

# **ISLAMIC REVIVALISM AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN UZBEKISTAN**

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## **Executive Summary**

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, political philosophers and social scientists have predicted the decline of religion and the rise of secularism and rationalism in both culture and politics. Is religion, and in particular Islam, in fact in decline? And if it is not, what if any role does Islamic faith and values play in shaping political attitudes and politics? Will Islam and Islamic leaders likely foster or undermine support for democracy? This paper speaks to these debates by looking at the development of religion and views about religion and politics in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Using data from in-depth qualitative interviews with a cross-section of social elites, the paper explores these attitudes in a way that previous quantitative or journalistic studies have not done. The paper argues that during the past fifteen years of its independence, Uzbekistan has experienced a dramatic revival of the Islamic faith. To some extent that religious revivalism has also fed the growth of some political Islamist ideas among ordinary people, who increasingly see Islam as a just solution to the injustices and illegitimacy of the current political regime. Such attitudes, however, have not yet translated into significant support for political Islamist opposition parties or movements.

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## **I. Introduction**

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, political philosophers and social scientists have predicted the decline of religion and the rise of secularism and rationalism in both culture and politics. From Hume to Hegel to Marx and Weber, theorists anticipated that modern man would be educated, urbanized, and free of the bonds of religious institutions and religious superstitions.

Indeed, in the latter half of the twentieth century, modernization theory (Huntington 1967, Inglehart 1990, 1997) and secularization theory (Berger 1967) went hand in hand in their celebration of the decline of religion and the rise of secular, rational politics. The Soviet system was often seen as an exemplar of modernization and secularization.

When Samuel Huntington challenged the dominant secularization thesis in 1993, he shocked the scholarly community, and the vast majority of scholars ridiculed his argument. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington claimed that religion and culture were in fact on the rise, and that in the post-Cold War world, religiously-defined civilizational boundaries were likely to become the fault line for future conflict between peoples and states. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, by contrast, have recently reformulated the modernization and secularization thesis, and argue both that religiosity is on the decline globally, and that support for democracy is just as strong in Muslim countries as elsewhere (Inglehart and Norris 2004).

Is religion, and in particular Islam, in fact in decline? And if it is not, what if any role does Islamic faith and values play in shaping political attitudes and politics? Will Islam and Islamic leaders likely foster or undermine support for democracy? This paper speaks to these debates by looking at the development of religion and views about religion and politics in post-

Soviet Uzbekistan. Using data from in-depth qualitative interviews with a cross-section of social elites, the paper explores these attitudes in a way that previous quantitative or journalistic studies have not done. The paper argues that during the past fifteen years of its independence, Uzbekistan has experienced a dramatic revival of the Islamic faith. To some extent that religious revivalism has also fed the growth of some political Islamist ideas among ordinary people, who increasingly see Islam as a just solution to the injustices and illegitimacy of the current political regime. Such attitudes, however, have not yet translated into significant support for political Islamist opposition parties or movements.

## **II. The Literature on Islam and Politics: Hypotheses to Explore**

The relationship between religion and politics and the direction of religion in a modernizing world have been hotly contested issues for centuries. Since the Enlightenment, many political philosophers in the west have decried the negative influence of religion on politics, and advocated the need to separate the two. Marx famously declared religion the “opiate of the people,” and he and Hegel both anticipated a modernization process that would eliminate, or at least diminish, the role of religion.

In Weber’s terms, modernization would allow people to shift from charismatic and irrational politics, to a rational, legalistic system. Building on Weber, twentieth-century modernization and political culture theorists argued that Protestantism, as a “reformed” religion, was conducive to capitalism and democracy, while more traditional religions such as Catholicism and Islam were not (see Weber 1920, Gellner 1986, Almond and Verba 1961).

While some scholars have revisited these predictions, finding that support for democracy and capitalism does now exist in Catholic and Islamic countries, they explain this shift by demonstrating that global modernization and secularization are well underway. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, in the most recent formulation of this theory, state that “human development generates changed cultural attitudes in virtually any society, although values also reflect the imprint of each society’s religious legacies and historical experiences” (2004, p. 137-38).

A closely related body of literature in Middle East and Islamic studies has grown up around the question of religion and democracy. Scholars, clerics, and policymakers have sought to understand the complicated relationship between religion and politics in the Muslim world. Apart from Huntington’s provocative clash hypothesis, others have argued the incompatibility of Islam and democracy.

The traditional culturalist or “Orientalist” view, articulated most eloquently by Bernard Lewis (2003, 1994, 1988; also Kedourie 1994, Gellner 1986), understands Islam as intricately intertwined with politics since the religion’s very birth (also see Fuller 2003, Mernissi 1992). Many Islamist clerics and thinkers, especially though not exclusively of the fundamentalist and extremist variants, also claim this to be true. Whether Khomeini, Khatami and Ahmadinejad in the Islamic Republic of Iran, or even President Hamid Karzai in the new Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, political and religious leaders in much of the Muslim world argue for religion’s special role within the state, a view that has led to significant skepticism about the possibility of democracy in a Muslim country.

Many Islamic scholars have challenged the prevailing view that these belief systems are incompatible (Saroush 2002, An-Naim 1996, Sachedina 2001, Voll 1994, Esposito and Voll

1996, Eickelman 1999, Ganji 2005; Boroumand and Boroumand 2002). A few scholars have addressed this issue empirically. Mark Tessler and Jodi Nachtewy (1999) and Tessler and Gao (2005), and Tessler (2003) have found in survey data of several Middle Eastern countries, that a strong majority support democracy. Andrei Karatnycky analyzes Freedom House ratings and finds that there is not a “Muslim democracy gap,” but an “Arab democracy gap” (2002). M. Steven Fish similarly argues that it is not Islam but attitudes towards women that explain political differences between Muslim countries and the West (2002). Inglehart and Norris, drawing on a cross-national data from the World Values Survey, found no significant difference in political attitudes, especially about democracy, in Muslim and non-Muslim countries (2004, p. 154).

Still others point to specific cases – the moderation of Turkey’s Islamist Justice and Development Party, Khatami’s reformist leadership in Iran, and Turabi’s arrest in the Sudan -- as signs that the wind had died out of political Islam. Renowned area specialists of the Islamic world have jumped on the secularization bandwagon, even arguing that the events of September 11, 2001 and the rash of terrorist incidences organized by Islamists since the 1990s are but a sign of the last gasp of political Islam (Kepel 2002, Roy 1994).

As we turn to the case of Central Asia, we find that Soviet modernization policy, predicated upon a Marxist view of the world, fit well with the predictions of western social scientists and political theorists. Lenin and the Soviet regime that succeeded his death sought to implement a policy of “scientific atheism.”

First, throughout its empire, the Soviet regime destroyed the religious elite, religious relics, religious literature and holy books, religious schools, and most houses of religion,



including both mosques and churches (Keller 2001). Second, the Soviet regime engaged in a rapid modernization campaign that dramatically raised literacy to nearly 100% in both rural and urban areas, and significantly industrialized and modernized society (even industrializing agriculture to a great extent). Third, the Soviet education system, the youth Pioneer camps, and the Party apparatus indoctrinated people with Marxist and atheist beliefs.

