukraine, forming there the core of the Russian speaking world in Ukraine. As a legacy of this, the atheists in Ukraine tend to gravitate toward the Russian language and culture.

position of the UOC-MP on religious activity of representatives of other faiths.²⁹ Notably, among the surveyed respondents, Protestants supported nontraditional religions most often. Historically, Protestants had to live under the unfriendly dominance of the Orthodox majority in Ukraine. Therefore, they may empathize with the feeling of estrangement and rejection that the followers of nontraditional religions might feel and know what it is like to seek acceptance but face exclusion.

In addition, we examined some psychological differences among people with different confessional affiliations in Ukraine. Perhaps most relevant to this chapter are such constructs as locus of control (e.g., “A person is not in charge of his or her own destiny”), flexibility of worldview (e.g., “No one can know for sure what is true about our reality”), optimism about the future (e.g., “Socioeconomic and political situations in my life will change for the better”), and the level of importance assigned to high social status (e.g., “It is of utmost importance to pursue high social status in life”). Locus of control can be internal or external and is defined as an individual’s propensity to place responsibility for life events and their consequences within or outside oneself, respectively. The adherents of the UOC-MP exhibited higher levels of external locus of control as compared with the followers of the UOC-KP and atheists. Arguably, the authoritarian church structure of the UOC-MP may have a particular allure to individuals looking for external sources of meaning and guidance; this may also make the appeals of church leaders to their parishioners particularly powerful and mobilizing for (or against) conflict. Atheists (and believers who do not belong to a specific religious confession) reported the highest levels of internal locus of control.

Further, Greek Catholics showed the most flexibility in their worldview, while atheists held the least flexible positions. Greek Catholics also exhibited the most optimism about their future, which, quite possibly, was the result of the timing of the survey question in December 2013. The growing protests in response to the state’s crackdown on demonstrators made it clear that change was imminent, which invigorated Yanukovich’s opponents—of which Greek Catholics were a visible part. Finally, atheists were the most inclined to place importance on the pursuit of high status, as compared with religious people, particularly in contrast to the followers of the UOC-KP and UOC-MP.

It is important to view the presented data as mostly descriptive and to recognize that they do not describe all believers of different confessions or atheists. Yet, these systematic differences in sociopolitical attitudes are illustrative of the fact that religious choice in Ukraine appears to be closely aligned with sociopolitical preferences. As practical religiosity in Ukraine is rather low (as noted earlier in this chapter, even those who belong to a religion rarely practice it), it seems safe to assume that it is not religion that guides people’s political choices, but rather cultural and political identities that are doing so. On the one hand, choosing social identities that are coherent with the overall

²⁹ Ospiov, 2015.

belief system is not surprising. Yet, the implications of such a close alignment between political and religious choices in the case of Ukraine—a society where religious life is continuously growing in dynamism—should be carefully considered.

First, as discussed elsewhere in this volume (see the special feature by Neuberg and Filip-Crawford), religious infusion can exacerbate nonreligious conflicts and contribute to incitement of violence. Further, when conflicts acquire a religious dimension, they become more difficult to reconcile. Thus, with growing religiosity on the one hand and political polarization on the other, divisions along religious lines may have dangerous consequences, shifting the conflict from a political plane to a more intractable, moral one.

At the same time, political disputes can make interconfessional relationships tenser as well. When theological differences interlink with political disagreements, the psychological distance between the two sides of the religious-political aisle may grow, as may the stake in the religious competition over the hearts and minds of worshippers. Perceiving great, multidimensional dissimilarity in members of another group will necessarily serve as a challenge for building a harmonious Ukrainian society.

Relatedly, close alignment of religious and political lines will make usurpation of religion by politics (as well as of politics by religion) inevitable, which will stifle the development of true religious plurality and freedom. It is very likely that under the conditions of unstable political dynamics and polarization and under great pressure to diminish opposition to the political status quo, which in the Ukrainian context often translates into preserving a civilizational choice, the church in political “favor” may work to preclude the competing ones from thriving.

In sum, the consistent differences in sociopolitical attitudes of the followers of different confessions indicate that religious categorization in Ukraine today may be a clear marker of sociopolitical identities. To avoid the complications that may come from the entanglement between religion and politics and leave the door open for the development of harmonious intergroup relations in Ukraine, it is essential to work toward keeping religion and politics apart.

Psychological differences between members of different confessions also begin to tell a story of what aspects may energize different people for conflict or peace. For example, to forecast the evolution of conflict and stability in Ukraine, it could be important to understand that the atheists’ less flexible view of the world, pursuit of high status, and sense of agency for change in their lives may become mobilizing attributes in the case their worldview and status are threatened or challenged. The greater external locus of control (i.e., placing a degree of responsibility for one’s life’s events on someone else) may make followers of the UOC-MP more susceptible to the influence of church or aligned political leaders. Violation of the optimistic expectations of the Greek Catholics may be a sore point that may ultimately bring about hopelessness and the sense of uselessness of their efforts to lead Ukraine in a pro-European prodemocratic direction.

People's Perceptions of the Role of Religion in the Conflict in Donbas

Do Ukrainians see religion as a contributor to the ongoing conflict? It is difficult to overestimate the sociopsychological significance of the military and political conflict in Donbas. This conflict is fueled by contradictions within the Ukrainian society and aggravated by Russian armed intervention. This conflict encapsulates an extreme polarization of views and positions on the historical fate of Ukrainian society and statehood and is a violent manifestation of Ukraine's struggle between pro-Russian and pro-European vectors. The death of 10,000 civilians and military personnel and the large-scale military operations and destruction led to a tremendous emotional upsurge and increased mutual hostility between representatives of communities on the opposing sides.

We investigated the perceived role of religion in the conflict in Donbas in a survey of 100 residents in Mariupol and Lviv (50 people in each city) in an August–September 2016 study with a broader aim to understand prospects and obstacles to peace.³⁰ Mariupol is now the largest city in the Donetsk region (eastern Ukraine) that has remained under Ukrainian control; Lviv is the historical and cultural center of western Ukraine. Because of the ideological divides between east and west Ukraine, the residents of these two cities were presumed to provide perspectives from the opposite sides of the conflict. Among other questions, the survey asked respondents whether they thought religion played a positive or a negative role in the events in Donbas. If a respondent found it difficult to answer the question or immediately responded that religion played no role, he or she was offered a prompt. More specifically, the interviewer asked the respondent to think about the role of confrontation between the UOC-MP and UOC-KP in this conflict.

The content analysis of participants' responses showed that most often respondents did not think that religion played a role in the conflict (44 total respondents; 23 from Mariupol and 21 from Lviv). The additional prompt for an answer did not change their opinion. Some of these respondents offered alternative explanations to conflict causes. In particular, nine of them (seven from Mariupol) insisted that the causes of the conflict were political, not religious. Eight respondents (six from Lviv) believed that the main causes were the cultural and psychological incompatibilities between the warring sides. Two respondents (both from Mariupol) stated that the core of the conflict was in business/financial interests that have used religion to attain their goals. Another ten people (eight from Lviv) suggested that Ukrainians' general aversion from god was the underlying cause of this conflict and return to faith would help resolve it.

Still, a relatively large proportion of respondents attempted to explain the conflict in Donbas through the lens of interconfessional discord, although they inevitably

³⁰ The age and gender composition of the samples in both locations corresponded to the structure of the adult urban population of Ukraine.

linked it to political and ideological differences. Altogether, 36 people accused the UOC-MP or the ROC of contributing to conflict. Seventeen respondents (13 from Lviv) did it without the additional prompt, and 19 more (11 from Lviv) responded after being prompted with the additional question. No respondent, even in Mariupol, spoke out favorably about the role of the UOC-MP. Six respondents (five from Mariupol) accused the UOC-KP and other “pro-Ukrainian” churches of contributing to the conflict. Fifteen respondents (12 of them from Lviv) mentioned these churches in a generally positive light. Seven interviewees (five in Mariupol) talked about the mutual fault of pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian churches. Five respondents noted that religion played a positive role in the conflict, and four others offered that religion should have, but did not play, a positive role in the events in Donbas.

Together, a significant number of respondents from both sides of the country believed that religion did not play a role in the events in Donbas; some further emphasized that any use of religion in this conflict was just a means to achieving political or business ends. Still, among those who did view religion as a contributing factor to the conflict in Donbas, a majority accused the UOC-MP of having a negative impact. Notably, a majority of those who accused the UOC-MP were from Lviv, which is indicative that geographical, cultural, and political divisions extend to attitudes toward and perceptions of religious institutions that are viewed as aligned with the “other side.”

Reflections on Future Trajectories

The diverse confessional mosaic of mostly Christian denominations in Ukraine, ranging from the three different shades of Orthodoxy (UAOC, UOC-KP, UOC-MP) to Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Greek Catholics, is a reflection of historical processes through which Ukraine was subsumed by the empires on its western (e.g., Austro-Hungarian) and eastern borders (Russian empire, Soviet Union). The confessional diversity also illustrates the Ukrainians’ insistence on preserving the specific manifestations of their culture and identity. Overall, despite some lingering prejudices—such as struggles over property or competition for influence over believers’ hearts and minds—interconfessional relationships have not been a great cause of concern in post-Soviet Ukraine. In recent years, however, confessional affiliation has increasingly become a political statement, a marker of social identity, and an indicator of an individual’s political or even civilizational choice. Further, followers of different confessions appear to also differ systematically in how they view and navigate their lives and the expectations they have for their country and its leadership.

These sociopolitical and psychological differences along religious lines may have important implications for Ukrainian society as it struggles to emerge from instability of the recent years and move in the direction of pluralism, democracy, stability,

and social harmony. In this process, religion could be a useful instrument for bringing people together, providing a foundation of shared beliefs, and making connections through common routes. However, if religion continues to be increasingly linked with politics, the distance between the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian confessions will grow longer and religion will inevitably become a tool of conflict and instability, not peace. (The fact that “pro-Ukrainian” and “pro-Russian” are commonly used as descriptors in relation to the orientation of different churches highlights the arguably unhealthy marriage between religion and politics in Ukraine.) Conflicts that acquire a religious dimension are harder to resolve, and postconflict reconstruction/reconciliation can face additional hard-to-overcome challenges, as religion often places issues into domains of morality and absolutes. Even the fact that both the followers of the UOC-MP and UOC-KP see religion as the bastion of morality may become a deeply divisive and not a uniting factor if what is moral is construed differently. When pushed to opposing ends of the political spectrum, followers of both churches may feel that defending their side’s uncompromising vision is a matter of defending their religion.

As is evident in the case of Ukraine, religion does not generally evolve into a meaningful actor in conflict without many other factors facilitating this process. Since the interconfessional tensions in Ukraine are fostered by the sociopolitical context, working to defuse the volatile sociopolitical situation in Ukraine is essential. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers pursue two related approaches to ensure that religion does not become a tool of conflict in Ukraine: (1) defuse the general sociopolitical situation and (2) directly promote positive interconfessional relationships. For the former, ensuring that policies are guided by the principles that would move Ukraine closer to social healing will be of utmost importance. Suggested policies include

- institutionalizing and securing the protection of civil rights and freedoms, which would ensure that Ukrainians have a way to express their grievances and hold the government accountable
- affirming pluralism of opinions and creating policies to combat ideological monopolization to avoid politicizing the differences present in a diverse society
- prioritizing humanistic over political values, which would help protect religion from becoming a tool of political power struggle
- conducting thoughtful and transparent economic and political reforms that will ultimately ensure the Ukrainians’ economic and social well-being, offer a prospect of long-term stability and would alleviate competition for resources that often results in discrimination and “othering”
- working to combat corrupt practices, as corruption and absence of rule of law prevents Ukraine from following the path toward stability
- diffusing protest readiness through better attunement to people’s demands, transparency, communication, and protections for freedoms of speech and assembly

(allowing a forum to express concerns, which would prevent their “leakage” into social and intergroup domains)

- working to increase confidence in the government (including, through some of the previously suggested means), which would also alleviate pressure on societal disagreements and would allow a more systematic approach to addressing them
- offering an optimistic vision for Ukrainian society, one that prioritizes building a better future over condemning the contested past (recognizing the challenges of the past is important, but proposing ways forward that focus on the well-being of all of the country’s citizens will reduce the need for social animosity and help unite people in pursuit of common goals)
- seeking and capitalizing on mutual values between west and east Ukraine to avoid further polarization of the country already divided along the geographic lines
- designing optimal legislative regulation of the language issue that acknowledges the needs of Ukraine’s most prominent minority but also deals with the challenge of securing the sovereignty of Ukraine and preservation of its culture
- working for the peaceful resolution of the military-political conflict in Donbas, which is the principal driver of tension and animosity in Ukrainian society
- protecting public safety and promoting people’s personal responsibility for it, instilling the sense that everyone owns the country and shares the responsibility of keeping it safe and stable
- publicly discussing the importance of people’s sense of agency and their ability and responsibility to change their country for the better, which would help shift the focus away from what the other group does wrong and onto what one can do to make things better
- putting significant efforts into creating opportunities for self-fulfillment of youth to prevent them from seeking meaning in social conflicts and ideologies.

When it comes to promoting more positive interconfessional relationships, Ukrainian policymakers should adopt the following principles:

- openly work for true separation between religion and state, and religion and politics, making clear that Ukrainian policies are guided by the scientific, not religious, view of the world
- resist elevating the profile of one religion and proclaiming it to be dominant
- encourage and facilitate contact between members of different confessions
- support programs that humanize followers of different confessions in Ukraine
- encourage open discussion of interconfessional disagreements and seek conflict resolution
- emphasize the principles of religious plurality and freedom in Ukraine
- avoid implying that people need to have a confessional affiliation
- emphasize the humanistic rather than ideological orientation of religion

- present religion as a psychological buffer and source of comfort in uncertain and difficult times
- encourage both religious and nonreligious social activity of young people
- call for fair, objective, and lawful resolution of property disputes between the religious confessions and between the confessions and the state.

While some of these suggestions are broad and, admittedly, hard to implement in the current climate, they constitute an essential foundation, without which Ukrainian society will struggle to withstand internal and external pressures. While some of these suggestions require a long view and patience, as it may take time for them to take root, the effort to implement these principles in Ukrainian policies will necessarily begin changing the normative environment and bolster the resilience with which the Ukrainian society has been persevering through hard times. Although these guiding principles may sound idealistic given the many challenges Ukraine currently faces, they constitute critical and practical steps necessary to help reduce sociopolitical tensions, liberate religious life from excessive influence of political discourse, and, ultimately, usher long-term social stability to Ukraine.

Russia: The Stability Implications of State Policies Toward Religion and the Russian Orthodox Church

Irina du Quenoy

Brought to near extinction under the Soviet regime, the ROC has made a remarkable institutional comeback in the 25 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, becoming the predominant religious actor within the Russian Federation.¹ The church counted 9,734 parishes in 1989,² but in February 2016, it boasted 34,764 communities, of which approximately one-half could be found outside Russian borders (as of 2013, Ukrainian parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate accounted for about one-third of the total).³ About 70 percent of Russian citizens identify as Orthodox,⁴ and although levels of actual church attendance are low, they have been rising discernibly.⁵ Under the pontificate of the current head of the ROC, Patriarch Kirill I, the church has taken on an increasing role in the public sphere, solidified all the more so by President Vladimir Putin's avowed adherence to the faith.

Given this prominent position of the ROC in the Russian Federation today, it is appropriate to ask how the evolution of the state-church relationship may affect stability within that country. This question is complex, as the Russian state and the ROC

¹ Technically, the term *Russian Orthodox Church* refers to the larger body of believers and clergy, while *Moscow Patriarchate* refers to the administrative apparatus that runs the church's daily affairs. But in common parlance the terms have become interchangeable; I follow this usage here.

² Vladimir Sabodan, "On the Current State of the Russian Orthodox Church After the Adoption of the New Rules and Regulations," report to the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in October 1989, *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, No. 2, 1990, p. 9.

³ Patriarch Kirill Gundayev, "Report at the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, February 2, 2016," Patriarchia.ru, February 2, 2016; Andrei Kuraev, "Ecclesiastical Statistics of the ROC in General and Ukraine," diak-kuraev.livejournal.com, March 2, 2013.

⁴ "Churching of the Orthodox" ["Votserkovlennost' pravoslavnyh: indeks votserkovlennosti pravoslavnyh: Monitoring"] fom.ru, July 3, 2014.

⁵ The same fom.ru survey lists the level of actually practicing Orthodox at 13 percent, based on the frequency of church attendance. This figure may seem low, but it is about double the percentage cited in the mid-2000s by numerous reputable polling organizations, suggesting (together with my own field observations) that the level of observance is slowly but steadily growing.

mutually influence each other in a variety of ways. This chapter focuses on the specific issue of state policies toward the ROC and their implications for stability in Russia in the short and long term.