In many Muslim areas of Soviet rule, the Party engaged in even more brutal tactics. The *hujum*, the campaign to unveil women, represents the brutality with which the Soviets attempted to forcibly remove a powerful Muslim symbol (especially in Uzbekistan), and to turn Muslim women into a “surrogate proletariat” that would help to eradicate Islam. These policies, together with social and economic advances were expected to wipe out religion.

The literature on Islam in the post-Soviet republics has many gaps. Several political scientists have argued that Islam is either mostly a cultural religious identity (Lubin 1995), or simply no longer a relevant identity (Jones Luong 2002) in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. This view critiqued those who pointed to the rise of some political trends in Islam during the transition (Naumkin 1992, Olcott 1995). Most scholars have focused almost exclusively on ethnic issues, to the exclusion of religious ones (e.g. Roy 2000; Nunn, Rubin, and Lubin, 1999; Tishkov 1997, Hiro 1995).

More recent works, to the contrary, have typically depicted the Central Asian region, like the Middle East, as a fundamentalist time bomb waiting to explode (Rashid 2002, Ro'i 2001). Vitaly Naumkin's study of radical Islamist movements in Central Asia is one of the few serious treatments of the subject (Naumkin 2003). Central Asia is one of the places in the Muslim world most likely to have undergone secularization as a result of Soviet policies, and yet the emergent

Islamist movements since 1991 suggest powerful evidence to the contrary. Here, however, we are interested not just in the radical leaders and activists, but in the religious and political attitudes of a broader slice of social elites.

Drawing together this varied literature on religion and politics in Central Asia and elsewhere in the Muslim world, we can set out a number of hypotheses to explore in this paper:

- 1) The modernization school hypothesis: religion is on the decline in Uzbekistan, and has been since the Soviet era due to modernization and forced secularization policies.
- 2) The culturalist school hypothesis: 1) religion is not in decline, and 2) in fact religious identity is ascending and likely to be the source of fundamentalist violence and inter-state conflict.
- 3) The reformist/modernization/democratization schools: These schools come together to argue 1) that Islam is in fact compatible with democracy, and 2) ordinary people support democracy despite lack of experience and a democratic culture; and 3) the divide between the west and the Muslim world is not about democracy but about gender discrimination.
- 4) The culturalist school: Islam is not compatible with democracy. Islamicization or Islamic revival will undermine support for democracy and create radical and extremist political movements.

### **III. Terms, Definitions, and Measurement**

Let me briefly define some terms used in this paper so that they are not confusing or mistaken as offensive. The term “Islamic world” or “Muslim world” simply refers to regions where the population is predominantly Muslim, and does not imply that the borders are fixed or the culture and religion unchanging.

Islamic religiosity is defined here as the belief, values, and practice of the Islamic faith. This term is measured by the extent to which people view themselves as Muslim and the extent to which they know and adhere to the tenets of their faith. One basic indicator of religiosity is

self-identification as a Muslim. Other indicators include knowing and performing the central five pillars of Islam: stating the *shahadah: La ilaha illa'Llah* (“There is no god but Allah”), saying *namaz* (daily prayer), reading the Qur’an, *hadith*, and other Islamic literature, attending the mosque on Fridays and holidays (for men), performing (or desiring to perform) the hajj, and giving alms to the poor. Based on these indicators, we can qualitatively assess religiosity as high or low, increasing or decreasing.

Islamist politics, political Islam, Islamist movements, or just Islamism are terms used here, as by prominent Middle East scholars and religious scholars, to refer to the politicization of Islamic religious teachings and beliefs, and those who actively promote such politicization (Esposito 1999). Ordinary Muslims or clerics are not necessarily *Islamists*, just as ordinary Christians are not necessarily members of the Christian Right. The use of the adjective Islamist does not imply that Islam is somehow inherently violent; rather most of these groups self-identify as Muslim or Islamic. Islamism is any ideology or movement that politicizes Islam, radical or moderate.

Within this broad spectrum of movements, Islamic fundamentalism refers to a category of Muslim believers who adopt a very strict or fundamental version of Islam (such as Salafism or Wahhabism). The term implies much the same that Christian fundamentalism does (Marty and Appleby 1991, Appleby, Almond, and Sivan 2001). Fundamentalists may, but do not necessarily, support violence. Nor are fundamentalists necessarily *Islamist*, that is, political. Likewise, extremists are not necessarily, fundamentalist in their religious views, though they often are. For example, militants in Kashmir are extremist (violent), but not clearly fundamentalist in their

religious views. Islamist movements may be fundamentalist (such as Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami),<sup>1</sup> extremist (such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), both (the IMU, Hamas), or neither, that is, moderate (e.g. Turkey's Justice and Development Party).

Islamic "fundamentalism" can be loosely assessed by an individual or group's beliefs on such issues as society, women, and the Islamic state or caliphate (Martin and Appleby 1991, Appleby, Almond, and Sivan 2001; Esposito 1999). Fundamentalists generally see society as a place of evil to be shunned, since humankind has fallen off the right path and into evil; they must return to the fundamentals of Islam (Esposito 1999). Fundamentalists seek the recreation of *Dar ul-Islam*, the abode of Islam, which refers to the just and good Islamic society. Fundamentalists likewise see the secular state as a place and agent of sin and injustice. This view can lead them either to shun the state or to advocate political change.

Fundamentalists are often identified by their physical appearance. Fundamentalists generally see women as a symbol of the family and procreation. They must be protected and kept at home, a view that generally leads to the wearing of a veil and chador that covers their hair and feminine figure from anyone outside the home and husband. Men are also restricted from shaving their beard and are sometimes restricted from wearing certain types of western clothing. The fundamentalist school sees not only the secular authoritarian state but also the democratic state as a place of immorality, in contradiction with the law of Allah. Thus, while many practicing Muslims may espouse political democracy, fundamentalist Muslims do not.

Islamic fundamentalism should be distinguished from Islamist extremism. I use the term "Islamist extremism" to refer to self-identified Islamist groups who use violence to attain their

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, some Christian movements are fundamentalist in their beliefs and worldview, but not extremist, i.e. violent. The Amish and some Bible belt groups fighting against teaching Darwinism in schools are two examples.

ends. Islamist extremist groups generally espouse the ideas of fundamentalists (e.g. the Islamicization of society and an Islamic state and law), but go beyond teaching and propaganda to the actual use of violence in fighting the *kufir* and pursuing their beliefs and political goals.

Islamic extremists are those who understand jihad principally to be violent war with unbelievers (what moderates call the “lesser jihad”, as opposed to the “greater jihad,” the war against one’s own sins, which moderates emphasize as the more important jihad, and liberals claim as the true meaning of jihad). They espouse and/or actually implement suicide bombings and other forms of terrorism to advance their political and religious goals.