The chapter argues that the post-Soviet state's concerns about stability have significantly shaped its approach toward the ROC and that understanding the way in which this has happened requires viewing the evolution of policy toward the ROC within the larger context of the government's management of religion in general.⁶ The chapter offers a narrative time line of the development of the principles guiding the state's relationship with the ROC and religion more broadly, divided into four distinct periods. For each period, I describe the general contours of relevant policy and the ways in which considerations of stability contributed to its emergence. The conclusion presents the possible consequences of this analysis for stability within Russia, both immediately and in the long term, and suggests some policy implications for local and international actors.

The Evolution of State Policy Toward the ROC/Religion in Post-Soviet Russia

The development of the Russian state's approach toward the ROC specifically and religion generally since the collapse of the Soviet Union to 2016 can be divided into four distinct periods: the permission of unbridled religious competition (1990–1997); the institutionalization of managed religious pluralism (1997–2008); the shift toward definitively privileging the ROC under Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2011); and the securitization of “traditional religion” under Putin's second presidency (2012–2016). Within each period, evolving concerns with stability played a discernible role in shaping state actors' understanding of the proper role of religion (and more concretely, Orthodoxy) in the post-Soviet landscape.

Free “Religious Market,” 1990–1997

Policy Developments: Unrestricted Exercise of Religion

In 1990, as the Soviet Union was on its way to collapse, the Soviet of the Russian Federation (the Russian republic's legislative body) passed a radically liberal law on religious freedom,⁷ which proscribed state interference in religious affairs and vice versa,

⁶ While they are the focus of this chapter, stability considerations are not the only factor that has informed the decisionmaking process of Russian policymakers concerned with religion; those interested in the still bigger picture may reference the already copious and expanding English-language literature on church-state relations in post-Soviet Russia, beginning with the work of Zoe Knox, Kristina Stoeckl, Wallace Daniel, and Christopher Marsh, among other authors.

⁷ I use the term *religious market* in this section following the usage established by the “religious economies” school within the sociology of religion; see, for example, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of Amer-*

allowing the unrestricted proliferation of religious organizations.⁸ Once the Russian Federation emerged as an independent country in 1991, this legislation remained on the books and was complemented by the adoption of a constitution that enshrined the separation of church and state. Over the next several years, the country experienced an explosive growth of religious observance, and while the ROC was a clear primary beneficiary of the lifting of Soviet-era restrictions on religion, the other major confessions within Russia's borders actually experienced significantly higher rates of growth.⁹

Both the new legislative order and the robust growth of non-Orthodox religious organizations seemed to preclude the establishment of an exclusively privileged relationship between the state and the ROC. Indeed, early indications were that representatives of the state viewed "religion" *generally speaking* as a positive force in the building of postcommunist Russia. For example, while education remained officially secular, many public schools at this stage enthusiastically permitted both Orthodox clergy and foreign missionaries to engage in religious instruction; at the same time, the Ministry of Education experimented with a nationwide health education program known as *valeology* (*valeologiya*), promoted by holistic wellness centers tied closely to various new age, neopagan movements.¹⁰

This situation of unbridled religious competition and equal treatment by the state was fragile. By 1996, it was clear that the political establishment viewed the four major world religions in particular—Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism—as "traditional" to the Russian geographical space.¹¹ Moreover, by this stage, the state acknowledged (if only implicitly) the predominant position of the ROC even within this group. Tellingly, while Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish clergy would be present at then-President Boris Yeltsin's second presidential inauguration in 1996, only the patriarch of the ROC would deliver a congratulatory speech during the ceremony.¹² Still, as late as

ica: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005; James D. Montgomery, "A Formalization and Test of the Religious Economies Model," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 68, No. 5, October 2003, pp. 782–809.

⁸ "The Law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on the 'Freedom of Religion'" ["Zakon Rossiiskoi Sovetskoi Federativnoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki 'O Svobode Veroyisповедanii'"]. Archive of the Legal Acts of the State Duma of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic [Bank Pravovykh Aktov Gosudarstvennoi Dumy FS Rossiiskoi Federatsii], October 25, 1990.

⁹ Edwin Bacon and Matthew Wyman, *Contemporary Russia*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p. 44.

¹⁰ Perry L. Glanzer, "Teaching Christian Ethics in Russian Public Schools: Testing Russia's Church-State Boundaries," *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Spring 1999, pp. 285–306; Perry L. Glanzer, *The Quest for Russia's Soul: Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia*, Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2002; Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russian Orthodox Church: Current State and Vital Problems* [*Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov': Sovremennoe Sostoianie i Aktual'nye Problemy*], Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004, p. 359.

¹¹ See, among many other examples, "Alexander Lebed Distinguishes Between Traditional and Nontraditional Religions in Russia," National News Service of Russia, July 11, 1996.

¹² "On the Day of Dmitriy Medvedev's Inauguration, Aleksii II Will Conduct a Prayer for the Beginning of the Good Deed" ["Aleksii II v den' inauguratsii Dimitriia Medvedeva sovershyt moleben 'na nachalo dobrogo dela'"],

September 1997, the Russian Federation enjoyed unfettered religious freedom of belief and association.

Stability Concerns: Rejection of the Past and the Search for National Cohesion

For the Yeltsin administration of the early 1990s, the most obvious question of stability concerned preventing the disintegration of the newly independent Russian Federation. In the view of the reform-minded government, the solution lay in a deeply positive engagement with the West, accompanied by a definitive rejection of the Soviet past. The consequent openness toward everything Western meant embracing not just American/European values of democracy and capitalism—including constitutionally institutionalizing the principle of religious freedom—but also welcoming the influx of foreign missionaries. Despite these efforts, as the social and economic costs of the shift from the planned economy to capitalism became painfully clear, the increasingly unpopular Yeltsin administration faced the dual dangers of a communist *revanche* and the secession of restive regions, including but not limited to Chechnya, Tatarstan, and Sakha-Yakutia.¹³

At the same time, the ROC emerged during this period as a potent force within post-Soviet society. Popularly seen as a repository of ancient Russian traditions and historical continuity, as well as of positive values that might help the average citizen navigate the uncertain political and economic situation, the ROC routinely scored as the most-trusted institution in the country in independent polling, well ahead of the president and parliament.¹⁴ Additionally, as the only institution that had survived intact from precommunist times, the ROC shared the Yeltsin government's aversion to the Soviet regime, which had, after all, attempted to eradicate religion altogether.

The recognition of these factors led the Yeltsin administration to view the ROC as a natural ally in stabilizing a domestic situation that seemed to be spinning out of control by 1996, believing that the ROC's support would lend the regime a degree of legitimacy it otherwise lacked. Indeed, as the revived Communist Party seemed on the verge of achieving electoral victory in the presidential elections that year, the ROC

religio.ru, undated.

¹³ See, for example, Alexander Kuznetsov, "The Meltdown of the Russian Federation in the Early 1990s: Nationalist Myth-Building and the Urals Republic Project," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 19, No. 1, December 2010, pp. 23–36; Ann Robertson, "Yeltsin, Shaimiev, and Dudaev: Negotiating Autonomy for Tatarstan and Chechnya," in Daniel R. Kempton and Terry D. Clark, eds., *Unity or Separation: Center-Periphery Relations in the Former Soviet Union*, New York: Praeger, 2002, pp. 99–142; Marjorie Balzer and Irina Vinokurova, "Nationalism, Interethnic Relations and Federalism: The Case of Sakha Republic (Yakutia)," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 1996, pp. 101–120.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the degree to which the ROC was seen as the most trusted institution in public life in the early 1990s, including survey data, see Stephen White and Ian McAllister, "The Politics of Religion in Post-Soviet Russia," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1997, pp. 235–252; see also figures reported by Stephen White in "The Political Parties," in Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman, and Richard Sakwa, eds., *Developments in Russian Politics 6*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 90.

leadership supported the Yeltsin candidacy by declaring that Orthodox Christians could not, in good conscience, vote for the communists; Yeltsin won the election, solidifying the notion that the voice of the ROC carried political weight.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the volatile situation in regions dominated by non-Orthodox minorities dictated the need to emphasize a multinational Russia whose identity was not based on Russian ethnicity or Orthodox religiosity, providing the context for the emergence of the idea of four major “traditional” Russian confessions.

1997–2008: Russia as a Multiconfessional State, Within Limits

Policy Developments: Restrictive Legislation (1997) and a New Status Quo

In October 1997, the era of unrestricted religious freedom in the Russian Federation came to an end with the passage of the federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. The law stipulated that, to obtain certain rights and benefits (e.g., exemption from taxation, funding for building registration and maintenance), religious associations had to henceforth prove 15 years of legal activity on Russian territory.¹⁶ The intended effect was to limit the activities of foreign missionaries and restrict the growth of so-called new religious movements inside Russia.

The preamble to the 1997 legislation also implicitly formalized the already widely accepted notion of Russia having four major “traditional” religions.¹⁷ Specifically, the text notes the important role played by the ROC in Russia’s history. It also stipulates that “Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism and other religions” form an “insoluble part of the historical patrimony of the peoples of Russia,” with the order in which the four major confessions were mentioned suggesting their relative importance.¹⁸

Following the adoption of the law in about 2008, state policies toward religion remained relatively stable, along the following lines: Russia was understood to be a

¹⁵ On the perceived strength of the “Orthodox” factor in the 1996 elections, see Aleksandr Verkhovskii et al., *Political Xenophobia: Radical Groups. Attitudes of the Leaders. The Role of the Church* [*Politicheskaia Ksenofobiia: Radikal’nye Gruppy. Predstavleniia Liderov. Rol’ Tserkvi*], Moscow: Izd-vo OOO Panorama, 1999, p. 75.

¹⁶ “The Federal Law ‘On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religion Associations’ [“Federal’nyi Zakon ‘O Svobode Sovesti i o Religioznykh Obiedineniakh’”], The Slavic Legal Center [Slavianskii Pravovoi Tsentri], amended March 21, 2002.

¹⁷ While the literature on the passage of the 1997 law and its intended and actual effects is copious, incorporating hundreds of scholarly and media publications in both English and Russian, the following articles provide a comprehensive overview: Derek H. Davis, “Russia’s New Law on Religion: Progress or Regress?” *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1997, pp. 645–655; Elliott Mark and Sharyl Corrado, “The 1997 Russian Law on Religion: The Impact on Protestants,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 1, March 1999, pp. 109–134; Wallace L. Daniel and Christopher Marsh, “Russia’s 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience in Context and Retrospect,” *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Winter 2007, pp. 5–17; Dara Hallinan, “Orthodox Pluralism: Contours of Freedom of Religion in the Russian Federation and Strasbourg Jurisprudence,” *Review of Central and East European Law*, Vol. 37, No. 2–3, 2012, pp. 293–346.

¹⁸ “The Federal Law ‘On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religion Associations’ [“Federal’nyi Zakon ‘O Svobode Sovesti i o Religioznykh Obiedineniakh’”], The Slavic Legal Center [Slavianskii Pravovoi Tsentri], September 26, 1997.

multiconfessional state and home to four major and a number of minor “traditional” confessions. Public officials from the president down routinely emphasized the positive image of Russia as a bridge between civilizations, a place where Christianity coexists peacefully with other world religions, especially Islam.¹⁹ Still, bureaucrats at both federal and regional levels routinely accorded the ROC deferential treatment. This took the form of, among other things, support for the reconstruction of new churches and the building of new ones, as well as the proliferation of various social initiatives carried out jointly by the church and state representatives.²⁰

Yet, this special consideration was not the exclusive preserve of the Moscow Patriarchate. The other three major “traditional” confessions benefited from similar opportunities, if on a smaller scale.²¹ In practice, “traditional” as a concept extended beyond Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. As previously mentioned, the preamble to the 1997 law referenced a generic “Christianity,” leaving it open to the interpretation that any Christian denomination with a historically significant presence in Russia could expect government recognition of its rights and privileges. Russian Catholics, Orthodox Old Believers, Lutherans, and Evangelicals, among others, successfully employed the preamble’s language to safeguard their access to the benefits that came with “traditional” status.²² Furthermore, the fact that the preamble’s language acknowledged the importance of “other religions” in addition to the four major confessions permitted representatives of such “native” faiths as Siberian shamanism to claim courteous treatment by political elites.²³ Finally, within this configuration, “nontraditional” religious associations continued to exist legally and in some cases to expand,

¹⁹ See, for example, “‘Russian Newspaper’: Russia and the Islamic World: Ambassador of the President for Special Assignments Veniamin Popov Talks About the Nature and Prospects of Russia’s Interaction with the Islamic World” [“Rossiia i islamskii mir. Posol prezidenta po osobym porucheniiam Veniamin Popov rasskazyvaet o kharaktere i perspektivakh vzaimodeistviia Rossii s islamskim mirom”], *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, July 31, 2004; “Vladimir Putin Congratulated the Muslims of Russia with Eid-al-Fitr” [“Vladimir Putin pozdravil musul’man Rossii s prazdnikom Uraza-bairam”], *Izvestia*, November 25, 2003.

²⁰ Among countless examples, see “All Our Dioceses Conduct Charitable Work” [“Vse nashy eparkhii vedut blagotvoritel’nuiu rabotu”], *AiF. Dolgozhytel*, June 17, 2004; Irina Vladimirova, “Kursk United the Politicians and the Church” [“Kursk obiedinil politikov i tserkov”], *Drug dlia druga (Kursk)*, July 27, 2004.

²¹ See, among many such examples, “Religious Leaders Will Become the Stronghold for the Rule of Law” [“Religioznye lidery stanut opornym punktom pravoporiadka”], RIA Novosti “Mir Religii,” July 11, 2002; “The Jewish Community of Veliky Novgorod Opened the Center of Its Spiritual Heritage” [“Evreiskaia obschina Velikogo Novgoroda otkryla tsentr svoego dukhovnogo nasledia”], *ITAR-TASS*, via Portal Credo, June 25, 2002.

²² Among many examples of positive state policies in the period 1997 to 2008 toward the “traditional” religions outside the quartet of “Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism,” see “The Head of the Altai Republic Is Convening the Science, Religion, and Government Council” [“Sovet nauki, religii i vlasti sozdaetsa pri glave Respubliki Altai”], *Ria Novosti*, March 5, 2003; “The Head of Administration of the Tambov Region Met with the Leadership of the Confessions Operating in the Region” [“Glava administratsii tambovskoi oblasti vstretilsa s rukovodstvom konfessii, deistvuiuschikh v regione”], March 17, 2004.

²³ For example, “The Hakassian Holy Stone Is Back in the Steppes” [“Sviaschennyi kamen’ hakasov vernulsia v step”], Portal Credo, September 3, 2003.

suffering occasional harassment from local officials but without being subjected to visibly coordinated state repression.²⁴

In practice, then, the period from 1997 to 2008 was characterized by a circumscribed religious heterogeneity, in line with what some scholars at the time described as the Russian regime's overall tendency toward "managed pluralism."²⁵ Throughout, the federal government resisted the ROC's efforts to lobby it on behalf of the church's own interests. From 1991 on, the Moscow Patriarchate had a clearly defined list of demands on the state: limitations on the proselytizing activities of foreign religious groups; censorship of "immoral and violent" content in Russian media; inclusion of Orthodox religious instruction in public schools; introductions of chaplains into the Russian army; and restitution of church property confiscated during the 1917 Russian Revolution.²⁶ Of this list, only the first point was satisfied prior to 2008 with the passage of the 1997 law. While the ROC rebuilt many church structures between 1990 and 2008, as well as constructed new houses of worship and administrative and other buildings, much of this activity took part on land that was on long-term, rent-free loan from the state; legally, the state continued to own most ecclesiastical property. Most embarrassingly for the church, when, in the mid-2000s, the Moscow Patriarchate lobbied intensely for the introduction of a version of religious instruction known as "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" into public school curricula, Putin personally blocked the initiative in late 2007 on the grounds that such a project contradicted the principle of church-state separation.²⁷

One final detail is important for understanding the complexities of the Russian government's policies toward religion that emerged during this period. In a number of regions, the state bureaucracy tended to favor other "traditional" religions *over* the ROC because of local demographic considerations. To be sure, local administrators tread a fine line between privileging the regionally dominant non-Orthodox population and entirely alienating the Orthodox constituency; however, in places such as the

²⁴ For example, "Mormons Expand Their Activities in Sakhalin" ["Mormony rashyriaiut svoiu deiatel'nost' na Sakhaline"], *Ostrova*, October 31, 2002; "Krishnaites Open Traditional Processions in Perm" ["Krishnaity otkryvaiut traditsionnye shestviia v Permi"], *Novyi Region*, May 11, 2006.