These categories are more ideal types situated along a continuum than neat boxes with hard and fast borders. We can identify liberal, moderate and conservative (fundamentalist and extremist) attitudes towards key issues. We should note that individuals and even sometimes movement leaders have more complicated views, such as those who espouse a separation of religion and state, but agree with a violent jihad under certain circumstances. These terms then are meant to aid in comparison and to give some precision to descriptions though, obviously, both individuals and movements often change their practices and positions over time.

#### **IV. Methodology**

Most of the empirical data presented is based on field research involving fifty-three in-depth structured interviews with social elites (carried out in 2004 and January –May 2005, with my research assistants), and several dozen semi-structured/ informal interviews, mosque visits, and participant observation (which I conducted between 2002 and 2004). The structured interviews were organized by region and categories of respondents comprising the social elite:

official religious leaders; informal/unofficial religious leaders; state representatives; formal community leaders; informal community leaders; and official journalists responsible for writing on religion. Names have been removed and places altered to protect respondents' identities.

I also make reference here to data from twenty-four focus groups carried out in 2004-2005, in six regions of Uzbekistan.<sup>2</sup> The focus groups were organized in each selected region according to certain criteria: age, gender (separate male and female groups), and professional status (blue collar and migrant laborers, small businessmen, white collar/ intelligentsia, and a category of tertiary and graduate students). The participants were recruited into three age groups, aged: 20-24 (students), 25-35 (young adults of the post-Soviet generation), and 36-50 (the Soviet-educated generation)

## **V. The Resurgence of Religiosity in Uzbekistan**

The interview and focus group studies in Uzbekistan were both broad and in-depth, and focused on a number of areas related to Islamic society and politics, including: 1) religious identification and beliefs; 2) religious practices and religious education; 3) attitudes about Islam and democracy/authoritarianism and an Islamic state; 4) attitudes about Islamic law and courts; 5) gender and Islam; 6) jihad and martyrdom; 7) attitudes about political parties, especially Islamist parties and movements; 8) attitudes about the US and its policies (e.g. in Afghanistan and Iraq); and 9) attitudes about major international issues in the Islamic world (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Chechnya). In this paper, due to space constraints, I focus mainly on the responses of social elites with regard to issues 1-7, as they reflect on the theoretical debates outlined above.

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<sup>2</sup> For more discussion of this focus group data and ordinary citizens' perspectives, see Kathleen Collins, "The Islamicization of Central Asia: A Social Perspective," unpublished paper, November 2005.

## **The Political Context of Religion in Independent Uzbekistan**

Religiosity in post-Soviet Uzbekistan has developed within a fluctuating but predominantly repressive state policy towards religion and religious freedom. Shortly after independence, the leadership of Uzbekistan began to adopt Muslim symbols and use Muslim rhetoric, in short, to engage in Muslim politics not unlike some leaders of secular Middle Eastern states that occasionally use Islam as a source of popular legitimacy.

The new flag incorporated green, the color of the Prophet, and a crescent moon, the symbol of Islam. President Islam Karimov legalized religion, returned the property of mosques and churches to religious leaders, allowed the official Spiritual Directorate for Muslims of Uzbekistan to increase its educational and preaching activities, and opened up sponsored trips to Mecca. Karimov himself, once a resolute communist, performed the hajj. He even made references to Uzbekistan's Muslim identity and unique Muslim heritage in some speeches.

Karimov's liberalization of religion, following Gorbachev's policy, has meant the legitimization of "official" Islam. Muslim organizations, as they have since the 1940s, operate under the authority of a state *Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musulman Uzbekistana*, the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Uzbekistan (often called the *Muftiat*), which differs from the Soviet system only in that it now exists independently in each Central Asian country. In Uzbekistan, this board includes the *Kaziyat* ('branch') of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakistan's Muslims, and the Imam al-Bukhari Institute of Islam in Tashkent (as in the Soviet era, an institution of higher Islamic learning).

Karimov also made some concessions to popular interest in religion. Ten *madrassas* (secondary education religious schools) have opened, including two women's *madrassas*. An Islamic University in Tashkent, an institution of higher learning under the Ministry of Education, opened in spring 1998. Although still tinged by their obvious connection to and subjugation to the government, the *Muftiat* and its cadre of imams do appear to be more openly engaged in religious teaching and services and less engaged in propaganda than in the Soviet days. Despite their antipathy towards the state, many moderate Muslims do perceive these imams as legitimate.<sup>3</sup> As Mark Saroyan has noted, even in the Soviet era, these imams had some social legitimacy (1997).

At the same time, Karimov's policies toward any trace of political Islam were resolutely harsh. No Islamic party could register and compete in the political process. Islamic NGOs were not given official permission to work or register, although each mosque is registered as a Muslim organization. After some leniency in allowing preachers from throughout the Muslim world – particularly from Saudi Arabia and Turkey – to evangelize and teach in Uzbekistan, by the mid-to late 1990s, Karimov also closed that channel of independent Islam.

In 1992, Karimov faced a showdown with Tohir Yuldosh and the Wahhabi movement. Both fundamentalist in its beliefs and Islamist in its goals, Yuldosh's movement had declared Islamic law in Namangan.<sup>4</sup> Yuldosh and his supporters, including the infamous military leader Juma Namangani, fled to Tajikistan and later formed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an extremist, militant organization. Control of Islam continued, although a large number

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<sup>3</sup> Informal interview with a regularly practicing Muslim in Tashkent, May 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with journalists and human rights activists, Fergana Valley region, January 2003. For more on the IMU, see Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2005) and Collins, unpublished paper (2002).



of informal, unregistered *mahalla* mosques continued to sprout up throughout the country, especially in the Ferghana Valley regions of Andijan and Namangan.

In 1997 and 1998, the government began to close these mosques and crack down on the so-called “Wahhabis,” anyone who was practicing Islam independently of the state *Muftiat*.<sup>5</sup> The crackdown continued and intensified after February 1999, when the IMU allegedly attempted to assassinate President Karimov, and again after August/September 1999 and 2000, when the IMU led guerilla incursions from Afghanistan into Kyrgyzstan, and sought to infiltrate Uzbekistan.

By 2001, the government had increasingly directed its efforts at arresting members of Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami (HT), which was surreptitiously spreading Islamist leaflets and underground literature throughout the country. According to human rights groups, some 6000 to 7000 people were in jail for religious crimes.<sup>6</sup> The Uzbek government later attributed suicide bombings in March and July 2004 to both Hizb ut-Tahrir, the IMU, and a new group, the Islamic Jihad, and stepped up its counter-terrorist actions. Despite the bombings, however, no major crackdown ensued, although the trials of the alleged perpetrators bore little legitimacy as fair and unbiased trials.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in a significant turn for the worse, the government has justified a massive crackdown on all civic, political, and religious activity after an uprising in Andijan in May 2005. Protests for the release of Andijan businessmen, accused of being members of the unsanctioned Islamic group “Akramia” turned bloody after some relatives and friends released the men from prison by force, and then took over some local government buildings. The government responded with heavy police and military force, opening fire on unarmed bystanders, peaceful

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<sup>5</sup> Informal interviews in Andijan and Namangan, May 1998.

<sup>6</sup> *Creating Enemies of the State: Religious Persecution in Uzbekistan* (NY: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Interview with US embassy officials monitoring the trials, Tashkent, July 2004.

protesters, and children as well as the armed group, and killing an estimated 700-800 people.<sup>8</sup> To date, just how “Islamist” the groups of businessman was is uncertain, but the government has provided no evidence that the protests themselves were Islamist activism.

### **Individual Identification with Religion and Individual Religious Practices**

In a national survey completed in Uzbekistan in 1993, the first to examine religious attitudes and beliefs, Nancy Lubin, found that religiosity and even self-identification as Muslim was relatively low among Uzbeks. Administered almost two years after the Soviet collapse, when the discussion and practice of religion was far freer than it had been (although still no doubt influenced by a politically repressive climate), the survey asked about religious identity, practices, and knowledge. Lubin found that only 46.4% of Uzbek citizens described themselves as “Islamic believers,” while 5.6% identified themselves as “believers of another faith,” 44.5% described themselves as “non-believers,” and 3.3% gave no response/ or listed “don’t know” (Lubin 1995, p 57-58). Lubin found that the highest level of identification as Muslim was in the Ferghana Valley (51% in Ferghana; 52.2% in Namangan; and 74.6% in Andijan), whereas in most other regions the numbers ranged from 25% to 50% (Tashkent oblast was an anomaly with 68% identifying as Muslim believers).

Lubin further found a weak knowledge and practice of Islam among those self-identified Muslims: about one-third of this group could not translate a core tenet of Islam, the declaration of faith; 44% never prayed; and 33% never fasted (Lubin 1995, p. 57). Furthermore, fewer youth identified themselves as believers (39%) than those over 50, a trend typical of the Soviet period when primarily elders went to the few working mosques. Even if we assume that significant

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<sup>8</sup> Journalists and human rights activists have estimated anywhere from 700 to over 1000 deaths. The Uzbek government put the death toll at 178, and claimed all were militants.

underreporting of belief in Islam occurred, due to fear in responding to such questions in an unpredictable political climate, these numbers are still striking. They reveal both a lack of knowledge about Islam, despite the liberalization of religious study already underway for approximately five years. And they suggest that a significant majority of the population was either afraid to admit to being Muslim, or did not view themselves as religious.

Unfortunately, we have no national survey today to compare with these results.<sup>9</sup> In the twenty-four focus groups conducted in 2004-2005, every Uzbek participant identified himself or herself as Muslim and a believer, and youth (students and young adults) typically expressed greater interest in religion and greater religiosity than the older participants. This generational phenomenon is consistent with studies of Hizb ut-Tahrir's membership, which attracts predominantly young adults between 18 and 40.<sup>10</sup>

In the fifty-three individual interviews carried out in 2004-2005, every respondent – including the subset of government officials for ideology, education, religion, and the police – identified himself as a believer and a Muslim. Similarly in a series of in-depth interviews with ordinary citizens in 1997 and 1998, not one respondent identified himself or herself as an atheist or non-believer, though some acknowledge that they did not regularly attend mosque or say prayers (Collins 2002). Either fear in responding has decreased -- which would be surprising given that the level of repression, especially of religion, has increased since 1998 -- or greater numbers of people strongly identify with their Muslim faith.

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<sup>9</sup> Some surveys have been done by the Uzbek and US governments, but the data remain inaccessible. As noted in the methodology section, I planned a survey for summer 2005, but decided to cancel it after the events in Andijan in May 2005.

<sup>10</sup> "Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir," International Crisis Group Report, Number 58, June 2003.

Other ethnographic signs indicate a widespread increase in religiosity. Participation in religious rituals has increased dramatically in the past decade. Funerals and weddings regularly follow religious ritual (rather than for example, simply the Soviet *Zaks*). Mosque attendance has increased according to most of the religious clerics interviewed, and the newcomers are increasingly youth. The market for religious literature – even if produced by the official *Muftiat* and the state committee on religion – has greatly expanded.<sup>11</sup> The *Muftiat* publishes 8,000 copies of the monthly magazine “*Hidayat*” [Right Path] and the newspaper “*Islom Nuri*” [Light of Islam] prints 5,000 copies twice a month (Ghazi 2004).

Religious pamphlets of various sorts -- including instructions for being a good Muslim woman or man, instructions for saying *namaz*, explanations of the Qur’an, and the history of Islam – have proliferated throughout the country, not just in the more traditionally religious regions. The writings of the former mufti Muhammad Sodyq Muhammad Yusuf are published and read widely, although he was removed from his post by Karimov due to his widespread popularity among ordinary Uzbeks. In 2004, the government commissioned a new encyclopedic history of Islam for study in schools (in addition to the old Soviet study of world religions), another indication that the state recognizes the need both to address and control the growing social interest in religion.

On the one hand, many in Uzbekistan, especially the wealthy in Tashkent, appeared to become increasingly secular and westernized in their dress, behavior, and education. Yet, on the street in Tashkent and other cities, it is now far more common than five or ten years ago to see women and girls wearing conservative dress and *hijabs*, or headscarves. In the late 1990s, an administrator for a western NGO, donned the *hijab* and brought her prayer rug to work every

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Muhammad Sodyq Muhammad Yusuf, Tashkent, January 2003.

day, until she was ultimately pressured to resign. The phenomenon of the *hijab* has led the government to take steps to expel girls from school for violating the constitutional separation of state and religion, and to close Turkish schools which were believed to encourage such religious behavior.

Although the number of men wearing a beard appears to have declined since the wave of arrests of bearded men from 1997 to 1999, men can be observed saying *namaz* during the workday and even at the bazaar. This was particularly common in Kokand's bazaars, where reading Islamic literature at the bazaar was very open, despite the crackdown there in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, I was acquainted with an Uzbek driver from Tashkent who dressed like an American, but played religious tapes in his car (some of which he shared with me to encourage me to convert), and took time off from work to search for a mosque to say *namaz*, wherever he was driving.<sup>13</sup>

The numbers of pilgrims performing the hajj have increased every year since independence, to several thousand per year. According to some reports, there are far more applications than slots available. Each application must be approved by the *Muftiat*, and by the security services, which is now believed to send agents to accompany the pilgrims.<sup>14</sup>

The number of functioning mosques is now much greater than during the Soviet era. According to data from 1995-1996, there were approximately 5,000 mosques in the republic, although only 1,952 were officially registered. The city of Tashkent, known for being one of the most modern and Sovietized cities, is home to ninety-six mosques. There are 206 officially registered mosques in Tashkent province as well. Even in Khorezm, one of the less traditionally

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<sup>12</sup>Informal interview with Kokand resident, November 2004.

<sup>13</sup>Informal communication with practicing Muslim, Tashkent, 2003-2004.

<sup>14</sup>In order to increase control over the group, the Uzbek government does not fill its country quota allotted by Saudi Arabia. See [www.ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru), February 2006.