²⁵ Harley Balzer, "Managed Pluralism: Vladimir Putin's Emerging Regime," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2003, pp. 189–226; Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Managed Pluralism' and Civil Religion in Post-Soviet Russia," in Christopher Marsh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, eds., *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002, pp. 75–89.

²⁶ See Irina Papkova, *Orthodoxy and Democracy in Russia: New Interpretations*, Ph.D. dissertation, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2006, especially chapter four, and Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011, especially chapter four.

²⁷ "Equidistancing of Religion: Putin Opposes Teaching Religion as a Compulsory Subject in Schools" ["Ravnoudalenie religii: Putin protiv obiazatel'nogo prepodavania religii v shkolah"], Graniru.org, September 14, 2007.

Muslim-majority areas of the North Caucasus and parts of Siberia and Kalmykia, the Moscow Patriarchate was clearly the junior religious actor.²⁸

Stability Concerns: From Domestic Chaos to the Putinist Revival

In 1997–2008, considerations of stability played into the evolution of state policies toward religion in several ways, all best understood in the context of the shift from the turbulent 1990s to the more outwardly stable domestic situation of the first two Putin terms.

First, members of the Russian Duma pressed for the restrictive legislation of 1997 largely because of the political elites' fear that foreign missionaries and previously unknown "new religious movements" were in fact agents acting on behalf of the West to destabilize the Russian Federation, part of a general anti-Russian plan that allegedly included the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the conflict in Chechnya, and the country's growing economic crisis.²⁹ In addition, around the time the law was adopted, Yeltsin was facing the nearly constant threat of impeachment by the Duma, which was dominated by a coalition of communists and nationalists fiercely opposed to his reform efforts; Yeltsin's removal from the presidency would arguably have imperiled the project of a democratic post-Soviet Russia and threatened the stability of the entire region. Evidence suggests that the first Russian president's motivation in signing the law limiting religious freedom—which he had initially vigorously opposed—lay at least partly in wishing to avoid this destabilizing outcome.³⁰

After the chaotic 1990s and Russia's economic recovery of the early 2000s under the first Putin presidency, these overriding concerns with the stabilization of the Russian Federation's shaky domestic situation and fears regarding external threats sub-

²⁸ For example, Geraldine Fagan, "Russia: Few Complaints over Kalmykia's State Support for Buddhism," Forum 18 News Service, April 11, 2003; Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, "Whose Steeple Is Higher? Religious Competition in Siberia," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2005, pp. 57–69. See also the substantial available scholarly literature on Islam in the North Caucasus.

²⁹ On Chechnya, NATO, and the economic crisis as being allegedly driven by anti-Russian Western policy, see *State Duma. Meetings Transcripts [Gosudarstvennaia Duma. Stenogrammy Zasedanii]*, vols. 1996 and 1997, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennoi Dumy 1996 and 1997; examining the transcripts of any session at random during this time period is sufficient to illustrate the point being made here. On the widespread perception in Russia—both among elites and the general population—of the link between foreign missionaries and a threat from the West, see (among many other examples) Mikhail Gorbunov, "The Northern-Most Counterintelligence" ["Samaia severnaia kontrrazvedka"], *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, January 5, 1997; Sergei Babichev, "Subjective Notes. Who Is Dressed Up as a Pastor?" ["Subiektivny zametki. Kto riaditsia v odezhdy pastyria?"], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, July 8, 1995; "The Address of the State Duma to the President of the Russian Federation About the Dangerous Consequences of the Influence of Some Religious Organizations on the Public, Family, and Individual Well-Being of the Russian Citizens" ["Obrashchenie Gosudarstvennoi Dumy k Prezidentu Rossiiskoi Federatsii ob opasnykh posledstviakh vozdествiia nekotorykh religioznykh organizatsii na zdorovie obschestva, semmii, grazhdan Rossii"], *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, December 28, 1996.

³⁰ "The President's Veto Appears to Be Well-Argued" ["Veto prezidenta vygliadit solidno argumentirovannym"], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, July 25, 1997. For an extensive discussion into the factors that went into the adoption of the 1997 law, including the ones mentioned here, see in general Papkova, 2006, chapter four.

sided, as did campaigns to further curb religious diversity. The passage of the 1997 law appeared enough of a measure to discourage the activities of foreign missionaries and new religious movements. While policymakers occasionally spoke of the need for stronger control mechanisms, the legislation on the books remained unchanged during this period.³¹ At the same time, a number of factors—the continuing volatile situation in the North Caucasus, Russia’s efforts to support the United States in its post-9/11 Global War on Terror, and the need to solidify the commitment of Tatarstan to renounce its secessionist ambitions—fed into the projection of Russia’s image as a multicultural, multireligious bridge between civilizations. Thus, for example, the support of “traditional confessions” was complemented in the international arena with Russian efforts to join the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.³²

Admittedly, of the three non-Orthodox “traditional religions,” the Islamic community emerged early on as the sort of unspoken “other” in relation to the ROC, if only because of demographic realities.³³ While the inclusion of Islam as one of the privileged confessions guaranteed the Muslim clerical establishment’s support for the 1997 legislation, in general, from 1997 to 2008, any explicitly “pro-Orthodox” government policy tended to raise tensions with Islamic institutions. Given the flashpoints described earlier (Chechnya, the North Caucasus, Tatarstan), the destabilizing potential of overt government support for Orthodox claims becomes obvious and contextualizes the frequent appeal by state officials to Russia as a multiconfessional state with “four traditional religions” in response to the Moscow Patriarchate’s lobbying efforts.³⁴

Finally, and of critical importance, the Putin regime during this period continued (at least on the level of official rhetoric) to think of Russia’s long-term survival and stability as depending on successful integration, or at least constructive partnership,

³¹ See, for example, Aleksandr Verkhovskii, “The State Duma Is Preparing New Limitation of the Religious Freedom” [“V Dume gotoviatsa novye ogranicheniia religioznoi svobody”], via Portal Credo, May 31, 2005.

³² For example, “Russia Wants to Be Partner to Islamic World,” *Pravda.Ru*, June 15, 2004.

³³ While statistics on the percentage of the Russian population that may be considered Muslim are notoriously imprecise (with current estimates ranging from about 6.5 percent to 15 percent), the Islamic community ranks clearly as the second-largest in Russia and is heavily preponderant in the politically unstable North Caucasus region. See, for example, “Arena: Atlas of Religions and Nationalities in Russia,” *sreda.org*, 2012; “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe,” Pew Research Center, May 18, 2017. Of particular relevance to the period discussed in this section (1991–2003) is the number of registered Islamic communities/places of worship that grew at a faster rate than those of the ROC. See Bacon and Wyman, 2006, p. 44.

³⁴ Of numerous possible examples of this dynamic, see in particular the negative reaction of a significant part of the Islamic clerical establishment to attempts, in the early 2000s, to introduce the “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” course into the public school curriculum, as well as to government rhetoric referring to Russia as a state with several “traditional religions” that accompanied policy reversal in this case (“The Address of the Mufti Council to the Members of the Russian Inter-Religious Council from 01.16. 2003” [“Obrashchenie Soveta Muftiev Rossii Chlenam Mezhreligioznogo Soveta Rossii ot 16.01.2003 g.”] (author archive), January 16, 2003; “Religious Education in Schools Should Be Optional” [“Religioznoe obrazovanie v shkolakh dolzhno byt’ fakul’tativnym”], *Regions.ru*, September 15, 2007.

with the West.³⁵ Presidential speeches and other government documents from this era barely, if ever, reference Orthodoxy (or religion generally, for that matter), as the state focused instead on building national cohesion based on economic prosperity and the image of a secular, multinational Russia “rising from its knees” to reclaim its rightful place on the world stage.³⁶ More than that, by the 2004 election, public officials had determined what social surveys by Western scholars had shown as early as the late 1990s: voter identification with “Orthodoxy” did not affect their electoral preferences.³⁷ In other words, Orthodox religious believers as a constituency did not in fact form an organized bloc that could sway the public against the regime, contrary to widespread belief during the Yeltsin years (see previous discussion about 1990–1996); the logical conclusion to be drawn was that the state’s stability did not in any way depend on acceding to the Moscow Patriarchate’s lobbying efforts on issues important to the church.

2008–2011: The Medvedev Interlude

Policy Developments: The “Orthodox” Turn

The presidency of Dmitry Medvedev is widely understood to have been a mere continuation of the Putin regime under a different name. Yet, in the realm of policy toward religion—and toward Orthodoxy in particular—the four-year period between 2008 and 2011 was marked by significant change. Indeed, despite Putin’s own publicly acknowledged adherence to the Orthodox faith, the second Russian president had, from 1999 to 2008, walked a clearly defined line between personal belief and preferential treatment of the ROC by the regime.³⁸ In contrast, the new administration pursued policies clearly aimed at strengthening the church’s positions in Russian society.

³⁵ See, for instance, Laszlo Poti, “Putin’s European Policy,” in Janusz Bugajski and Marek Michalewski, eds., *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002, pp. 135–152; Ira Straus, “NATO: The Only West That Russia Has?” *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2003, pp. 245–269.

³⁶ For more on the place of Orthodoxy (or rather, the lack thereof) in government strategic thinking during this time period see Papkova, 2006, chapter five.

³⁷ See Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, *The 1999–2000 Elections in Russia: Their Impact and Legacy*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 128; and Timothy J. Colton, *Transnational Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 85. For a clear demonstration of how the elites came to understand the negligible impact of the “Orthodox factor” on electoral outcomes, see the differences between the party platform of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation for 1995 and 2003: “The Russian Communist Party’s Election Platform,” in V. A. Oleschuk, V. V. Pribylovskii, and M. N. Reitblat, eds., *Parliamentary Parties, Movements, and Unions [Predvybornaia Platforma KPRF 1995]*, Moscow: OOO “Panorama,” 1996, p. 26, and “Power to the People! The Election Platform of the Russian Federation Communist Party” [“Za Vlast’ Trudovogo Naroda! Predvybornaia Platforma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Rossiiskoi Federatsii”], aih.net, 2003.

³⁸ “Putin and His Family Are Christians. That Is What Matters” [“Putin i ego semiiia khristiane. Eto glavnoe”], *Izvestiia*, December 7, 2001.

On the symbolic level, the new tone could be discerned in the institutionalization of the “Day of the Baptism of Rus” as a federal holiday.³⁹ More prosaically, in June 2009, Medvedev signaled his personal approval for at least some kind of Orthodox component in the federal public school curriculum; by April 2010, experimental courses in the “Fundamentals of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” were introduced in 19 Russian regions, overturning two decades of state policy to the contrary.⁴⁰ The same spring, the Ministry of Defense institutionalized the military chaplaincy and began actively recruiting clergy to minister to the armed forces.⁴¹ Moreover, later in the same year, the state moved decisively in the direction of returning religious property confiscated in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. On November 30, 2010, Medvedev signed into law Federal Law No. 327-FZ, “Regarding the Transfer of Properties of Religious Significance Currently in Government or Municipal Ownership, to Religious Organizations,” permitting the transfer of most types of ecclesiastical property back to its original owners.⁴²

Within two years of Medvedev assuming office, the regime had acquiesced to grant the ROC three significant shifts in federal policy that had eluded the church during the entirety of the Yeltsin and first Putin presidencies. Other “traditional” confessions also stood to benefit from these developments (e.g., the new educational curriculum ostensibly gave students the option of studying the fundamentals of *any* of the four traditional religions or learning instead about “secular ethics”). However, it is clear that the regime adopted the relevant legislative changes in all three realms previously discussed, noting the interests of the ROC above those of all other religious organizations. Characteristically, the language of the legislation emerged out of consultations of state actors with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, including the personal involvement of Patriarch Kirill I.⁴³

³⁹ “Day of Baptism in Russia. Reference” [“Den’ kreshcheniia Rusi. Spravka”], *Ria Novosti*, July 28, 2010.

⁴⁰ “Medvedev Supported the Idea of Teaching the Basics of Religious Culture and the Institution of Chaplains” [“Medvedev podderzhal ideiu prepodavaniia Osnov Religioznoi Kul’tury i institut kapellanov”], *Vesti*, July 21, 2009; Mikhail Moshkin, “God’s Class. The Second Stage of the Experiment in Teaching Religious Cultures Has Begun in Russia” [“Klass Bozhii. V Rossii nachinaetsa vtoroi etap eksperimenta po prepodavaniiu religioznykh kul’tur”], *Vremia Novostei*, September 1, 2010.

⁴¹ Iurii Gavrilov, “Contract Father (or, Father on Contract). The Ministry of Defense Has Determined the Legal Status of Military Priests” [“Batiushka na kontrakte. V Minoborone opredelili pravovoi status voennykh sviashchennikov”], *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, March 16, 2010.

⁴² Valery Buldakov, “Temple Awaits Restitution” [“Khramy zhдут restitutsii”], *Argumenty Nedeli*, December 8, 2010.

⁴³ “Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation Approved a Bill on the Transfer of Religious Property to Religious Organizations” [“Ministr kul’tury RF odobril zakonoproekt o peredache religioznym organizatsiiam imushchestva religioznogo naznacheniiia”], *Patriarchia.ru*, June 21, 2010.

Stability Concerns: Patriotism and “Spiritual-Moral” Education

Under Medvedev, considerations of stability did not seem to have been a significant driver of the evident turn toward treating the ROC as a *de facto* state church. Instead, the innovations discussed previously seem primarily to have been motivated by two factors: the personal piety of Medvedev and his wife and the new president’s belief that the ROC—which he referred to as the Russian Federation’s “most authoritative social institution”—would be useful in supporting his “modernization” program.⁴⁴ Indeed, the fact that Putin had bequeathed Medvedev (and himself, as prime minister) with a polity that seemed far more stable than it had been in the 1990s contextualizes the deescalation of stability concerns relating to religious organizations active on Russian territory.

Still, one aspect of the Medvedev-era developments described earlier in this chapter had implications for the interplay between stability and government policy toward religion as it would later evolve under Putin starting in 2012. The introduction of the “Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” curriculum into secular public schools did not just reflect the long-term aspiration of the ROC to add an “Orthodox component” to education, but it also intersected with existing elite beliefs concerning the link between “spirituality” (*dukhovnost*) and patriotism. In the face of criticism that the implementation of the curriculum looked suspiciously like religious indoctrination in a constitutionally secular setting, officials regularly referenced the alleged utility of “spiritual and moral upbringing” (*dukhovno nravstvennoe vospitanie*) in strengthening patriotic feelings among the youth.⁴⁵ Furthermore, there were indications that notable members of the elite saw the “spiritual” element here as primarily, if not exclusively, Orthodox;⁴⁶

⁴⁴ On the Medvedevs’ personal piety, see Ol’ga Vandysheva, “Spiritual Teacher of Svetlana Medvedeva Prooierei Vladimir Volodin: ‘The President’s Wife Has a Moral Core’” [“Dukhovnyi nastavnik Svetlany Medvedevoi Prooierei Vladimir Volgin: ‘U suprugi prezidenta est’ nravstvennyi sterzhen’”], *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, May 15, 2008. On “modernization” under Medvedev and the ROC’s presumed role as the “most authoritative social institution,” see “In a Meeting with the ROC’s Bishops’ Council Participants, Dmitrii Medvedev Acknowledged This Church as ‘Russia’s Most Authoritative Social Institution’” [“Na vstreche s uchastnikami arkhieiereiskogo sobora RPTs MP Dmitrii Medvedev priznal etu tserkov’ ‘naibolee avtoritetnym obshchestvennym institutom’ Rossii”], NewsRu.com, February 3, 2011.

⁴⁵ For an excellent example of this link between “spiritual upbringing” and patriotism in the upper echelons of the Russian government during this period, see “The Transcript of the Parliamentary Hearing of the State Duma’s Family, Women, and Children Committee on the Topic of ‘the State Policy Concept of Approaches to the Moral-Spiritual Upbringing of the Children in the Russian Federation and Protection of Their Morality: Legal Aspects’” [“Stenogramma parlamentskikh slushanii Komiteta Gosudarstvennoi Dumy po voprosam semii, zhenshin i detei na temu ‘O kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki v oblasti dukhovno-nravstvennogo vospitaniia detei v Rossiiskoi Federatsii i zaschite ikh nravstvennosti: pravovoi aspekt’”], Detirossii.ru, June 2, 2008. This link between patriotism and spirituality appeared in government discourse much earlier, during the first Putin term; it was present, for example, in the State Program for Patriotic Education adopted in 2001, however, it was during the Medvedev years that the idea moved to the center of government policy, as a justification for introducing a curriculum with religious content in public schools.

⁴⁶ See, for example, “The Integrated Target Program ‘Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Younger Generation of Russia’” [“Kompleksnaia tselevaya programma ‘Dukhovno-nravstvennaia kul’tura podrostaiushchego pokoleniia

once Putin returned to the presidential office in 2012, this attention to the interconnection between (Orthodox) spirituality and patriotism would spill over from the educational sector into a general trend toward securitizing religion.