Islamic regions, a local mullah reported that the number of mosques has risen from three before 1991 to ninety-six today.<sup>15</sup>

In 2004, the total number of registered imams was 1,942. Of these clerics, 531 imams have attained higher education (at the Islamic institute or university; only a few studied abroad), and 1,066 imams attained a religious secondary religious education. The remaining presumably have only informal training. Several *madrassas* (secondary education), the Bukhara Institute, and the Islamic University, which has developed connections with Egypt's renowned Al Azhar University, provide a sanctioned religious education. The numbers of both men and women attending the Islamic University are high, particularly from the regions.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, in 2004 there were 1,965 Muslim organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan (as opposed to 188 non-Islamic religious organizations of fifteen other faith denominations).<sup>17</sup>

### **Mosques and Mullahs**

During the 1990s, and by some accounts even as early as 1989, numerous unregistered mosques sprouted up throughout Uzbekistan. Many were built by *hashar*, the voluntary collective money and labor of the local community, and some with aid from foreign donors. Experts believed the Ferghana Valley to house most of these mosques, with one or two to a village or *mahalla*. Yet they were clearly popular throughout the country. Their very popularity instigated a backlash from the government, which in turn led to anger among the local population. A journalist for a government newspaper in Karshi city intimates the building hostility between locals and the regime over the mosques:

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<sup>15</sup> Official mullah 1, western region.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with deputy rector, Islamic University, Tashkent, January 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Each mosque appears to be registered as an individual religious organization. Islamic NGOs are not allowed.

After independence in the course of three to four years big roads for religion were opened, but now many of them have been closed. A few years ago in our *mahalla* a mosque was built by hashar – at that time, whoever could, helped with the building of the house of prayer. It was the project of collective love for Islam. But now they have closed the mosque; it's opened only twice a year on the holidays of *Hayit*. And even then each person is watched. It's not good. People by their own strength built the mosque. They had no other goal besides reading prayers. *Namaz* gives people spiritual calm, and now this is not possible....This very negatively affects people's attitude."<sup>18</sup>

An informal religious leader in Tashkent similarly described the mosque “as a club, where people can gather and talk.”<sup>19</sup> Even a typically “new Uzbek” businessman claimed that “A person should always go to the mosque; one should not run away from the mosque. A lot of people have an internal barrier before the door of the mosque, but...It's the common house of all Muslims.”<sup>20</sup> Muslim leaders in Namagan also complained that it was very difficult for a mosque to get a registration.<sup>21</sup>

In the post-Soviet era, mosques increasingly serve multiple social purposes. They collect money and food for the poor. “In any mosque there is a box for donations, and people willingly and generously give,” said one *mahalla* leader in Namangan. According to a local state official for ideology, “the good side of the mosque is that it mobilizes everyone to give help to whomever [needs it].”<sup>22</sup>

Several officials and religious leaders noted that the mosques now engage in the work of taking care of the poor in the community, work that used to be performed by the *mahalla*.<sup>23</sup> Just as importantly, as one respondent said, “The mosque for a lot of people is not only a place for reading *namaz*, and hearing the sermon of the mullah, but most important it's a place of

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<sup>18</sup> Journalist, state newspaper, southern region, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Informal religious leader 1, Tashkent region, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> “New Uzbek” 1, Tashkent region.

<sup>21</sup> Informal mahalla leader 1, Ferghana Valley.

<sup>22</sup> Official ideology leader, Ferghana Valley.

<sup>23</sup> Government advisor on religious in the hokimiat, Ferghana Valley.

meeting...a place of exchanging news, knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> According to a prominent businessman in Tashkent, he donated to his neighborhood mosque to support its education programs.<sup>25</sup> One official mullah observed that “all the religious people give assistance to the mosque” (including both monetary and other aid).<sup>26</sup> Another official mullah claimed, in a statement the government would likely disagree with, “the mosque is like the flag of the country.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite their overarching secularization thesis, Inglehart and Norris do find that there is a higher level of respect and a more important role accorded to religious leaders in Muslim countries than in the west.<sup>28</sup> A 2004 survey in Tajikistan similarly found that 61% of the population had significant trust in imams.<sup>29</sup> Although we did not ask this specific question in Uzbekistan, it would not be surprising to find a similar situation there, especially since we have seen that religiosity and the role of the mosques – both official and unofficial -- has increased so significantly since 1991. At the same time, some respondents expressed skepticism about some official mullahs who spouted “communist” rhetoric, while others – especially official mullahs and government representatives -- expressed doubts about “unofficial mullahs” who received their education in foreign countries.

## **VI. Islam and Political Attitudes in Uzbekistan**

### **Islam, Democracy, and the State**

As noted earlier, there is an ongoing debate both among western scholars and among Islamist thinkers and statesmen about the compatibility of Islam and democracy, religiously and

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<sup>24</sup> Journalist, state newspaper, southern region.

<sup>25</sup> Business leader 1, Tashkent.

<sup>26</sup> Official mullah 1, southern region.

<sup>27</sup> Official mullah 1, southwest region.

<sup>28</sup> The Central Asian countries were not included in their survey.

<sup>29</sup> “Public Opinion in Tajikistan,” IFES Survey, Tajikistan, 2004.



theoretically. There is significant debate about whether Muslims actually want democracy. Bernard Lewis expresses the prevailing Western popular view of Islam's relation to the state: "In Muslim theory, church and state are not separate or separable institutions." (Lewis 2001, p. 28). This is also the view articulated by most Islamists. By contrast, a key proponent of global democratization, Adrian Karatnycky argues that neither Islam nor religion in general is uniformly anti-democratic:

...religion is not an immutable impediment to political change. Rather, religious leaders and clergy frequently seek to be responsive to public sentiments. When public sentiment shifts toward democracy, for example, religious leaders tend to be swept up in the popular mood, even as they seek to put forward transcendent values. This is possible because the great religious traditions are rich in teachings about just rule and the dignity of the individual, and are supple enough to support the project of democratic reform. It cannot be ruled out that similar trends toward democratic change may occur in the coming decades in the Islamic world (Karatnycky 2002, p. 107).

Scholars of Islamic history and politics also contest that the relationship between Islam and politics has varied over time and place and is not necessarily theocratic or anti-democratic (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Esposito 1999). In survey research, Richard Rose found significant support for democracy among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, although his study was carried out in the least traditionally Islamic places in Central Asia. Mark Tessler, Mansoor Moaddel, and Ronald Inglehart (2006) recently found more mixed results in surveys in Iraq, including strong support for "democracy" as well as "Islamic democracy" and "Sharia." Surveys unfortunately do not clearly unpack the meaning of these terms or the reasoning behind them. What are respondents thinking and reasoning in their responses, and why? The interviews in my Uzbekistan study found that support for democracy was strong, but indicated support for

“Muslim” or “Islamic” democracy, which did not necessary agree with the western understanding of democracy.