State Policy Under Putin's Second Presidency ***Policy Developments: Securitization of Religion***

Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 heralded significant developments in the regime's approach toward religion in general and toward Orthodoxy in particular. The first of these related to extending the scope of the government's interest in "spirituality" from the sphere of education (where it had largely remained under Medvedev) into society more broadly. In December 2012, Putin's annual address to the Russian Federal Assembly lamented the fact that Russian society "suffers from a clear deficit of spiritual bonds/*dukhovnyye skrepy*," a deficit which he alleges contributes to weakening the country overall.⁴⁷ While he did not reference Orthodoxy specifically, observers noted that Putin seemed to have borrowed the concept from a June 2012 sermon by Patriarch Kirill, titled "The Church Is the Spiritual Bond [...] Which, If We Destroy It, We Will Destroy the Fatherland."⁴⁸ This statement signaled that the new Putin regime drew a direct connection between threats in the spiritual sphere and threats to Russia's physical existence, a theme that has only intensified since 2012.

Furthermore, consistent with the overall drift of the regime toward a harsher version of authoritarianism than had characterized the first Putin and Medvedev periods, new restrictions were imposed on freedom of religion (including both the right not to believe and/or criticize religious beliefs other than one's own). First, in 2013, "insulting the feelings of believers" became a criminal offense (under Article 148 of the Russian Criminal Code), whereby "public acts, expressing obvious disrespect to society and committed with the goal of offending the religious feelings of believers" may be punishable by prison time.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, the Russian courts witnessed the intensification of convictions on the charge of "exciting hatred or enmity" related to insulting religious believers (under Article 282 of the Criminal Code), with more than 150 such convictions in the first half of 2015.⁵⁰

Rossii"], luchangela.ru, undated.

⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Federal Council" ["Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniu"], Vesti.ru, December 4, 2014.

⁴⁸ Patriarch Kirill Gundayev, "The Church—Is a Spiritual Bond, That Entity the Destruction of Which Would Lead to the Destruction of the Fatherland" ["Tserkov—eto dukhovnaya skrepa, ta obshchnost', razrushiv kotoruiu, my razrushim svoe Otechestvo"], verav.ru, June 28, 2012.

⁴⁹ "The State Duma Passed a Law on Insulting the Feelings of Believers" ["Gosduma priniala zakon ob oskorblenii chuvstv veruiuschikh"], *Kommersant-Online*, June 6, 2013. Prior to 2013, "insulting the feelings of believers" had been an administrative offense punishable by a fine.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Tsybul'skii, "The Trial Over 'God Does Not Exist.' The Story of Religious Wars in 'Vkontakte,' Which Ended in a Criminal Case" ["Sud za 'Boha net.' Istoriia kholivara 'VKontakte,' kotoryi zakonchilsa ugo-

In addition, since 2014, the Putin regime has noticeably ramped up the use of antiextremism laws to curtail the activities of particular categories of religious believers. Key to these efforts has been the prohibition of certain types of religious literature as “extremist materials.” Their production and/or distribution may lead to fines or imprisonment for individuals; the discovery of even a single copy of a banned publication in a place of worship may lead to the latter’s liquidation. While an amendment to antiextremism legislation passed in 2015 specifies that the core literatures of the four “traditional religions” are automatically protected from the “extremism” label, it is noteworthy that the amendment shields the specific versions of Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism supposedly “native” to Russia while leaving other variants open to prosecution alongside any “nontraditional” faiths that bureaucrats may choose to target. To date, the two groups most targeted by the legislation have included the followers of the Muslim theologian Said Nusri and the Jehova’s Witnesses.⁵¹

If new restrictions on religious diversity within Russia itself could be considered a logical (if delayed) extension of the passage of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, the regime’s appeal to religion in the international arena after 2012 was entirely new. Prior to 2012, the post-Soviet regime’s interest in using religion as a foreign policy tool was largely limited to supporting the ROC in its efforts to either establish new parishes or reclaim pre-Revolution property abroad (as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ broad effort to engage with the Russian diaspora) or to position the Russian Federation as a power friendly to the so-called Islamic world.⁵² Since 2012, this utilitarian picture changed sharply.

First and most dramatically, the annexation of Crimea was partially justified as the reclaiming of a territory that is home to Kherson, the place where Grand Prince Vladimir was baptized in the late ninth century before returning to Kiev and overseeing the conversion of “Rus”—in Russian historiography, the protostate of contemporary Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. In his annual address to the Duma in December 2014, Putin positioned Kherson as the Orthodox equivalent of Jerusalem or Mecca in terms of its religious significance.⁵³ The fact that the Moscow Patriarchate expressed

lovnym delom”], *Meduza*, March 2, 2016.

⁵¹ Victoria Arnold, “Russia: ‘Extremism’ Religious Freedom Survey, September 2016,” Forum 18 News Service, September 13, 2016. According to *Forum 18*, total prosecutions of alleged distribution of banned religious materials in Russia rose from 65 cases in 2014 to 89, of which 55 were for possession of Islamic material and 32 for possession of Jehovah’s Witness texts. A further two cases involved Falung Gong materials.

⁵² That the Russian government did not seriously consider the ROC as a central factor of its foreign policy prior to 2012 can be seen during the 2008 war with Georgia, during which ostensibly Orthodox Russia entered into armed conflict with Orthodox Georgia. The patriarch of the ROC at the time, Alexei II, was less than supportive of the war efforts; this can be seen for instance in the fact that when the government asked the ROC to receive into its fold Abkhazian Orthodox parishes that wanted to change jurisdiction from Georgia to Russia, the ROC refused to comply, acknowledging the Georgian patriarchate’s canonical jurisdiction over Abkhazian territory.

⁵³ Putin, 2014.

a decided ambivalence about the event did not prevent the government from casting Crimea's return to the Russian Federation as a victory for Orthodox civilization.⁵⁴ (Among other signs of muted disapproval, Patriarch Kirill did not attend Putin's speech announcing the annexation.) In the subsequent Russian intervention in the Donbas region, the government has avoided overtly religious justifications for its actions. The regime's use of terminology referring to a "Russian world" (*ruski mir*) to support its policy in Ukraine post 2014, however, does seem to have been borrowed from rhetoric popularized by Patriarch Kirill in the years leading up to the conflict.⁵⁵

Second, since 2012, government policy has emphasized the defense of "traditional values" in the face of perceived threats from a secularized West. In this context, the Russian Duma passed a number of laws to protect these (vaguely defined) ideals. Among these was the law blocking the adoption of Russian children by citizens of most foreign countries (passed in part allegedly to protect Russian children from the influences of gay culture) and a law prohibiting the promulgation of homosexuality among minors. Here, one key difference with the Medvedev years may be discerned: The adjective "Orthodox" does not appear in front of "traditional," which may be presumed to refer to the values shared by all four major "traditional Russian religions," reminiscent of the earlier Putin-era policy of projecting Russia as a multinational, multi-religious bridge between civilizations.

Third, in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Russian foreign policy establishment periodically sought to position Russia as the defender of Christians in the Middle East, beginning with Egypt but especially in Syria. For example, in 2015, Russian ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Vitaly Churkin brought up the issue to the UN; Putin, for his part, has made a point of sharing his concern over the fate of the "Christians in conflict zones" with Pope Francis.⁵⁶

Finally, a discussion of the Russian government's policy toward religion from 2012 to 2016 would be incomplete without mentioning the so-called Law of Yarovaya, which sits at the nexus of domestic and foreign policy, as it further limits religious freedom in response to perceived external threats. In June 2016, the Duma adopted legislation (popularly nicknamed after the legislator who proposed it) severely limiting

⁵⁴ "The Heavy Silences of the Head of the ROC: Patriarch Kirill Did Not Attend Putin's Celebration in the Kremlin" ["Tiazheloe molchanie predstoiatelia RPTs: v Kremli' na torzhestvo Putina patriarkh Kirill ne poshel"], *Joininfo.ua*, March 3, 2014.

⁵⁵ I purposefully do not treat the issue of the Russian government's alleged attempts to use the ROC in its military intervention in the Donbas region, as at the moment definitive information on this highly politicized topic has been hard to obtain. For now, it is important to note that the Patriarchate has largely maintained silence on the subject, for fear of losing its parishes in Ukraine, as the Russian intervention has seriously damaged the ROC's image in Ukraine. At the same time, rumors abound about the efforts of the Russian state to use the ROC Ukrainian parishes as a sort of fifth column in the conflict, with or without this community's consent. However, more in-depth field research is necessary to further engage with this subject.

⁵⁶ For example, "Putin and the Pope Discussed the Protections of Christians" ["Putin i Papa Rimskii obsudiili voprosy zashchity khristian"], *Lenta.ru*, December 17, 2016.

missionary activity; the law permits “missionary” endeavors to be undertaken only by officially registered religious organizations (who must now provide its members who wish to “proselytize” with documentation certifying that they may do so) and limits the spaces where such activity may occur.⁵⁷

Stability Concerns: Combating Perceived Threats, Both Internal and External

If the Medvedev interregnum was characterized by a receding of stability as a factor in state policy toward religion/Orthodoxy, after Putin’s return to presidency, considerations of Russia’s domestic and external stability came clearly back to the foreground. Most of the developments discussed earlier may, in various degrees, be traced back to the larger context of the regime’s fears that the country was and is threatened by destabilization. *Dukhovnye skrepy*—the “spiritual bonds” that Putin, in his 2012 address to the Russian Federal Assembly, lamented was lacking—can be considered an iteration of another term that was introduced far earlier, namely, “spiritual security” (*dukhovnaya bezopasnost*).⁵⁸ The concept first gained currency during the debate around foreign missionaries in the mid 1990s; after the successful implementation of restrictive legislation in 1997, it receded into the background but began to witness a revival under Medvedev.⁵⁹ Since 2012, the idea that Russia’s “spiritual sphere” was vulnerable to destabilization became broadly accepted among relevant elites reacting to two perceived threats: Islamic radicalism and the “spirituality-less”/bezdukhovny West.⁶⁰

From this standpoint, the Russian state’s tightening of antiextremism measures mentioned in this chapter was justified in part by the need to combat the radicalization of Russian youth by Islamist actors. Not coincidentally, the other main target of these restrictions on religious freedom, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, had long been seen as agents-provateurs of the West, sent to destabilize Russian families and therefore the

⁵⁷ “How ‘Yarovaya’s Law’ May Touch All Religions: Talking with Journalist Svetlana Malodnik” [“Как «закон Яровой» может затронуть все религии. Разговор с журналистом Светланой Солодовник”], *SOVA*, June 28, 2016.

⁵⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Council” [“Poslanie Prezidenta Federal’nomu Sobraniu”], December 12, 2012.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Valeryi Lebedev, “Terror,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 14, 1996; Daniel Payne, “Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?” *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 2010, pp. 712–727.

⁶⁰ Tellingly, a Google search on the term “духовная безопасность” (spiritual security) generates more than 700,000 hits as of January 2017.

polity.⁶¹ Similarly, the crafters of the “Law of Yarovaya” drew a direct link between the need to combat extremism and stability in Russia.⁶²

Perhaps most importantly, the return of Putin to the presidency in 2012 followed closely on the heels of deeply flawed elections to the Duma, which sparked mass protests across the Russian Federation. Occurring as they did in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring that toppled several Middle Eastern dictators, some observers have suggested that the Putin administration interpreted the protests as part of a larger, Western-driven agenda that sought regime change in Russia itself.⁶³ With sinking oil prices no longer permitting the regime to placate the public through economic means, the need for a “consolidating” ideology capable of withstanding the Western onslaught emerged.

Turning directly to Orthodoxy for an ideological template was not possible for two reasons. First, the continuing demographic reality of Russia’s multinational, multireligious population (and particularly the restive North Caucasus) in itself precluded such an outcome. Second, the Medvedev-era “Orthodox turn” had led to an anticlerical backlash within society that contributed to the general sense of a polarized (and therefore destabilized) situation around the elections in 2011–2012; definitively privileging the ROC as the source of official ideology would have further exacerbated an already volatile situation.⁶⁴ The appeal to defending “traditional values” as the linchpin differentiating Russia from the West appeared to square the circle, providing the regime with a source of legitimation as it headed toward further confrontations abroad, whether over Ukraine, Syria, or other issues.

⁶¹ For typical expressions of this belief among the Russian elites about the Jehovah’s Witnesses, see, for example, “Regional Representatives Ask to Prohibit Jehovah’s Witnesses” [“Regional’nye deputaty prosiat zapretit’ ‘Svidetelei Iegovy’”], *Parlamentskaia Gazeta*, September 20, 2016; “Full Ban on the Activities of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia” [“KPRF Narodnaia Initsiativa: Polnyi zapret deiatel’nosti sekty ‘Svidetelei Iegovy’ na territorii Rossii”], ni.kprf.ru, August 7, 2015.

⁶² See, for example, “Demobilization Package: How Russians’ Life Will Change After Yarovaya’s Amendments Will Come into Power” [“Dembel’skii paket: kak izmenitsa zhizn’ rossian posle vstuplenia v silu popravok Iar-ovoi”], Lenta.ru, June 27, 2016.

⁶³ For a cogent discussion of the Russian protest wave in the wake of the Duma elections of 2011, see Denis Volkov, *The Protest Movement in Russia 2011–2013: Sources, Dynamics and Structures. Systemic and Non-Systemic Opposition in the Russian Federation: Civil Society Awakens?* Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015. Among many possible examples of elite interpretations of the protests as a hostile Western action, see Roland Oliphant, “Vladimir Putin Invokes Napoleon Invasion of Russia in Patriotic Call,” *The Telegraph*, February 23, 2012.

⁶⁴ For more on this trend, see Aleksandr Khramov, “Patriarch, Contain Your Idiots! Why Patriarch Kirill’s Visit to the Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics Provoked Students’ Anticlericalism” [“Patriarkh, uimi durakov! Pochemu visit Patriarkha Kirilla v MIFI sprovoztiroval studentov na antiklerikalizm”], PortalCredo.ru, March 11, 2010; “Anticlerical Moods in Society: Expert Opinions” [“Antiklerikal’nye nastroyeniia v obshchestve: mneniia ekspertov”], *Tatianin Den’*, April 11, 2011.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

The preceding discussion has a number of implications for assessing the stability of the Russian Federation and reflecting on future trajectories. First, while stability considerations are not the only factor affecting the way the government manages its relationship with the ROC (and religion generally) in post-Soviet Russia, they certainly emerge as an important component in the crafting of relevant policy.⁶⁵ Concretely, policies affected by the state's stability concerns have taken on two primary forms: (1) innovations aimed at strengthening domestic security (e.g., the restrictions on missionary activity) and (2) efforts to use the ROC and, to some extent, the other "traditional" religions, to bolster the regime's legitimacy (e.g., Yeltsin appealing to the ROC's support during the 1996 elections or the more-recent Putin-era invocation of Kherson as the "cradle of Russian Orthodoxy" to legitimate the annexation of Crimea).

Second, the interplay of stability considerations with policy toward religion plays itself out in a demonstrable pattern. Namely, when the regime's uneasiness over the general stability of the state is relatively high (e.g., Yeltsin and the post-2012 Putin presidency), these concerns take on greater importance in the relationship between state and church. When fears over the possible destabilization of the polity or regime recede, they no longer play as important a role in this area (e.g., during the Medvedev years).

These dynamics have implications for the Russian Federation's stability in the short and long run. For the immediate future, developments in 2012–2016 are of most obvious importance. The increased restrictions on religious freedom may bolster the stability of the existing regime when used as a tool (among others) in clamping down on opposition, particularly of the radical Islamist variety but also of ultranationalists who appeal to Orthodoxy in their ideology.⁶⁶ The appeal to "traditional" values may, in turn, serve to shore up the establishment's legitimacy in the context of heightened tensions with the West.

In the longer term, however, the general direction in which Russian state policy toward Orthodoxy and toward religion in general has evolved since 1991 holds evident destabilizing potential. First, within the literature that treats stability as the lack of armed conflict between opposed groups on the territory of a particular country, there is a consensus that religion may be a destabilizing factor when it overlaps with ethnic

⁶⁵ The scope of this chapter does not permit the detailed discussion of other factors entering into the formation of Russian government policy toward religion, although certainly the example of the Medvedev years indicates that, for example, the personal piety (or lack thereof) of political elites may play an important role, as well as a variety of other political, social, cultural, and economic considerations.