Respondents fell into three general groups in their views about Islam, the state, and democracy. Predictably the government representatives and police, and official religions leaders – all of whom have been screened and appointed by the regime -- argued that the government should be secular. As one police officer stated: “Most importantly the government must not be religious, but the country can be Muslim.”<sup>30</sup> One business leader in the allegedly “fundamentalist” town of Margilon, backed this view: “Religious leaders should only engage in religious affairs; they should not interfere with government affairs. That’s how it should be” Even this group, however, emphasized the need to preserve religious freedom and the Muslim identity of the country.

A second group, the majority, supported an often unclear mix of religion and state. One informal religious leader argued: “Each country has time to correct its inadequacies. The government sets politics. And the decision to be a religious country or not, we don’t decide. Most importantly, we need peace. Our country is Muslim, so democracy must also be such.”<sup>31</sup>

Curiously, members of the legal political parties, all of which are avowedly secular, gave varied responses. Some proposed a mix of Islam and secular state law. About two-thirds of party leaders referred to Islamic parties and the notion of Islamic law or a Muslim democracy as “extremist,” and HT members as “terrorists” and a threat to “Uzbek democracy.” At the same time, a majority of these leaders also revealed that they are practicing Muslims. And about one-third articulated some typically Islamist ideas. For example, one member of Fidokor, a secular pro-governmental party created by the Uzbek regime in the 1990s, stated:

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<sup>30</sup> Police officer 1, Ferghana Valley region.

<sup>31</sup> Informal religious leader 1, Ferghana Valley region.

Three to four years ago in our mosque there was a lecture about the conditions and problems of contemporary Islam. You have probably heard that in all the world there's a tendency that Islamic states are lagging behind in their development. This is also our very great sorrow. We must use time wisely. Only time will tell.<sup>32</sup>

Another Fidokor party member said: "It would be better if it [the government] were secular. But, it's true that the strength of religion in our country is very strong, therefore, I think in life we must adopt those religious values that help a person." An informal community leader similarly stated, "Our country is Muslim, because in her lives a Muslim population. Because there are religious traditions carried in our customs and everyday values. We are Muslim and must hold onto these customs."<sup>33</sup> The line between customs, values and laws is not entirely clear among such respondents.

A third group -- a minority composed of a mix of business leaders, informal religious leaders, and *mahalla* leaders – tacitly or explicitly endorsed a religious state, despite the political risk in doing so. "Take for example, Saudi Arabia where there is oil. They give \$50,000 for a newborn. The drilled oil is dispersed among the population. I don't know if it's true or not, but maybe. The sheikhs there receive more. It is a pure democracy. The government is just."<sup>34</sup> One informal mullah claimed: "The Qur'an is the book of Allah; for us it is like the Constitution."<sup>35</sup>

A female religious leader agreed: "If the state will be Muslim, then our values, traditions, and customs and upbringing will be such. If everyone will be Muslim, then society will be good. Yes, it must be such."<sup>36</sup> Another such mullah sated with conviction: "The way of our life must be Islamic....In order for a government to be just, it must be Islamic. For example, in accord with

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<sup>32</sup> Fidokor party leader 1, Ferghana Valley region.

<sup>33</sup> Informal mahalla leader 1, Ferghana Valley region.

<sup>34</sup> Informal community leader 1, Tashkent region.

<sup>35</sup> Informal mullah 1, southern region.

<sup>36</sup> Informal religious leader 2, Ferghana valley region.

Islam a person must repay a debt; in other states there is no such rule. To not return a debt is against Muslim law....And in Islam corruption is forbidden.”<sup>37</sup> Not only religious figures but others held such views. Contrary to what modernization theory would expect, a 40ish middle-class business leader, simply stated: “It seems to me everything must be religious.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Islam, the Law, and Courts**

Despite the prevalence of positive responses about support for “Islamic democracy” or “democracy, but not western-style,” a majority of interview respondents also responded with significant support for the creation of Islamic courts or courts based on some version of Islamic law, rather than secular courts.

Representatives of the government and pro-government parties were predictably the most critical of any idea of Islamic courts and laws. According to one police official, “Both [Muslim and our secular] laws are bad. Both oppress the person, sometimes the moral [law] is more oppressive....I don’t support Muslim courts because they use physical forms of punishment.” The police officer then proceeded to tell the story of Solomon and the two women fighting over a child. Solomon recommended that they cut the child in two. Rather than explain the true point of the story – that Solomon wisely knew that the true mother would not harm her child – the officer used the story to argue that a *Qazi* [Muslim judge] makes poor decisions, not based on the law.<sup>39</sup> Several others also opposed Islamic courts because of the physical punishments they dispense to the guilty. Another police officer did not condemn *Sharia* courts for being Islamic, but simply argued that religious courts take bribes just like secular ones.

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<sup>37</sup> Informal mullah 2, Tashkent region.

<sup>38</sup> Business leader 1, Ferghana Valley region.

<sup>39</sup> Police officer 1, western region.

Surprisingly, only one respondent, one *mahalla* leader, argued against Islamic courts on the basis of the democratic principle of a secular state: “For me a Muslim court is absolutely unacceptable...the constitution is the reflection of the will of the people.”<sup>40</sup> One skeptic stated the problem: “Ask ordinary people what the Constitution is. Many know what it is, but don’t know what is written in it. And ask them what the *Sharia* is. Everyone will know what it is and explain its meaning.”<sup>41</sup>

Several respondents – including not just informal religious leaders, but also well-educated business leaders, and *mahalla* leaders – agreed with the physical punishments of the *Sharia* courts, such as cutting off the hand of a thief. They argued that they forced the person to remember his crime, and were a lesson to society. Some even praised the physical punishments of the *Sharia* often seen in the west as inhumane. For example, one businessman said:

“We can’t call our country Muslim because it does not fulfill the requirements of the Islamic religion. If we want to create an Islamic state, then we must eradicate a lot of negative events in our society. For example, according to *Sharia* law, one is strictly punished for a proven crime. Having proven theft, they cut off the hand even if the person has a high position in society, because before Allah everyone is equal...if to one person this punishment is given then other people will be afraid to commit such a crime. In our society, criminals are sent to jail, but after they are freed they continue to commit theft and other crimes. If we cut off his hand, he will not be able to steal again.”<sup>42</sup>

One official religious leader hedged, saying “If you take on faith the laws of the *Sharia* and follow the *Ayat* and *Hadith* of our prophet Muhammad, then the sentence of the Muslim court must be more just.” He later continued, as if guarding his answer, “I think our government courts are just...they just don’t correct the criminals, and they continue to carry out crimes.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Informal mahalla leader 1, western region.

<sup>41</sup> “New Uzbek” 2, Tashkent region.

<sup>42</sup> Business leader 2, Tashkent region.

<sup>43</sup> Official religious leader 2, western region.