⁶⁶ The federal list of "extremist" materials prohibited in the Russian Federation has been expanding at astronomical rates, and currently lists 3,879 forbidden items (e.g., books, brochures, videotapes). Among other materials it lists, as number 865, the Orthodox ultranationalist slogan "Orthodoxy or Death," which was deemed extremist in a court case on December 21, 2010. See "The Slogan 'Orthodoxy or Death!' Recognized as Extremist" ["Lozung 'Pravoslavie ili smert' priznali ekstremistskim"], Pravda.ru, May 16, 2011.

identities.⁶⁷ The rhetorical division of the Russian population into four “traditional” religious groups has, roughly speaking, followed ethnic parameters, with particularly negative potential implications for the relationship between the large and growing Muslim population and the amorphously “Orthodox” Russian majority.⁶⁸ For example, it may be no coincidence that the Medvedev turn toward the ROC was accompanied by palpable tensions between these communities.⁶⁹ Furthermore, along the same lines, increasingly repressive “antiextremist” policies aimed at suspected Islamic radicals may have the same effect they seemed to have had in Egypt and Iraq, achieving ends opposite to those envisaged by persuading idealistic youth of the truth of militant ideology.⁷⁰

A second issue lies in the ways in which stability concerns have, over time and in various ways, led the post-Soviet Russian state to invoke the ROC to boost its own legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects. Recall that the trajectory from Yeltsin’s evocation of the ROC’s ties to pre-Revolution Russia to the Medvedev era appeals to a presumed relationship between (Orthodox) spirituality and patriotism. By the late 2000s, this aspect of government policy had helped consolidate the ROC’s image within Russian society as a reliable and willing pillar of state power—an image it continued to enjoy even after the return of Putin to the presidency shifted the elites’ attention away from the evident pro-Orthodox posture of the Medvedev years toward a more general concern with “spirituality” and “traditional” values.⁷¹

The problem lies in the fact that, as in Russia in the decades prior to the 1917 Revolution, the public perception of the church-state nexus is such that the ROC appears as the ideological arm of the Putin regime, meaning that any serious opposition to the existing state of affairs may well entail opposition if not to Orthodoxy per se then at

⁶⁷ See, for example, Kanayo Louis Nwadiakor and Amara Mary Uzoigwe, “Ethnicity and Social Stability in Nigeria: The Place of Religion,” *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2013.

⁶⁸ Assessments of the percentage of the Russian population that is Muslim vary widely, but it seems likely that it is somewhere near 15 percent and growing. In the case of the ethnic Russian population, the percentage of actual Orthodox Christians is unclear: the governing trope is that, since approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnically Russian, then it is also 80 percent Orthodox, which is not entirely borne out by survey data. Among other problems, the question of how to define affiliation with the Orthodox faith is rather contentious: For instance, is it all those baptized in the religion, those attending church on a regular basis (at least once a month), or those who believe but do not practice?

⁶⁹ Flashpoints include the 2009 murder of Father Daniil Sysoev, a particularly active Orthodox missionary to the “traditionally” Muslim community, and controversies about how many mosques can/should be built to accommodate the 1.5 million-strong Muslim population of Moscow.

⁷⁰ For example, as of June 2016, security experts were estimating that at least 3,400 Russian citizens had joined the Islamic State in its fight in Syria and Iraq. Simon Shuster, “How Russian Fighters of ISIS Became a Terror Threat in Turkey,” *Time*, June 30, 2016.

⁷¹ Among countless examples of this perception within Russian society, see Valery Prikhod’ko, “Tandem Church-State, the ROC Takes on Clearly Uncharacteristic Functions” [“Tandem ‘tserkov—gosudarstvo,’ RPTs beret na sebja iavno ne svoistvennye ei funktsii”], *Ekho Moskvy* blog, January 16, 2013.

least to the Moscow Patriarchate as an institution.⁷² There are indications that at least some segments of the bureaucracy understand this: Notably, since 2012, vocal dissatisfaction with the ROC has increasingly been interpreted by Russian political elites as a sign of opposition to the state itself.⁷³ Furthermore, it should be noted that Medvedev's unambiguous favoring of the ROC engendered an anticlerical backlash within society that manifested quite openly during the protests of 2011–2012, most famously in the punk band Pussy Riot performance at Moscow's greatest cathedral.⁷⁴ Should a truly meaningful opposition emerge in the long term to challenge the existing regime, it will likely contain strong anticlerical elements which, if unleashed, could potentially be as destructive as the militant atheism that accompanied the 1917 Revolution.

Finally, the idea that the ROC is a reliable source of legitimacy depends on two assumptions widely shared by the governing elite and which, on closer examination, may not be tenable over the longer term. On the one hand, it is assumed that the (approximately) 70 percent of the population that claims to be Orthodox treats its religious affiliation as more than just a quasiethnic marker (“to be Russian is to be Orthodox”). It is true, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, that the percentage of Russian Orthodox who may be considered “actively” religious has been steadily, if slowly, rising over the past two decades. However, this has not translated into widespread support for government-sponsored pro-Orthodox initiatives. (For example, as of 2012, a majority of parents have preferred that their children study the “secular ethics” version of the “Fundamentals of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” course rather than the Orthodox component. Additionally, a project to build 200 new churches across Moscow has run into spirited opposition from civil society and neighborhood organizations.⁷⁵)

⁷² For a thorough English-language discussion of what happened to the Orthodox church in the wake of the 1917 Revolution as a result of its association with imperial state power, see Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003.

⁷³ See, among other examples, Roman Dobrokhotov, “How One Can Be Locked Away in a Psychiatric Hospital for Criticizing the ROC” [“Kak za kritiku RPts mozhno ugodit' v psikhushku”], Republic.ru, August 9, 2012.

⁷⁴ “Pussy Riot Gig at Christ the Savior Cathedral (original video),” YouTube video by timurnechaev77, July 2 2012.

⁷⁵ According to a 2012 survey of schools in 21 regions of the Russian Federation, by that stage, 42 percent of students had chosen to study the “secular ethics” version of the course; 30 percent were studying the “fundamentals of Orthodox culture”; 18 percent preferred to learn about the basics of “world religions”; and 9 percent, Islam, while Buddhism and Judaism both attracted the interest of 1 percent of students. “The Global Religions Come Together in the Moscow Region” [“V Moskovskoi oblasti obiediniat mirovye religi”], *Izvestiia*, February 14, 2012. For more on opposition to the building of new churches in Moscow, see, for example, Nadezhda Guzhiyeva, “The Trofianka’s Defender: These Fascists Are Ready to Murder Us! The Moscow Park ‘Trofianka’ Is Reminiscent of a War Theater Rather than a Place of Leisure” [“Zaschitnik Trofianki: Eto fashysty gotovy nas ubit’! Moskovski park Trofianka bol’she napominaet ne mesto otdyha, a teatr voennykh deistvii”], Sobesednik.ru, December 2, 2016.

The other related assumption is that the ROC commands the respect of wide swathes of society, Orthodox or not, because of its role as a repository of positive historical and cultural associations. As already alluded to with the rising anticlerical mood within Russian society over the past few years, it is unclear that the ROC will be able to hang on to the respect it still nominally commands. In particular, the pontificate of Patriarch Kirill I has been associated with numerous public scandals that have palpably dented the ROC's reputation since 2009; should this decline in social standing continue, it could, in the long-run, taint the state itself, undermining the very regime that has elevated the ROC to such heights.⁷⁶

Policymakers may draw several lessons from this examination. The first is that the Russian state's perceptions of Western intentions matter when it comes to the development of policy related to religion (as they do in other areas). The fact that restrictions on religious freedom in Russia since 1997 have been driven largely by concerns with security/stability suggests that they may not be a "natural" part of the Russian regime's autocratic make-up and that the path toward easing these restrictions may lie in alleviating the Russian government's overall concerns about Western efforts to destabilize the country.

Second, policymakers should engage with relevant Russian partners to share U.S. experiences in managing religious pluralism and mitigating security concerns that come with the reality of a multicultural society. Indeed, U.S. history has its own examples of majoritarian conflicts with allegedly destabilizing "new religious movements" that were eventually integrated into the political fabric (e.g., the troubled early history of the relationship of the U.S. government with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Possible options include organizing working groups bringing together U.S. policymakers and scholars with representatives of the Russian Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations or other relevant government offices responsible for carrying out policy toward the ROC/religion in the Russian Federation.

Third, as part of the general decline in Russian studies in the United States since the late 1990s, U.S. universities are currently not systematically training experts on the post-Soviet Russian religious landscape, especially on the regional level.⁷⁷ As a result, while projects such as this one are able to trace federal-level policy toward the ROC (or other religious groups in Russia), our understanding of the way in which the church-state dynamic is playing out in the Russian regions and its implications for Russian stability is quite limited. This may be solved by directing federal U.S. funding toward universities and think tanks aimed at stimulating research in this area. Additionally,

⁷⁶ For example, "The Patriarch Is Suspected to Have Violated Two Religious Vows" ["Patriarkha podozrevaiut v narushenii dvukh obetov monakha"], NEWSru.com, March 27, 2012; "The Patriarch's Watch Has Exploded the Internet" ["Patriarshie chasy vzorvali internet"], Utro.ru, June 4, 2012.

⁷⁷ For a summary assessment on this decline, see Lynda Park, "Decline in U.S. Expertise on Russia," Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, April 8, 2014.

U.S. institutions can engage Russian scholars from Russian regions themselves and invite them to the United States to share their knowledge with U.S. partners.

Certainly, these recommendations presuppose a change in the general dynamic of the relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation over the immediate- or medium-term future. The desire to engage actors within the Russian government or Russian scholars may be a tall order given the current climate of distrust. In the absence of improved relations, the analysis in this chapter points at the very least at the need for policymakers to monitor carefully the evolution of Russian state policy toward religion generally, the ROC specifically, and to bring to light stability considerations contributing to Russian decisionmaking in this sphere.

Religion and Stability in the Former Soviet Union: Policy Implications of Analysis

Jonah Blank

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.¹

—Karl Marx

In 1843, Karl Marx formulated an analysis of religion drastically at odds with the prevailing political philosophies of his day: Far from being the natural foundation for legitimate governance, as he argued, religion was merely a delusion cynically manipulated by ruling elites to maintain stability. Faith, of whatever variety, was a counter-revolutionary force. It eased the hardships of life just enough to prevent insurrection and used the hope of a better hereafter to dissuade peasant and proletarian alike from rising up in search of a better here-and-now. For Marx, the political stability resulting from religion was a challenge to be overcome.

Between 1922 and 1991, the leadership of the Soviet Union translated this analysis into concrete policy. Christianity, Islam, and all other forms of religion were forcefully discouraged—their practice harshly persecuted. The only forms of communal worship permitted were those channeled through, and controlled by, the state itself. Some observers have seen communist ideology as performing a social role similar to that of the religions it supplanted, with the communist party standing in for the clergy as the upholders of social order.² Whether driven by genuine conviction or cold pragmatism, for nearly 70 years, the Soviet Union conducted a multigenerational political experiment in state-sponsored atheism.

¹ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” in trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, *Early Writings*, London: Penguin Classics, 1992, p. 244.

² Marcin Kula, “Communism as Religion,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 3, December 2005, pp. 371–381.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of the Marxist ideology on which it was based, successor states had to craft their own analysis on a wide range of topics: From economics to democracy to nationalism, the intellectual pillars of governance now had to be reconsidered. Was religion truly—as a century-and-a-half of doctrinaire Marxists believed—a source of political stability? Or was it instead—as seven decades of Soviet officials had seemed to imply by their attempts to suppress expressions of faith—a potential *challenge* to the social and political order?³ For most of the post-Soviet states, the analysis seems to have been an inversion of Marx: Religion *can be used as* an opiate for the masses—but only if administered carefully, with strict precautions to avoid the risk of overdose. The policy results of this analysis have varied throughout the nations of the FSU but have generally not strayed far from the Soviet playbook of coopting a tightly controlled set of religious authorities while cracking down on religious groups unwilling to operate as *de facto* agents of the state.

This volume has provided a collection of perspectives examining the phenomenon of religion in the FSU and its impact (present and potential future) on stability in the region. The analyses of the specific areas have sometimes run parallel to that of the leaders of these states and at other times in different directions. This chapter aims to synthesize the analyses of prior chapters and present policy recommendations—both for the nations of the FSU and for the United States—based on this understanding. Given the disparity of each author’s outlook inherent in any edited volume, they do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors of other chapters.

Analysis of Religion and Stability in the FSU

Most of the following analytical points run through multiple chapters and represent a critical mass (in some cases, a consensus) of the opinion presented in this study.

Religion Can Be a Powerful Driver of Instability

If religion is to be considered a narcotic, is it an opiate or a stimulant? Any fair analysis would have to say it is both. Marx highlighted its potential as a tool for social control. Many examples across the world since the waning years of the Soviet Union highlight its potential as an agent for social change. In Iran, the Shi’a clergy helped overthrow a dictatorial (and decidedly secular) shah in 1979 and usher in a theocratic *vilayet-e faqih*. In India, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which had been advocating an explicitly Hindu-inflected society and politics for 60 years, gained traction in the mid-1980s and in about a decade had helped install a government led by the Hindu Nationalist

³ Perhaps the most noteworthy example of religious expression as a challenge to the Soviet order came during the pontificate of John Paul II, who inspired citizens of his native Poland to oppose Communist rule; the Roman Catholic church was part of a broad coalition that ended Communist governance in 1989.

Bharatiya Janata Party.⁴ Religious parties and organizations have strongly influenced the politics of nations including Israel, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

This phenomenon was by no means absent in the officially atheistic Communist bloc. Svante E. Cornell notes in Chapter Four, “as the example of Poland makes abundantly clear, the return of religiosity contributed to the collapse of communism rather than being [solely] a result of it.” Perhaps the most noteworthy example of a religious challenge to Soviet stability, however, can be found just outside the formal boundaries of the Soviet Union: From the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 until its withdrawal ten years later, the most effective forces of opposition were Islamist mujahideen supported by the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Whether these mujahideen were a critical factor in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union, they certainly created enormous problems for its leadership during the country’s final years—as their external patrons intended.

As Artyom Tonoyan notes in Chapter Two, “Contrary to the assumptions of modernization and theories of secularization that envisaged a world with less religion, societies around the world are becoming more ethnically and religiously conscious.” The differences between religion and other drivers of instability are discussed by Steven L. Neuberger and Gabrielle Filip-Crawford in their featured insert. They argue that a society’s degree of “religious infusion”—that is, “the extent to which religious beliefs, practices, and discourses infuse the daily private and public life of a group”—is a powerful predictor of collective violence, including insurgency and terrorism.

Part of reason, they argue, is the strength of ideology: A person’s ethnic group is not any “better” than that of his or her neighbor, but a person’s faith is (at least in many formulations) the only true faith in the cosmos; in such a division, the possibility for compromise and coexistence is necessarily reduced. Another part of the reason, Neuberger and Filip-Crawford argue, is the set of capabilities facilitated by religion: Groups organized on the lines of ethnicity or social class can promise rewards in this life but not in the next. In other words, religion promises an eternal reward, which encourages potentially self-sacrificing endeavors such as insurgency and terrorism. While the data are not specifically geared toward the FSU, Neuberger and Filip-Crawford note that all successor states except Georgia and Belarus are represented in the collection set.

⁴ The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded in 1925 but remained a largely marginal force until the Babri Masjid campaign of the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1984, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (an offshoot) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) launched a campaign to “reclaim” the land beneath a 16th-century mosque, which the group claimed had appropriated a Hindu holy site. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its affiliates turned this issue into one of the key drivers of the Lok Sabha elections of 1989 and 1991. In 1992, their partisans destroyed the Babri Masjid and in 1996 and 1998, the Bharatiya Janata Party held the office of prime minister; the 1996 term lasted only 16 days, while the term begun in 1998 lasted over six years. In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party won the most decisive electoral victory of any Indian party in 25 years and at the time of writing, the party enjoys solid control over India’s political scene.

Even When It Destabilizes, Religion Is Seldom the Only Factor

Instability, let alone political violence, is not the inevitable outgrowth of a particular faith or of faith itself. This might seem a point too obvious to require articulation, but it remains, at least among U.S. policymakers, far from universally accepted. Influential voices—some in the innermost circles of policymaking—have described Islam in particular as a belief-system theologically mandating political violence. Such a view holds little sway among genuine scholars (let alone practitioners) of Islam, but its continuing salience in the U.S. policymaking community should not be underestimated.⁵ Those making an essentialist argument about Islam tend to cite (without proper context) a particular verse of the Quran: “Slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter.”⁶ To take this verse (or several similar ones) as an encapsulation of Islamic teaching on the subject would be akin to summarizing both Christianity and Judaism by verses such as, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts. . . Now go and smite [the tribe of] Am’alek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”⁷

Even when religion is a driver of social conflict, it is seldom the *only* driver. As Sufian N. Zhemukhov notes in Chapter Three, even in a place such as the North Caucasus where religious strife has been endemic,

[t]he Kremlin’s failure to address the root causes of radicalization (e.g., economic and social challenges of the transitional period, corruption, a shattered education system) and reliance on aggressive military actions have escalated the situation in the region by creating a notion of an ongoing civil war between the regime and the citizens and a civilizational chasm between the citizens of other parts of Russia and the North Caucasus.

External factors are very often the most important determinant of a religiously based protest movement that turns violent operates within the political system, if it grows

⁵ For a brief discussion of this argument, see Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on Mainframe: Islam and Modernity Among the Daudi Bohras*, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 262–272.

⁶ The historical context is important: These verses are believed to have been revealed just before the Battle of Badr, as a stronger polytheist Meccan army was attempting to stamp out the fledgling Muslim community. The textual context is similarly important: The beginning and end of the passage, typically omitted by essentialist commentators, make clear that this exhortation refers strictly to defensive rather than offensive action:

Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not the aggressors. And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter . . . But if they desist, then lo! Allah is Forgiving. Al-Qur’an, Surah II, Verses 190–192 (emphasis added). English version: Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York: Mentor/New American Library, 1953, p. 50.

⁷ 1 Samuel 15:2–3. English version: *Revised Standard Version Holy Bible*, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952, p. 222. Similar passages include Joshua 6:21 or Deuteronomy 2:33–34, 3:6, 7:2, 7:16, and 20:16–17.

or fades away, and if it poses a genuine threat to state stability. For example, as Zhemukhov, Cornell, and Nargis Kassenova all note, the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria has provided a pressure valve for radical Islamists across the FSU. Without the siphoning off of the most committed and most violent individuals throughout the region, it is quite possible that terrorism and insurgency within the FSU would have been far greater.

Religion Often Has Political Importance Because of Identity Rather than Belief

In Chapter Two, Tonoyan, citing a formulation by Rogers Brubaker, calls religion the “key diacritical marker” of identity distinguishing Armenians from Azerbaijanis: An Armenian is Armenian because he is Christian, an Azeri is Azeri because she is Muslim; ethnic and linguistic differences are also important, but the master narrative is one of religion. In Chapter Six, Vadym Vasiutynskyi makes the same point in the very different context of Ukraine: While the overwhelming majority of the population is Christian, the key social divisions here are manifested in the competing Protestant, Roman Catholic, and especially the Orthodox churches (particularly, within the Eastern Orthodox arena, competition among the UAOC, the UOC-KP, and the Moscow Patriarchate). Confessional choice is a decision based on politics more than theology.

The same is true, to varying degrees, in communities throughout the FSU and throughout the world. Within a particular faith, denominational affiliation often owes more to family or community custom than to doctrinal preference: An individual’s identification as Protestant or Catholic is unlikely to be determined by his or her views on consubstantiation versus transubstantiation of the Eucharistic host. This point is worth bearing in mind when analysts are tempted to read too much into the policy implications of a particular denomination’s theology. Such analysis is useful in determining the views of a religious group’s leadership, who may be expected to be knowledgeable about and deeply concerned with points of doctrine. It is less useful in understanding the motivations of rank-and-file followers, for whom religion is often primarily a matter of “who I am” rather than “what I believe.”

Radical Islam Is a Highly Varied, and Highly Localized Phenomenon

Commentators with a superficial understanding of both the theology and sociology of Islam sometimes portray its more radical strands as a unitary global movement. In fact, it is no such thing. At the most rudimentary level, radical Sunni groups tend to consider radical Shi’a groups apostates rather than fellow travelers. In Syria and Iraq, for example, the bloodiest combat is often between rival Sunni and Shi’a militias. Even among radical Sunnis, differences in doctrine or (more commonly) political rivalries often lead to intensely violent conflict. This is as true in the FSU as elsewhere. As Zhemukhov notes, the religious landscape of an area as small as the northern Caucasus displays enormous subregional differences in ideology and identity. The northeastern areas (including Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia) tend to follow the Shafi’i

school,⁸ to be culturally closer to the Middle East, and to merge Islamic and ethnic identity. The northwestern areas (including North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria), on the other hand, tend to follow the Hanafi school, to be culturally closer to Turkey, and to maintain ethnic identities that are distinct from religious ones. Not only is it impossible to generalize about Islam (radical or otherwise) in the FSU, Zhemukhov notes that it is impossible to generalize about it in a region as small as the northern portion of the Caucasus.

Likewise, the boundary between “radical” and “moderate” Islam is more porous than many observers might concede. Cornell notes the importance of Hanafi dominance as a factor in limiting radicalism in Central Asia, while correctly noting, “many [Islamists] reject the notion that the people, not god, are the source of sovereignty and the legitimacy of a government.” This is indeed a common objection that Islamists worldwide have with the vocabulary of democracy. But it is hardly unique to radicals—or even to Muslims. The foundational document of America’s creation—the Declaration of Independence—bases its demand for self-governance on the claim “that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their CREATOR with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”⁹

Militant Christianity Is Also a Potentially Dangerous Phenomenon

While most commentary on the potentially destabilizing role of religion in the FSU is focused on Islam, the rise of politically militant forms of Christianity merit policy-maker attention as well.¹⁰ As Irina du Quenoy notes in Chapter Seven, about 70 percent of Russians identify themselves as Christian (mostly affiliated with the ROC); this has resulted in the “securitization of ‘traditional religion.’” Rather than being an apo-

⁸ Practitioners of Sunni Islam follow one of four *madhhabs*, or schools of Islamic jurisprudence. *Madhhabs* are in many ways roughly akin to the denominational divisions of Protestant Christianity (i.e., while all *madhhabs*—like all mainstream Christian denominations—subscribe to the same basic theology, there are important distinctions in the interpretation and understanding of this theology, as well as its application in everyday life). The Shaf’i school is viewed as more strict than the Hanafi school. The other two *madhhabs*—Hanbali and Maliki—are not widely followed in the FSU.

⁹ “In Congress, July 4, 1776. The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America,” in *Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774–1789*, paragraph 2. This theological justification for governance is all the more noteworthy in light of the fact that the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, was influenced at least as much by deism as by mainstream Christianity.

¹⁰ Finding the right description for the phenomenon of potentially violent ethnonationalist Christianity is a challenge. One term might be *radical Christianity*, in order to maintain a parallel construction with *radical Islam* that is used elsewhere in this chapter and throughout this volume. The problem with this terminology, however, is that the two phenomena are not the same: the ROC (like some other Eastern Orthodox national churches) operates in *support* of the Kremlin, while the untraditional, potentially violent Islamic movements in the FSU operate in *opposition* to established regimes. The term *militant Christianity* is by no means a perfect nomenclature—no more so than “radical Islam,” “fundamentalist Islam,” “Hindu chauvinism,” or “militant Buddhism.” The aim is to convey a strand of the faith that, in the past, has been and may again be used to stoke communal violence and acts of terrorism.

litical organization focused solely on spiritual matters, the ROC hierarchy has aligned itself squarely with the Russian government—and, indeed, with the political priorities of the Kremlin. This has led to support for a pro-regime line in Russia itself—and also for Moscow’s destabilizing policies in areas (such as eastern Ukraine, as Vasiutynskiy notes in Chapter Six) with a Russian majority or significant-minority population.

The alliance between a long-persecuted Orthodox clergy and the inheritors of an atheistic state apparatus might at first glance seem paradoxical. On closer examination, however, the arrangement makes sense for both parties: The state is able to coopt a source of ideological persuasion, which could serve either to bolster or to threaten the regime. The ROC is able to regain its pre-1917 position as the *de facto* state religion of Russia—an important status, given the agility and success of rivals such as various evangelical Protestant denominations in rapidly evangelizing much of traditionally difficult terrain throughout Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia.

But this association carries risks to the stability of the region. As the ROC clergy allies itself ever more closely with the Putin regime, it may find itself discredited in the eyes of younger, more cynical believers who might, as a result, be drawn to new, uncontrolled, and far more radical forms of the faith. This is precisely what gave rise to modern Islamic radicalism in the 20th century, as traditional religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere became seen as mere pawns of corrupt and dictatorial regimes, rather than legitimate advocates for Islam. As du Quenoy notes, “Should a truly meaningful opposition emerge in the long term to challenge the existing regime, it will likely contain strong anticlerical elements which, if unleashed, could potentially be as destructive [to the state] as the militant atheism that accompanied the 1917 Revolution.”

Could a radical form of Eastern Orthodox Christianity become a driver of violence outside the FSU? It has already occurred in recent memory. During the Balkan Wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1992, the Serbian Orthodox Church quickly became far more radicalized and politically aligned than it had been during the decades of Yugoslavian socialism. The close association between Serbian Orthodox faith and Serbian ethnicity was a factor in much of the violence in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and pockets of Croatia, Macedonia, and Montenegro.¹¹

¹¹ For discussion of the role played by the Serbian Orthodox Church and other national Orthodox churches in the civil wars (and war crimes) of the Balkans during the 1990s, see Michael Sells, “Sacral Ruins of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Mapping Ethnoreligious Nationalism,” in Craig R. Prentiss, ed., *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, p. 211; Milan Vukomanović, “The Serbian Orthodox Church as a Political Actor in the Aftermath of October 5, 2000,” *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 1, 2008, pp. 237–269; and Keith Doubt, “Scapegoating and the Simulation of Mechanical Solidarity in Former Yugoslavia: ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ and the Serbian Orthodox Church,” *Humanity and Society*, Vol. 31, February 2007, pp. 65–82.

Repression Can Tamp Down Radicalism—and Also Fuel It

It is widely accepted in scholarly circles that government oppression is a key driver of religious radicalism. As Eric McGlinchey argues, “Islamist movements in Central Asia are first and foremost a response to local authoritarian rule: the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.”¹² Cornell argues in Chapter Four, however, that such analysis may be based on unsound foundations: “Because the policies are deemed to be morally repulsive, scholars appear inclined to believe that they are also counterproductive—a vicious cycle of radicalization and repression strengthening each other. . . . [T]he evidence nonetheless suggests that our understanding of it should become more nuanced.”

This critique highlights an important and morally puzzling fact: Quite often—at least in the short term—repression *does* seem to work. Dictators use brutal methods not merely out of sadism (at least in most cases), but because they deem such tools effective. If repression of religion and other human rights abuses eventually contributed to the overthrow of the Soviet Union, it was a karmic retribution that Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko never lived to see.

Most of the contributors to this volume note both the short-term efficacy and the longer-term failures of repression as an instrument of political control. In Chapter Five, Kassenova cites Maryia Omelicheva to demonstrate this phenomenon throughout former Soviet Central Asia,¹³ writing with respect to one in particular: “Suppression and repressive measures do seem to constrain the development of Islamist movements in Kazakhstan. However, these measures can be counterproductive both in the short and long-term perspective.” The question raised by Cornell, with particular reference to the data observable in Central Asia, is therefore important to discuss in more detail:

[T]he “repression-radicalization hypothesis” fails to explain the relative paucity of radicalization in the region or the discrepancy among the countries in the region. Indeed, it cannot explain why radicalization appears to have decreased in heavily authoritarian Uzbekistan and especially why the epicenter of Islamic radicalization today—in direct contradiction to the expectations of the hypothesis—appears to be in the relatively more open Kyrgyzstan.

There are several potential lines of response, each meriting a longer discussion than would be appropriate here. The critique and potential rejoinders are presented to propose a range of analytical approach, not to suggest that the topic has achieved scholarly consensus. There is much that remains to be studied regarding the long-

¹² Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. 25 No. 3, 2005, p. 559. Cited by Svante E. Cornell in Chapter Four.

¹³ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2010, pp. 167–186. Cited by Kassenova in Chapter Six.

term implications of repression of religious groups. However, there are several possible replies to a “repression works” theory, including:

- *Supporting data are not necessarily supportive.* Cornell correctly notes that there are very few systematic studies of the efficacy of repression in controlling radical Islamist movements. He cites Mohammed Hafez as concluding that “repression did work in Syria, Tunisia, and Iraq. However, in Algeria, Egypt, Kashmir, the southern Philippines, and Chechnya, repression has resulted in higher rates of violence and protracted conflicts.”¹⁴ He acknowledges that repression was unsuccessful in five of the eight cases studied, but the tally now appears even less impressive: Since its publication in 2003, two of the case studies (Syria and Tunisia) that Hafez judged as examples of repression that successfully prevented regime challenge moved squarely into the unsuccessful category.¹⁵ The last example, Iraq, was cut short by the U.S. invasion: Whether Saddam Hussein would have died in his bed (like Egypt’s Gamel Abdel Nasser, the scourge of the Muslim Brotherhood) or in far grislier circumstances (like Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi) will never be known.
- *Different forms of repression have different outcomes.* Some dictators are more effective than others. Ham-fisted brutality without any compensatory societal outreach, as the example of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad demonstrates, tends to alienate populations rather than control them. The repressive regimes that maintain control over a longer period tend to do so with far more carefully calibrated application of force and far more incentives for cooperation provided to the people they govern. China is no ingénue in the field of religious repression: Both its Muslim population of Xinjiang and its Buddhist population of Tibet have been subject to everyday restrictions and periodic crackdowns. While violence and repression were horrific during the Cultural Revolution, in recent decades, Beijing has modified its approach and offered economic and social incentives to try to offset the absence of religious liberty. Perhaps as a result, the number of terrorist incidents reported in China since the end of the Soviet Union is less than 6 percent of that of the nations in the FSU, despite China’s larger population. Indeed, Russia alone had nearly nine times as many incidents during this period, and Ukraine reported more than six times China’s 24-year tally in just three years.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 206. Cited by Svante E. Cornell in Chapter Four.

¹⁵ In Tunisia, the movement that overthrew the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 was not primarily Islamist, but the broader pointer of repression failing to prevent challenges remains the same.

¹⁶ Figures are from the University of Maryland’s Global Terrorism Database, referenced on December 26, 1991 (dissolution of the USSR) through December 31, 2015 (last date in database at time of search). China had 237 reported terrorist incidents in this period, compared with 4,266 for all FSU countries; Russia had 2,100 incidents; Ukraine had 1,581 incidents in this period, of which 1,533 occurred between 2013 and 2015. Two caveats

- *Repression may fuel radicalism elsewhere.* One of the unanswerable questions of post-Soviet Central Asia is what direction Islamist radicalism might have taken were the homegrown extremists to stay home. In late 1991, before the Soviet Union had even officially dissolved, the Uzbek Islamist Tahir Yuldashev took effective control of the Ferghana Valley; together with former Soviet paratrooper Juma Namangani, he would form the IMU, the most dangerous and wide-ranging terrorist group in Central Asia. When the government of Islam Karimov drove them out of Uzbekistan, the group found sanctuary first in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, later in Pakistan, and most recently in Syria (where the dominant faction made *bayat* to the Islamic State in 2015).¹⁷ This was not merely a case of an insurgency finding sanctuary to carry out attacks in its own country: Since the mid- to late 1990s, the IMU has directed most of its activity toward its new centers of operation. Indeed, it may well have served as a net *drain* on the pool of young radicals inside Uzbekistan by channeling them to battlefields further away. Is the IMU an example of a radical group whose growth was spurred by the brutal repression meted out by the government of Uzbekistan? Or is it an example of repression successfully tamping down the threat posed by an extremist group, thereby keeping the lid on instability? The answer is possibly both. The brutality of the Karimov regime very likely inflamed radical sentiment in Uzbekistan, but the same heavy state security presence directed the flow of young recruits outside the country. Karimov himself passed away peacefully in 2016, having lived to see both Yuldashev and Namangani meet violent ends. The redirection of militants is not necessarily a long-term strategy: Sooner or later, those radicals who survive their foreign adventures may decide to come home—experienced, battle-hardened, and with little left to lose. An attempt to keep such extremists from ever returning may lock a regime into repressive measures as a permanent condition rather than a crisis-management exception: The more that this dynamic is fueled, the more difficult it may be to later reverse course and adopt a policy aimed at national reconciliation.
- *Until.* Perhaps the most important rejoinder to the “repression works” argument lies in a single word. Yes, repression staved off insurrection until the very end of the Soviet period. But the key word here is *until*. Repression works—*until* it

are in order: First, the number of reported incidents may not reflect the full extent of terrorist action, in China or in the more authoritarian nations of the FSU. There may be overreporting because of regime desire to portray all political opponents as terrorists and underreporting to downplay evidence of regime instability. One useful point of comparison is Tajikistan, which—although it has only a population only 6 percent of China’s (in 2015 figures)—recorded more than 77 percent as many terrorist incidents (184) and 31 percent as many fatalities (304, compared with China’s 978) since the end of the Soviet Union. Data compiled May 31, 2017. See “Search Results: 237 Incident,” Global Terrorism Database, 2014–2015.