In general, the common theme behind support for the *Sharia* courts (or Muslim/Islamic courts) was the issue of justice. Islamic courts are widely viewed by social elites as just; the current state/secular court system is not. Said one leader: “A Muslim court is more just than a non-Muslim one. Because in a Muslim court they punish based on a real crime, not on a lie.”<sup>44</sup> In the words of another: “If those who judge will be people who have an Islamic upbringing, then the court will be just. Because they can distinguish the dirty from the pure...we always talk about that which is written in the *Sharia*.”<sup>45</sup> A Tashkent business leader responded: “Yes the Muslim court is more just. If one thinks about it, all the laws of the state and prosecutor are taken from the *Sharia*.”<sup>46</sup> Others implicitly tied the courts to the broader issue of Muslim statehood: “If a state is Muslim and has its own laws, then the court will be Muslim and just.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Jihad and Martyrdom**

In contrast to the generally moderate views regarding an “Islamic state”, views on jihad were typically far more aggressive. Respondents’ attitudes on jihad fell into three categories, depending on their degree of militancy. The first group consisted of those who argued that the true meaning of jihad was “an inner struggle against one’s sins,” and rejected the religious validity of suicide attacks/martyrdom. One official mullah typified this view: “the greater jihad is the more important.”<sup>48</sup>

A second group of respondents, by far the largest, consisted of those who claimed that jihad most importantly was an “inner struggle,” the “greater jihad.” Yet, they also believed that

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<sup>44</sup> Informal religious leader 3, woman, Ferghana valley region.

<sup>45</sup> Informal mahalla leader 1, Tashkent region.

<sup>46</sup> Business leader 1, Tashkent region.

<sup>47</sup> Informal mahalla leader 2, Feghana Valley region.

<sup>48</sup> Official mullah 1, southern region.

jihad could also mean the use of violence or war in specific circumstances, generally in self-defense against attackers. They tended to have a more skeptical attitude towards suicide martyrdom, occasionally expressing sympathy but not support of such tactics. One might see this group as the adherents of the “Just War Tradition” in Islam.<sup>49</sup> A jihad has to be justified in terms of self-defense of Islam, the homeland, and the family. One official mullah stated,

The word Jihad means defense of the Fatherland, one’s religion, self, family and property. For this in order to defend the faith, comes Jihad. Nevertheless, such groups that have emerged in recent years, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and those who support the idea that they declare a jihad on the path to Allah – it is in its core wrong. They sow sedition and divide people. This is completely wrong.<sup>50</sup>

Except when fighting (presumably combatants), martyrdom is not glorified. Typically, these respondents discussed such legitimate jihads in a nationalist or nationalist-Islamic sense, rather than as transnational Islamic wars. For example, one religious teacher explained:

There is the word “Jihad” in the Qur’an. When the Prophet was asked what is “jihad,” he answered that even if our state lives quietly and peacefully, a neighboring state will pressure us and want to conquer our population. And to show them resistance and to perish in this war for the homeland, for ones territory, for family and children, it is to die a “*shahid*.”<sup>51</sup>

Another official mullah stated, “jihad is self defense, defense of one’s religion, defense of one’s people from enemies.”<sup>52</sup> Other violence against unbelievers is not legitimate, in this view. Suicide bombing and the killing of innocent life is not justified according to their religious beliefs. As one woman’s leader stated, “Jihad is a declaration of war. In the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Prophet Muhammad, at the time of the proselytizing and spread of Islam to other peoples, declared a jihad. By this way he tried to bring neighboring peoples to his faith.

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<sup>49</sup> On just war theory, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust War* (New York: Basic Books, 1992)

<sup>50</sup> Official mullah, western region.

<sup>51</sup> Religious teacher 1, southern region.

<sup>52</sup> Official mullah 1, Ferghana Valley region.

At that time there was jihad....Now there is no jihad....I understand suicide, killing oneself...to try to end one's life by suicide...the person is psychologically not healthy. Or there are religious fanatics who kill themselves.”<sup>53</sup>

A third type of respondent, belonging to the smallest group, interpreted jihad as a holy war, in a more strictly religious and extremist sense. Some of these respondents likewise argued that suicide bombing constituted martyrdom, and that this was an acceptable tactic in a jihad. Perhaps surprisingly, these extremist interpretations of jihad were not only expressed by the informal, unsanctioned religious leaders. Several business leaders held this view. For example, one businessman claimed:

In my opinion, jihad is war...For example, if America or Russia begin to wage war with someone [some people, state] – this [response] is a jihad in the glory of such a goal. For example, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, were necessary jihads and they are equally a jihad and all take place thanks to this goal....sacrificing oneself is also jihad. That which is happening in our country, the explosions and anti-governmental acts—it is jihad connected with the changes in our society.<sup>54</sup>

Another business leader in Tashkent said, “Jihad is a war with unbelievers...when there is an atmosphere of threat or struggle towards the destruction of religion, then it is possible to call a jihad.”<sup>55</sup> One informal *mahalla* leader, like a number of clerics interviewed, declared the righteousness of jihad by rooting it in the actions of the Prophet and the necessity to spread Islam. However, similar to Hizb ut-Tahrir's message, she then suggested that jihad at the current time is not necessary:

Our prophet declared a jihad nineteen times. Jihad – it means to stand to fight, to wage war, to spread and proselytize the Muslim faith. To go against Shiites means to go against unbelievers. Life does not go round about without sacrifice... The first to accept the faith was our Prophet and then his wife Hadicha and then Abu Bakir Sidik....Little by little Muslims hung their flag. At that time, first jihad was necessary.

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<sup>53</sup> Official woman's community leader, southwest region.

<sup>54</sup> Business leader 1, southern region.

<sup>55</sup> Business leader 2, Tashkent region.



The representatives of religion can declare a jihad, to fight with those who are against us....Foreigners carry their religion in their hands; why don't we do this? Then it was necessary for the spread of our religion. But now without a declaration of jihad the ranks of Muslims are spreading against the kafir, unbelievers, and Buddhists. Now it is not necessary to declare a jihad. Even with force, it will never be possible to turn the Russian state to Islam. The same way, it is forbidden to change a Muslim state. The people are already formed. Jihad is not at all necessary.<sup>56</sup>

The respondent's message revealed some contradictions in either her thinking or in her willingness to speak completely openly. On the one hand, she says, a jihad against Shiites is necessary and right; on the other hand no jihad is necessary at this time, at least not against Russia. An informal mullah stated even more strongly, "It is necessary to wage jihad. It is necessary to spread Islam. If people do not submit and accept it, then it is necessary to kill them. Jihad has been such since the time of the Prophet."<sup>57</sup>

### **Support for Islamist Opposition Parties or Movements**

Perhaps the most difficult issue to assess in contemporary Uzbekistan is the level of actual support for and membership in the Islamist opposition. Unlike the democratic parties, the Islamist parties are completely underground, and have no known or visible leaders or spokesmen. Nonetheless, journalists and local experts believe their membership and potential to be far higher than that of the democratic parties. The actions of the Central Asian governments themselves, and the intelligence they share with the US, also suggest that they believe the Islamist parties, and especially Hizb ut Tahrir, to be in the thousands. Human Rights Watch and

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<sup>56</sup> Informal mahalla leader 2, southern region.

<sup>57</sup> Informal mullah 1, southern region.