¹⁷ Merhat Sharipzhan, “IMU Declares It Is Now Part of the Islamic State,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 6, 2015.

does not. When the dam breaks, the deluge sweeps the old order away in a flash. For more than two decades, Nicolae Ceausescu ruled Romania as the iron-fisted Soviet-backed satrap. On the morning of December 21, 1989, he was the unquestioned master of his nation. By the evening of December 25, he was a corpse.

Policy Recommendations

The previous discussion aims to outline the key issues with which the authors of this volume have wrestled. Some of these issues are limited to a specific part of the FSU—for example, Islamic radicalism is not a major issue in Ukraine, and Russian Orthodox militancy is not a major issue in Uzbekistan. While the preceding discussion attempts to synthesize the general consensus of the volume’s authors, it does not suggest that all authors would agree with this analysis in every respect.

Similarly, and as previously noted, the recommendations that follow from this analysis aim to synthesize the consensus of the volume’s authors—but these recommendations should not be understood as representing a common position endorsed by all of the volume’s contributors. The ideas presented here represent a logical extrapolation based on the analysis of the authors, rather than a strategy discussed and agreed on by every contributor.

Scholars offering recommendations to policymakers always face a conundrum: Any program that is both effective and politically viable has probably already been implemented. Political leaders generally have a better sense than academics do of which policies will run afoul of the many potential deal-breakers in the local environment: Every president and prime minister is kept in power by a complex set of military, economic, and often ethnic or tribal constituencies. Toss religion into the mix, and the brew becomes all the more volatile. As a result, the recommendations presented in academic studies can either lean toward generalities too bland to be rejected or look to stake out a bolder position in hopes of moving the conversation in a more productive direction. This chapter takes the latter approach: I am under no illusion that the leaders of FSU nations will suddenly change their policies based on an academic report. Likewise, I do not believe that the United States has the power to force major changes on FSU leaders. Dispassionate academic studies will help inform civil society as well as policymakers in the FSU and, over time, may influence policy, such as by encouraging religious tolerance.

The recommendations presented here are an attempt to forward a dialogue. As demonstrated by the Color Revolutions that swept several FSU nations since 2005, there are a great many voices throughout the region advocating for greater freedom in the spheres of politics, economics, and, indeed, religion; the rulers of these nations speak for their own regimes—but not, at least not in all cases, for the bulk of the people. The discussion presented here attempts to explain why such programs make

sense: The intended audience is not merely the leaders of the FSU nations, but other political actors inside these nations who might *become* national leaders.

The recommendations for U.S. leaders represent a continuity, rather than a break, with a bipartisan consensus that has held strongly in U.S. political circles for the past 72 years. This consensus—that support for human rights in general and religious liberty in particular should be a key element in U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union and its successors—is now under challenge for the first time since the end of the Second World War. At the time of writing, however, the bipartisan commitment to such a policy extends throughout both chambers of Congress and through most of the career officialdom of the Executive Branch. The recommendations in this chapter are addressed to the U.S. continuation of this bipartisan consensus.

For Leaders of Nations in the Former Soviet Union

- *DO NOT count on repression to ensure stability.* Brutality may be effective in the short run, but it is no long-term guarantee. Prevailing scholarly opinion (as noted by Kassenova and Zhemukhov) holds that repression often fuels radicalism; experts such as Cornell question the *degree* of correlation, but few reject the premise entirely. Some dictators, such as Karimov, manage to outlive their opponents—and, perhaps, push the day of reckoning onto their successors. Others, such as Ceausescu, Gaddafi, and the Soviet-Afghan client Mohammad Najibullah, met far more sanguinary ends. At a bare minimum, repression cuts off the possibility of controlling radicalism through more-moderate methods: Once a regime starts down this pathway, there is often no other course. And eventually—perhaps a matter of years, in some cases (such as the FSU) perhaps even decades—this pathway leads to regime collapse.
- *DO NOT count on diversion as a long-term strategy either.* In this volume, Zhemukhov and Cornell have noted the outflow of violent radicals from the FSU to Syria, and many observers of the region suspect that this outflow may be tacitly supported by at least some of the governing regimes.¹⁸ Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, a similar siphoning-off effect has been seen in Uzbekistan, with IMU cadres leaving their home turf to fight in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir. The attractions of this strategy for an FSU regime are obvious: Far better to have homegrown radicals killing (and, perhaps, being killed) in another country than at home. But such an approach does not solve the problem; it merely pushes the day of reckoning further down the road.

¹⁸ An example of such analysis is International Crisis Group, “The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?” No. 238, March 16, 2016.

The example of Pakistan's involvement with an array of radical groups since the 1980s is instructive. While Pakistan had occasionally sponsored individual militants or small groups throughout its independent history, in the 1980s, it drastically increased this strategy—largely funded by the United States and Saudi Arabia—to wage a proxy war against Soviet control of Afghanistan.¹⁹ In addition to sponsoring an array of Pashtun militias with tribal affiliations across the Durand Line separating itself and Afghanistan (e.g., the Haqqani clan, the precursor of the Taliban), Pakistan also supported indigenous groups such as Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), recruited from its own citizenry in Punjab. Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Pakistan continued to push its own Pashtun militants across the western border into Afghanistan, while redirecting its Punjabi radicals eastward into a budding insurgency in India's state of Jammu and Kashmir. Nearly three decades later, both groups pose a near-existential threat to Pakistan's identity as a democracy (albeit an imperfect one). Many of the Pashtuns encouraged to fight in Afghanistan have since turned their guns on the Pakistani state itself, forming the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and prompting the largest counterinsurgency operation (Operation Zarb-e Azb, initiated in 2014 and still underway) since 1971. The Punjabi groups, most notably LeT and Jaish-e Muhammad, have brought Pakistan to the brink of warfare with India on at least three occasions in this century: following the terrorist attacks on India's Parliament House in December 2001, on Mumbai in November 2008, and on a string of military posts in Kashmir in 2016.

Whatever policy advantage may have been gained by the use of these proxies in the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan now faces a terrible dilemma: While these home-grown militants pose grave dangers when they are supported in violent actions against neighboring countries, they represent a far more serious threat were support to be dropped, turning their violence against the Pakistani state itself.

- *DO NOT boost radicals to undermine more moderate religious opponents.* As noted by Zhemukhov, both democratic and nondemocratic regimes have sometimes tried to sabotage religiously based political opponents by tacitly supporting their far more radical rivals. The logic of such an approach may be inviting: First, a violent radical group can discredit a more moderate, religiously based political party by the taint of association. Second, the more extreme group might draw popular support away from the more mainstream one or even direct its violence against its rival rather than the state. Third, a governing regime can use the threat of terrorism as rationale for a broad-based crackdown on opponents across the

¹⁹ For a general overview of Pakistan's strategy of using jihadists to wage a proxy war against the Soviet-sponsored Afghan government of the 1980s, see Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*, New York: Public Affairs, 2013, pp. 265–516; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 1–31; and Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden*, New York: Penguin, 2004, pp. 21–188.

political spectrum—for example, a policy carried out in Uzbekistan under Islam Karimov and in the Caucasus by Kremlin leadership in the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

Bashar al-Assad has adopted precisely this strategy vis-à-vis the Islamic State, pointedly refraining from action against the most radical Sunni group in his nation, instead focusing his attacks on more moderate Sunni militias (and their civilian supporters); the long-term outcome of Assad's policy remains to be seen. Perhaps the most instructive archetype of this approach, however, is the tacit support by India's prime minister Indira Gandhi for the radical Sikh leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In the early 1980s, Gandhi felt that the Sikh-focused party Akali Dal posed a threat to her electoral control over the state of Punjab. In the view of many scholars, Gandhi permitted Bhindranwale to undertake a bloody campaign against both Hindus and moderate Sikhs, thereby exacerbating communal tensions in Punjab and discrediting the Akalis in the eyes of the electorate.²⁰

The experiment did not end well: In 1983, Bhindranwale led a small army of his followers to seize control of the Golden Temple in Amritsar and turned it into a heavily fortified compound. Gandhi ordered a full-scale military assault in 1984, which left the holiest site in the Sikh faith defiled with hundreds of corpses. This attack left even the most moderate Sikhs deeply alienated and led to Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards four months later.

- *DO pay close notice to external sponsors of extremist religious groups.* Throughout the FSU, as elsewhere, religious revivalism is fueled by external donations and material support. In most cases, this poses little threat to the stability of the nation: Missionary activity often disrupts established social hierarchies, but this is more commonly an evolutionary than a revolutionary process. For example, 20th-century missionary activity has turned South Korea from an overwhelmingly Buddhist nation to one in which a majority of the population espousing any religion identify as Christian;²¹ the political cleavages of South Korean society, however, do not occur along sectarian lines.

²⁰ The analysis of Šumit Ganguly is representative of other scholarly views:

She detected in the appearance and rhetoric of the regional Akali Dal party not only a threat to Congress's dominance but also a strong whiff of secessionism. In a perverse attempt to undermine the growing popularity of the Akalis, she chose actively to court and encourage a violent, fundamentalist Sikh preacher, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who had political ambitions of his own and proved to be more than a match for her (Šumit Ganguly, "The Crisis of Indian Secularism," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 4, October 2003, p. 16).

²¹ According the Pew Research Center, in 2010, a plurality (46 percent) of the population had no religious affiliation, while 29 percent identified as Christian and 23 percent as Buddhist. Phillip Connor, "Six Facts About South Korea's Growing Christian population," Pew Research Center, August 12, 2014.

Likewise, as noted by Cornell, when the Central Asian republics began to loosen restrictions on the practice of Islam in the 1990s, a range of international Muslim charities and donors were eager to assist in the construction of mosques and the spread of religious education. Each donor naturally propagated its own branch of the faith, and this led to a range of ideological sponsorship. Turkish groups helped reintroduce the Sufi form of Islam shared by most Turkic communities in Central Asia. Donors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, however, fostered a strict Salafi interpretation of the faith. Given the financial resources at their disposal, these donors have been able to fund high-profile mosques and *madrassas* (religious academies) and provide generous scholarships to Central Asian students interested in pursuing religious education abroad.

While most of the Salafi missionary and donor activity remains apolitical, a portion of it helps fund the region's radical fringe. The challenge for regimes in the FSU is to separate external funding of violent radicalism from funding of nonviolent religious streams.

- *DO permit nonviolent religious groups—and perhaps support moderate ones—even if they do not support your political agenda.* In many cases throughout the FSU, regime leaders have taken an approach toward religious groups that might be characterized as “you’re either with me or against me.” Religious groups that have aligned with the political agendas of regimes have enjoyed government sponsorship, often through an official *muftiate* or ministry (e.g., as noted by Tonoyan, Azerbaijan’s *Azərbaycan Respublikası Dini Qurumlarla İş üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi* [State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations]).

In most, if not all, of the Central Asian republics, the imams of officially sanctioned mosques are required to deliver their Friday *khutba* (sermon) from a text sent out by the government. This close association between the state and its favored religious groups has led—as suggested by Kassenova—to a discrediting of officially permitted leaders and congregations. Why has the banned organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to attract followers in Uzbekistan and elsewhere throughout the region, despite the perils of belonging to such a group? Why do significant numbers of younger believers shun official congregations in favor of underground faith communities? In large measure, it is because they see the established clergy as being too closely tied to political authorities who have often lost the trust of their people.

The phenomenon is hardly unique to the FSU: It has been the subject of considerable scholarly discussion in the context of the Arab Spring.²² From a regime stand-

²² John Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 1–25; Claudia Derichs and Thomas Demmelhuber, “Monarchies and Republics, State and Regime, Durability and Fragility in View of the Arab Spring,” *Journal of Arabian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2014, pp. 180–194.

point, there is generally less to fear from moderate opponents willing to work within the political system than from radical foes operating in a nebulous underground. This is as true of religiously based opponents as of those with no religious ideology. Enabling moderate religious opposition to find a voice within the political arena can create a governing structure that is more resilient and better able to self-correct in the face of popular discontent.

- *DO encourage secular education and values.* Secularism and faith are sometimes portrayed as polar opposites—by those on both sides of the religious divide. During Soviet times, expressions of faith were taken as signs of a counter-revolutionary mindset and often punished brutally. In the post-Soviet era, secularism is often associated with the cruelest forms of communist repression rather than with more universal themes. For regimes in the FSU (as suggested by Cornell), the challenge is to rehabilitate the principle of secular education without turning it back into a form of state-mandated ideology.

There are models for the integration of secular and faith-based education. These range from a full secular curriculum with religious topics taught as a supplement to independent systems of education run by religious organizations teaching both spiritual and temporal subjects on an equal basis.²³ Likewise, opening space in the public arena for religious expression does not require a closing of space for secular values. Some state models (such as that of France and Atatürk's Turkey) posit a form of secularism that removes displays of faith from government offices and other sites associated with the state; this is not, however, the only model available. More appropriate for FSU nations (particularly those of Central Asia) might be a model of secularism enshrined in the constitution of India, in which the government stands equidistant from specific religions without attempting to remove religious expression from the public stage.²⁴

²³ An example of a fully integrated approach, administered by a religious order teaching Turkish language as well as spiritual and secular topics, is that of the Fethullah Gülen movement; it does not reveal its full international presence publicly, but has been reported to run 800 schools worldwide (see Alexandra Hudson, "Turkish Islamic Preacher: Threat or Benefactor?" Reuters, May 14, 2008). Because of antagonism between the Hizmet (as the movement is sometimes called) and the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, expansion into Central Asia is unlikely to progress very far. A global religious denomination with a significant presence in Tajikistan, the Nizari Ismaili community, led by the Aga Khan, runs a system of schools worldwide, including the Aga Khan Lycée in Khorog, Tajikistan. For a discussion of one such educational approach from outside the FSU, teaching both Islamic subjects and all of the secular topics necessary for an International Baccalaureate Degree, see Blank, 2001, pp. 207–228.

²⁴ This model, sometimes termed "Nehruvian secularism" after India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, is rejected by the Hindu Nationalist movement seeking a more explicitly sectarian form of public religious expression. The Bharatiya Janata Party, which, at the time of writing, controls both the central government and the most important state governments, subscribes to the Hindu Nationalist ideology. Nonetheless, India's constitutional safeguards have preserved greater religious freedom for minority communities than are enjoyed in most states of the FSU. For discussion of the Nehruvian/Hindu Nationalist debate over secularism in India, see Ashutosh

- *Learn from China's failures and successes.* The People's Republic of China (PRC), like the Soviet Union, spent decades trying to stamp out most meaningful expressions of private faith. Unlike the Soviet Union, however, the PRC evolved sufficiently to make its transition into the 21st century. The China of 2017 bears only a faint resemblance to that of 1967, and this change has been central to the regime's survival. Beijing has loosened its control over its citizens' economic, social, and intellectual lives—including their freedom of worship. The Communist Party brooks little disagreement over issues that it considers of paramount importance, but since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, it has been moving steadily away from the Stalinist model of totalitarian rule.

Since the early 1990s, the regime has struck an implicit bargain with its citizens: The party will provide opportunities for rapid economic growth and greatly expanded social freedoms as long as citizens refrain from challenging the political structure. On the whole, this bargain has resulted in far less religious discord and religiously motivated insurgency or instability than might otherwise have been expected in a nation comprising one-sixth of humanity. The two most important geographical areas in assessing China's policy vis-à-vis religious communities are Tibet and Xinjiang. Few outside observers would rate Beijing's policies in either region a genuine success, and few would claim that citizens of these territories enjoy anything approaching true freedom of conscience. But both areas are fully under the control of the central government, and this control is maintained with a minimum of violence. What can the nations of the FSU learn from this example?

As a cautionary example, they can learn not to replicate the heavy-handed social engineering that has so often fueled anger against Beijing in both Tibet and Xinjiang. The Chinese government has diluted the ethnic and religious character of both regions through officially sponsored in-migration of ethnic Han Chinese. The practice of religion—Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Islam in Xinjiang—is often treated as an act of political subversion. Largely as a result of these policies, Tibet and Xinjiang are perhaps the most unstable and poorly integrated territories under the central government's control. A lesson for nations of the FSU: Do not underestimate the enduring power of religious and ethnic identities—and do not exacerbate tensions through repression.

The compact between the party and the people, however, has yielded benefits for both. The party has delivered economic and social progress that would have been inconceivable to previous generations of Chinese citizens. Whether one looks in Kashgar or Lhasa—or among Uighurs and Tibetans living in predominantly Han cities throughout China—the material benefits of the compact are plain to see. This economic and social improvement may well have a power-

ful effect in tamping down pressure for religious freedom. A lesson for nations of the FSU: The more the state is able to provide its citizens with a comfortable life, the fewer resources it will have to expend in repressing religiously inspired threats to national stability. In China, the party has devised a system where everything *except* religion is the opiate of the masses.

For U.S. Policymakers

For U.S. officials, the key question may be, “How do you solve a problem like Karimov?” That is, what should the United States do when faced with FSU leaders whose approach toward potential extremists is brutal repression? Should policymakers ignore their violations of human rights and religious liberties? That would be a violation of several U.S. laws (for example, the Leahy Amendment [10 U.S. Code §2249]).²⁵ Should the United States actively participate in such abuses? When this approach has been tried (e.g., using “extraordinary rendition” of terrorism suspects to nations where torture is routinely practiced), the results were counterproductive by the metrics of security, diplomacy, and politics (not to mention morality).

The recommendations presented here do not claim to solve the Karimov problem. U.S. leaders will always have to weigh countering extremism (whether through a human rights or religious liberty agenda or by other methods) against a variety of other policy imperatives. Sometimes, these other imperatives will take priority: for example, the threat posed by the potential for “loose nukes” in Kazakhstan in the 1990s or the need for Uzbekistan’s cooperation in the Northern Distribution Network supplying U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2009.

It is the role of the policy-minded scholar to propose options. It is the role of the policymaker to choose among the options presented:

- Use U.S. leverage—and a range of specific incentives and disincentives—to encourage FSU nations to adopt the policies outlined in the previous section. The United States is an indirect actor in the FSU and will have far less effect than the governments of the nations in question. At the same time, the United States will remain an interested party and a potential target of radicalism bred in the FSU: The Boston Marathon bombing of 2013, perpetrated by the Chechen American brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, demonstrated the threat that FSU extremism poses to the United States. Rather than aiming for unilateral approaches to this challenge, the U.S. government should focus on inducing the governments of the region to adopt the strategies outlined earlier in this chapter. The tools available to the U.S. government include:
 - *Security cooperation/assistance.* While none of the FSU nations are among the most significant security cooperation partners of the United States, several

²⁵ United States Code, Title 10, Section 2249e (Renumbered Section 362), Leahy Law, December 23, 2016.

states receive enough security cooperation or assistance to provide the United States with substantial policy influence. During Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. relied heavily on several FSU nations—particularly Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan—for logistical supply lines to Afghanistan in the Northern Distribution Network. Enduring Freedom officially ended on December 31, 2014, and was succeeded by the more-limited Operation Freedom’s Sentinel.²⁶ This transition provides the United States with greater leeway in using security cooperation funding as a tool to influence partner nations’ approaches to radicalism within their borders. Even heavily sanctioned FSU nations currently benefit from various types of security assistance. For example, Uzbekistan has been legally barred from receiving direct military transfers since 2004, but in 2012, the U.S. government used waiver authority to restart certain forms of security aid; in January 2015, the United States announced the provision of 308 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles and 20 Armored Recovery Vehicles—a transfer of assets worth \$348 million when new—to Uzbekistan under the Excess Defense Articles Program.²⁷

- *Bilateral and multilateral economic assistance.* U.S. humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is—and should be—walled off from political objectives. The same is true, at least in theory, for most development aid provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); an exception to this is assistance given through the Office of Transition Initiatives, which has the explicit mission of providing “assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs.”²⁸ Outside of USAID, agencies within the U.S. government providing various forms of economic assistance to countries in the FSU include bureaus within the U.S. Departments of State, Treasury, and Labor and Energy, as well as the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Beyond its bilateral aid, the United States has a powerful “voice and vote” role in the economic assistance provided by multinational institutions including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank.
- Most forms of economic assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral, serve U.S. interests as well as those of the recipient nation. In most cases, it would be imprudent to use such aid as a lever for short-term policy goals. Outside the realm of disaster relief, however, most bilateral and multilateral programs incorporate good-governance measures as a requirement—or even as the primary

²⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, “Obama, Hagel Mark End of Operation Enduring Freedom,” Washington, D.C.: DoD News, Defense Media Activity, December 28, 2014.

²⁷ Navbahor Imamova, “Exclusive: U.S. Gives Uzbekistan Military Equipment Boost,” Voice of America News, January 22, 2015.

²⁸ U.S. Agency for International Development, “Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance,” November 4, 2016.

goal. In other words, much of the economic assistance provided or influenced by the United States is *already* premised on FSU nations implementing many of the policies previously outlined. The United States can advance its interest in controlling FSU radicalism by making sure that such good-governance promises are actually kept. As a quick reference on the scope of bilateral aid alone, the nations of the FSU received the following sums in fiscal year 2016:²⁹

- Armenia: \$78 million
- Azerbaijan: \$26 million
- Belarus: \$26 million
- Georgia: \$147 million
- Kazakhstan: \$26 million
- Kyrgyzstan: \$77 million
- Moldova: \$75 million
- Tajikistan: \$52 million
- Turkmenistan: \$8 million
- Ukraine: \$241 million
- Uzbekistan: \$16 million.

- *Diplomatic, trade, and other “soft power” pressure.* In addition to the conventional tools of security cooperation and economic assistance, the United States has a range of options in the arena typically understood as “soft power.” At the UN and other international fora, the United States can use its diplomatic heft to induce FSU nations to adopt policies that defuse rather than exacerbate religious radicalism. The tools of trade can also be employed to advance national security interests, often more easily than can those of development assistance. It is worth noting that some key FSU members, including Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, remain outside the World Trade Organization.³⁰ U.S. government informational campaigns, sometimes falling under the rubric of public diplomacy, can also provide useful tools spanning a wide range of traditional and social media.
- *Make conscious use of existing unilateral tools with potential impact on radicalization in the FSU.* While U.S. unilateral influence in the FSU is far more limited than influence exercised through the regional governments, some policy tools for direct U.S. action are indeed available. They include:
 - *Educational and cultural exchanges.* The U.S. government has a direct role in selecting the participants of at least 43 educational and cultural exchange

²⁹ Data are total disbursements from all U.S. agencies, for FY 2016. FSU nations termed “high income,” such as Estonia and Latvia, are not listed as aid recipients. See U.S. Agency for International Development, “U.S. Foreign Aid by Country,” Foreign Aid Explorer, 2016.

³⁰ World Trade Organization, “Members and Observers,” wto.org, undated.

programs, most of which are open to citizens of FSU nations or to U.S. citizens wishing to visit these countries.³¹ The most well-known of these may be the Fulbright educational exchange programs (there are 13 separate such exchanges), but they range from the American Arts Incubator Program to the Youth Exchange and Study Abroad Program. When deciding which candidates to select for some of these programs in the FSU, the United States could prioritize applicants whose exchange would advance the goal of religious deradicalization. For example, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs could increase its promotion of interfaith exchanges for religious leaders and members of religious youth groups; such exchanges would enable religious figures in the FSU to see how the United States has struggled with issues surrounding the place of faith communities in a multireligious nation—and enable them to learn from both the successes and failures of this struggle.

- *Better coordination of law enforcement intelligence.* After the Boston Marathon bombing, there was considerable blame shifting among the various counterterrorism agencies either inside the United States or abroad. Should the Tsarnaev brothers have been the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Investigation? The Central Intelligence Agency? Local law enforcement in Boston? Did this fall under the mandate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the State Department? Should the U.S. government have cooperated more closely with authorities in the Russian Federation? The short, and unsatisfactory, answer is all of the above. To combat violent radicalism throughout the FSU, a longer answer would include some mechanism for improving coordination not merely between the United States and any one specific nation (in the Boston case, the culprits had ties to Chechnya and Dagestan, which are both within the Russian Federation), but among *all* nations throughout the FSU. Much of the extremist threat in the region is transnational: As several authors in this volume have noted, many extremists are radicalized in diaspora communities (particularly those in Moscow and other large Russian cities) or in prisons outside of their native countries. Without an effective means of exchanging information on such individuals and groups, the United States will always be behind the radical curve.
- *Understand the issue.* One action entirely within the control of the United States—perhaps the only recommendation that can be said to flow from the analysis of every author in this volume—is formulation of policy based on a solid analysis of the challenge. This study aims to make a small contribution to this effort, but the topic needs a much more thorough exploration than it currently finds in policy-

³¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “Alphabetical List of Programs,” undated.

making circles. A proper discussion of the requirements for shaping such a comprehensive understanding would constitute an entirely separate project, necessitating investigation of overlapping issues in South Asia, the Middle East, and other regions. The analytical points raised at the beginning of this chapter are intended for U.S. policymakers at least as much as for those in FSU nations. The direct implications of these points for U.S. policymakers are outlined here:

- *Radical Islam is a highly varied and highly localized phenomenon.* The tendency to lump all strands of “radical Islam” together and to characterize all of them as an undifferentiated threat is perhaps more prevalent among U.S. policymakers than among those in the FSU. In all five Central Asian nations, as well as in such Muslim-majority areas as parts of the Caucasus, policymakers have a greater understanding of the nuances of Islam than is generally found in Washington. The policymakers in the former FSU, however, use this knowledge to their own institutional advantage when interacting with U.S. officials. Is Hizb ut-Tahrir a genuine threat to U.S. interests, as leaders of Uzbekistan and other nations say? Do Salafi groups represent creeping jihadism, regardless of any pledges to operate within the nonviolent arena? Or are the representatives of Central Asian (and other FSU) states merely representing their *own* interests (in the case of some authoritarian regimes with poor human rights records, interests that may not be in concert with those of their citizens)?
- Americans are quite familiar with rival denominations of a single faith adopting very different ideologies, so long as this phenomenon is expressed in a familiar context. U.S. policymakers are aware that the Christian world is divided into rival Protestant and Roman Catholic groups, with a wide variety of smaller denominations (most notably, the various Eastern Orthodox churches) found in many nations of the FSU and other parts of Eastern Europe, North and East Africa, and the Middle East). U.S. leaders are likewise familiar that each of these large blocs contains an enormous ideological range. The Protestant community reaches from squarely fundamentalist Southern Baptist and Pentecostal congregations to progressive Episcopal and Presbyterian churches proudly celebrating gay marriages. Even the rigidly hierarchical Roman Catholic Church contains individuals and groups ranging from deeply reactionary Opus Dei initiates to nuns and priests living out the doctrines of Liberation Theology. The very term *radical* is a slippery one: Are the Amish a radical group because their men all keep beards, their women wear modest clothing, and they consciously model all aspects of their lives on the social conditions prevalent several hundred years ago? If not, by what standard are Salafis deemed an across-the-board threat, and the Amish not?
- Harsh rhetoric employed by U.S. policymakers, often lumping all practitioners of Islam into a single demonized category, can become a self-fulfilling proph-

ecy.³² This is not merely a false narrative but a dangerous one. Only a small fringe of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims espouse extremist views, and only a tiny fraction of this tiny fraction will ever undertake a violent action based on them. By making policies based on an unrepresentative fringe rather than the overwhelmingly nonviolent mainstream, U.S. officials run the real risk of assisting jihadist recruitment. Even among the small portion of extremists in the FSU, only a minuscule subset represents a threat to the United States (as opposed to their own governments). Irresponsible rhetoric—and irresponsible policies flowing from it—have the power to alter this equation.

- *Militant Christianity is also a potentially dangerous phenomenon.* This analytical point is more relevant for FSU leaders than for those of the United States, but represents an underappreciated cautionary notice nonetheless. The United States has its own indigenous threat from extremist self-described Christian groups and individuals.³³ Of relevance to this discussion, however, is the ongoing salience of militant Christian groups inside the FSU.
- As is the case for Islamist groups in the FSU, the rise of potentially violent Christian groups could have serious implications for U.S. policy and interests, as well as for the safety of U.S. citizens abroad. For evidence of the threat, one need look no further than the Balkans conflicts of the 1990s. During these overlapping series of civil wars, several radical Christian groups engaged in mass murder, war crimes, and countless acts of terroristic violence. The signature atrocity of this conflict—the July 1995 massacre of some 8,000 prisoners at Srebrenica—was perpetrated by the self-declared Army of Republika Srpska, fighting in self-proclaimed defense of the Serbian Orthodox community and church. A range of militias fought conventional and subconventional actions in support of other Eastern Orthodox communities, including the Macedonian Orthodox and Montenegrin Orthodox churches. Croatia's militias were predominantly Roman Catholic. Each of these groups fought against other religiously based militias, comprising a shifting mix of Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic alliances. Any U.S. policymakers active during that period will need little reminding that Christian extremists can be as dangerous as Muslim

³² For examples of such rhetoric from the Executive Branch, see Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, “I Think Islam Hates Us’: A Timeline of Trump’s Comments About Islam and Muslims,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017. For examples from the Legislative Branch, see Jason Silverman, “Iowa Congressman Implies That Muslim Children Are Holding Back ‘Our Civilization,’” *New York Daily News*, March 12, 2017; and Ken Stickney, “Louisiana Congressman on Radicalized Islam: ‘Kill Them All,’” *USA Today*, June 5, 2017.

³³ For discussion of groups including Christian Identity and Christian Patriots, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 102–109.

ones—but policymakers whose careers began only after the 1990s may be unaware of this history.³⁴

- *Repression can tamp down radicalism and also fuel it.* Some strands of current U.S. government thinking see alliances with authoritarian rulers as a strategy to combat violent radicalism. Where the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations sought to engage with citizens and civil-society leaders of nations at risk for religiously motivated radicalism (especially, although not exclusively, in the Islamic world), the current administration has prioritized interaction with authoritarian heads of government such as Egypt’s President (and former general) Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz.
- The same observations that should caution FSU leaders about the dangers of a counter-radicalism strategy based on repression are also applicable to U.S. policymakers. For U.S. leaders, there is an additional rationale for avoiding the embrace of FSU authoritarians: Such a bearhug cannot help but leave its mark. U.S. reputation could be soiled by close association with leaders who are seen by their own people as brutal and undemocratic. In many parts of the world (e.g., Latin America and much of the Middle East), the United States already has a long history of sponsoring repressive regimes. Today’s policymakers are still dealing with the consequences of the choices made by their predecessors several generations ago. In the FSU, however, the United States has no such baggage: Throughout the Soviet years, the United States worked very hard to create an image of itself as a beacon of moral leadership. Generations of Soviet political prisoners were sustained by that beacon, and many of their children and grandchildren are now drawn to religious movements in a search for similar moral leadership. For the United States to ally with local dictators who have inherited the Soviet mantle would be a colossal error: It would cast away 70 years of hard-won credibility in exchange for policy goals unlikely to survive a change of season.

Conclusion

The United States and the leaders of FSU regimes share a number of key goals, including regional stability, defusing of sectarian tensions that give rise to religious radicalism, and prevention of violent extremism from either growing in the region or being imported from such hotspots as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The best practices for

³⁴ Mitja Velikonja, “In Hoc Signo Vincens: Religious Symbolism in the Balkans Wars 1991–1995,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1, September, 2003, pp. 25–40; William W. Hagen, “The Balkans’ Lethal Nationalisms,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, July–August 1999, pp. 52–64.

achieving these goals are also compatible: Promotion of good governance and religious tolerance in the FSU nations and wise strategy implemented (perhaps with U.S. assistance) by FSU governments. The United States can take additional steps on a unilateral basis, but its best hope for success lies in inducing FSU governments to adopt best practices on their own. In cases where governments are intent on adopting such good-governance measures, the United States should stand ready to assist with expertise and funding for programs likely to produce results.

In cases where governments are resistant to such measures, however, the United States should distance itself from regimes trying to control radicalism through repression, subversion, or other brutal techniques. Such policies might enable FSU regimes to survive long enough for their leaders and elite members of the *nomenklatura* to amass personal fortunes and either live out their days in local power or enjoy their riches in gilded exile. In some cases, they might not: Nicolae Ceausescu and Mohammad Najibullah will not be the last dictators to end their days by bullet or noose. For the United States, however, the decision should be clear: Sooner or later, association with brutal regimes will end badly.

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Despite the rise of religion as a visible force in the sociopolitical life of post-Soviet countries, little is known about how religion has contributed or may yet contribute to tensions or peace in this region. An improved understanding of the relationship between religion and conflict in the former Soviet republics can fill a critical gap and help inform policymakers and other actors working to bring peace and stability to this volatile region.

This volume of essays takes a multidisciplinary and cross-domain look at religion and how it affects the stability of the former Soviet republics. Contributions by a range of international researchers and policy experts on religion and conflict and the post-Soviet region address the dynamics among religion, conflict, and stability in the South and North Caucasus, Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia. The authors found that while the role of religion varies across contexts, religion has not been the original source of conflict in the FSU. Religion has, however, increasingly been used by both states and nonstate groups to mobilize supporters, and the infusion of religion in existing grievances has exacerbated existing tensions and encumbered progress toward peace.

While broad in scope, this volume of essays provides an improved understanding of the role of religion in conflict and stability in the FSU. Further inter- and multidisciplinary work and scholar-practitioner collaborations will be crucial to developing comprehensive and nuanced recommendations for how to approach religion when working toward building sustainable peace in the FSU and beyond.



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