Freedom House believe that 6000-7000 religious prisoners (many of whom are HT members or sympathizers) are in jail, and many more have been amnestied and released over the years.<sup>58</sup>

In order to minimize their fear and exposure, respondents in this study were not asked about and never spoke about their personal involvement with or support of Islamist opposition parties. Nonetheless, despite the willingness to talk openly the concepts of jihad, martyrdom, and Islamic law, respondents were reluctant to discuss Islamist parties and movements in Uzbekistan, and most expressed very negative attitudes.

Although they had expressed support for certain Islamist ideas, respondents carefully avoided association with the opposition, an understandable response strategy given the political repression of and underground nature of such groups in Uzbekistan. Most expressed the view that all political parties are bad, and they had little interest in them. Only some, however, referred to Hizb ut-Tahrir as “terrorists” or “extremists”, suggesting that even though they claimed not to support them, they perhaps did not share the government’s complete condemnation of them. Others stressed that there should be “no parties in Islam,” a view often associated with fundamentalists but not extremists.

Interviewees did, however, respond to questions about why people in their village or city were supporting such opposition groups. Respondents identified a number of reasons for such attitudes and support. The most important was “spiritual needs” and belief in the idea of “justice” and a “better life” articulated by the Islamists. Indeed, these youth live in an ideological vacuum --- where communism and state socialism have failed, where Uzbek nationalism has proven false, and where democracy is not an option or has been rejected as a failure of the West in the 1990s. Islamism, with its message of justice, offers a hopeful alternative.

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<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch report, 2002; and interviews with Freedom House experts or religious prisoners, Tashkent, 2003.

Second, social elites highlighted economic conditions: lack of work, and especially training and educational preparation for professional jobs, only to face unemployment or menial labor. Whereas even ten years ago youth expected things to improve, today they are dissatisfied with their seemingly hopeless economic and social prospects. According to some religious and community leaders, Islamists have taken advantage of this situation and offered material and psychological assistance to youth. The Islamist message is one of a better life and self-fulfillment within an Islamic state. Official religious leaders claim that they need more competent and educated official clergy to combat the ideas spread by the unofficial religious extremists.

### **Gender Issues**

A core element of Norris and Inglehart's argument (2004, also Fish 2002), is that the major divide between the Muslim world and the West is not about democracy or religion, but about the treatment of women. Interestingly, interview respondents in Uzbekistan, by contrast, were relatively more democratic regarding gender issues than with regards to the law and courts. A handful of respondents claimed that women must wear a *hijab*, according to Islam, and that she would shame her husband and father if she did not. Most of those respondents were not clerics, but business leaders. All official religious leaders instead argued that the *hijab* was good because of its modesty, but optional; they claimed the choice should be made by the woman.

All respondents agreed that a woman should receive at least a primary and secondary education (through age sixteen), and that she should be allowed to continue on if she so chose. These relatively liberal attitudes towards women could be a legacy of the Soviet period, which gave Muslim women far greater social, economic, and political rights and more education than

women in probably any other Muslim country. However, the relatively liberal attitude towards women is also consistent with Hizb ut-Tahrir's message in Central Asia (as opposed to the more general Wahhabi teachings), which to date has involved and recruited women members, but does not impose restrictions on their education or dress. HT may also have adapted its message to a different type of Muslim woman in Central Asia.

At the same time, some respondents expressed the view that women had more rights in Islam. Numerous women participants in focus groups argued that they did not need democracy to protect their rights (Collins 2005). They claimed that they themselves, not their husbands or families or community leaders, chose to wear the hijab, and that despite their university education they saw their primary role as being a wife and mother. They opposed working outside the home, except in acceptable professions, such as teaching or medicine for women.

In fact, in a surprising response, one leader of the LDPU, a secular party created by President Karimov's daughter, Gulnora, claimed that Islamic law was better for women. She gave the following example:

One man created a family with his wife. Ten years went by, but there were no children. They divorced. I've always supported that they divide the home and property to give to the woman. If our family codex followed Islamic rules, then in this instance he must give part of the property to his wife.<sup>59</sup>

Although this interpretation of Islamic law is not uniform, it is notable that a secular party leader would argue for the need for Islamic law to protect women, in response to a question about whether secular or Islamic law – in general – is better.

## **VII. Conclusions**

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<sup>59</sup> LDPU party leader 1, southern region.

From the preceding discussion we can draw some tentative conclusions about the nature of Islamic revival and support for Islamism by social elites in Uzbekistan. First, from the open religious identification of both ordinary people and social elites, to the spread of Islamic literature, to increased religious practices and the increased role of the mosque, religiosity has seen a dramatic flourishing in Uzbekistan since 1991. This phenomenon is particularly interesting given the political conditions and often unpredictable reaction of the state to religious affairs. Moreover, this religious revival is taking place among the youth, urban and educated, whom Inglehart and Norris and other modernization theorists predicted to be the more secularized segment of the population.

We also find that there is little direct correlation between religiosity and support for a theocracy. The range of views about Islam, democracy, and the separation of religion and state varied. On one end was a handful of pure secularists and advocates of western-style secular democracy, although among these were state representatives who clearly knew that the Uzbek regime, despite its rhetoric, was not a democracy. In the middle, was a majority supporting an “Islamic democracy,” some unclear combination of Islam and state. On the other end, was a minority advocating only Islam or an Islamic state, a view associated with fundamentalist or extremist groups.

Support for some form of Sharia, Islamic law, was widespread. Most respondents argued that as Muslims, living in a Muslim state, the law should be based at least in part on Sharia. There was strong support for Islamic courts. In general, these social elites viewed Islamic law as a “just” alternative to the current courts and law.

Further, respondents expressed a range of views about the importance and necessity of jihad, and to what extent a violent jihad was justified. The majority of respondents articulated a twofold notion of jihad, both as an inner purification and a holy war. Most saw holy war as justified and as a religious duty in times of attack on Islam, national homeland and family. However, only a minority suggested that jihad demanded a transnational understanding of jihad.

Responses must be interpreted with caution. Discussion of abstract concepts of Islamic law and Islamist militancy is less incriminating than expressing support for actual Islamists at home. However, views in the abstract of course do not necessarily translate into political action. Belief in the righteousness of militant jihad does not mean that these respondents would necessarily participate or send their children to participate in such violent acts. On gender issues, few respondents and particularly few social elites, articulated fundamentalist, much less extremist views. Surprisingly, it was typically not the social elites but ordinary young women, participants in focus groups, who expressed more conservative attitudes.

In sum, the analysis here has found significant support for the perseverance and revival of religion and personal religiosity, despite Soviet and post-Soviet policies of modernization and secularization. There is little evidence to suggest that the “secularization” hypothesis is correct. Second, this analysis found that the relationship between Islam and democracy is very complex, not simply compatible or incompatible. The majority of social elites interviewed generally claimed to support democracy, but at the same time, their support for Sharia, Islamic courts, and a particular form of “Muslim democracy,” suggests that the merging of Islam and democracy will not necessarily be easy. While these views are not likely to be unchanging over time, the

significant repression of both Islam and democracy in Uzbekistan may lead to the intensification and mobilization of these views.

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