

Guiding the Hand of God: The Influence of State Involvement in Religion on Religionational  
Identity

by

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## NOTES

### Overview of Primary Sources

#### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews, funded by a Boren Fellowship, the Berkeley Center for Religious Freedom, and the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies were conducted in June-December of 2015. Snowball sampling was used to identify relevant subjects, and the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee. The majority of these interviews (14) were conducted with religious leaders ranging from imams at local mosques to high-level muftiate officials, while the remainder (12) were conducted with relevant civil society leaders including lawyers, activists, academics, journalists, and NGO officials, as well as with current and former Kyrgyzstani government officials working on religious issues. In addition to the above interviews I conducted, two local research assistants conducted 6 supplemental interviews. The findings from the interviews were used to inform my theory and research questions, as well as to construct my original survey.

#### *Surveys*

The original survey in Kyrgyzstan, funded by NSF award number 1658336 with Pauline Jones as the PI, was administered in Kyrgyzstan in late 2018/early 2019. The survey includes a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Kyrgyzstani citizens, in addition to an oversample of 200 ethnic Uzbek Kyrgyzstanis. For full sampling methodology, questionnaires, and data, please contact the author ([gamza@umich.edu](mailto:gamza@umich.edu)) or Pauline Jones ([pjluong@umich.edu](mailto:pjluong@umich.edu)).

In addition to the original survey in the Kyrgyz Republic, a number of other surveys were consulted. In particular, the International Social Survey Programme's National Identity I, National Identity II, and National Identity III surveys, as well as Pew's Being Christian in Western Europe, Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe Survey, and the 2016 Spring Global Attitudes Survey were used to construct the cross-national dataset presented in chapter 6. Full citations for these surveys, and other surveys used to support my findings, are found below.

Additional surveys are used in chapters 1 and 4 to measure religiopolitical attitudes, religionational fusion, and religiosity. These surveys are cited where they are used.

### *Legal Data*

To construct my timeline of the evolution of state involvement in religion in Central Asia, I reviewed legal documents taken from state legal databases that included religious terms such as “religion”, “religious”, “Muslim”, “muftiate”, “Islam”, etc.<sup>1</sup> I also reviewed the secondary literature to ensure I was not missing any relevant legislation or policy documents, and where appropriate, located these documents once I had identified them. These documents are linked to in footnotes when they are referenced.

Sources to measure rhetoric and symbols in chapter 4 are cited where they are used.

In addition to this original data, I utilized Jonathan Fox’s Religion and State Dataset to construct my regulation and rhetoric measures in chapter 6. Sources used to create measures of symbols are cited where they are referenced in chapter 6.

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<sup>1</sup> These databases included <http://www.lex.uz/>, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg>, <http://www.adlia.tj/>, and <https://online.zakon.kz/>.

## ABSTRACT

Religion remains a core component of political identity in many countries despite predictions that religious identity would decrease in importance as part of political identity in the modern era. The degree to which religious and national identity overlap, moreover, varies significantly across countries and among individuals. The factors explaining this variation remain undertheorized. This dissertation offers a novel explanation for both the degree of overlap between religious and national identity, and the strength of this fused identity: the influence of state involvement in religion.

First, I introduce the concept of religionational fusion (RNF), or the manner in and degree to which religious identity constitutes national identity. I break down this concept into two dimensions: 1) imbrication, or the degree to which religious identity and national identity overlap as perceived by members of each collective identity, and 2) primacy, or the degree of salience religious and national identity holds within an individual's hierarchy of collective identities. I then develop my explanatory concept of state involvement in religion. I argue that each dimension of state involvement—religious regulation as repression and subsidy, religious symbols, and religious rhetoric—has direct and independent effects on the degree of RNF among individual members of the dominant religion within a state.

State involvement influences RNF by sending signals to citizens concerning the ascribed “proper” relationship between religious and national identity. As a primary arbiter of national identity in many nation-states, the state is uniquely positioned to both send and maintain these signals. When the state sends or reinforces negative signals regarding its position on religion as a component of national identity by repressing the dominant faith, RNF is expected to decrease. When the state sends positive signals concerning the role of religion as a component of national identity through the provision of religious subsidies and the use of religious symbols and religious rhetoric, RNF is expected to increase.

I engage in a two-step empirical analysis. First, I use the Central Asian cases of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to illustrate the spectrum of state involvement in religion and to demonstrate that changes in state involvement in religion are correlated with religiopolitical

attitudes, a proxy for RNF. Second, I test my hypotheses on the determinants of RNF using an original survey in Kyrgyzstan and a cross-national sample based on original and existing data from 54 states. I find evidence supporting the hypothesis that perceptions of religious repression decrease RNF at the individual level in Kyrgyzstan, though I also find evidence that higher levels of repression appear to be correlated with higher aggregate levels of RNF. I also find significant support for the hypotheses that religious subsidies, state use of religious symbols, and state use of religious rhetoric are associated with higher levels of RNF.

My findings are significant not only for understanding how religion becomes a component of national identity, but also for understanding religious influence in the development of political attitudes and behavior. They also have testable implications for understanding the construction of national identity and its components beyond religion.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### Introduction

As long as national identity has been understood to exist as a collective political identity, religion has played a critical role in its construction, either as a critical element of the identity, or as a foil against which oppositional identity was constructed. The early nationalisms of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe informed by Christian traditions and history, and politicians and ecclesiastics both collaborated and competed over the role that religion would play as a part of burgeoning national identities (McLeod 2015). In the Muslim world, Islamic mobilization would help drive independence movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in fused religious and national identities that would contribute to Islamist opposition to secular regimes (Akturk 2015).

Social scientists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—led by figures such as Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and more recently Peter Berger—argued that modernizing economies and political systems would reduce religiosity, and in turn, decrease the relevance of religion in determining political identity and behavior as society became secularized. Instead, however, religion often remains a major component of national identity, determinant of political attitudes, and driver of political behavior.

Puzzled by the persistence of religious identity, and in many contexts, the upsurge of the importance of religion for how individuals define their national and political identity, scholars are beginning to explore the relationship between modern religious and national identity. These contemporary investigations of the fusion or cleavage of religious and national identity are not limited to any single religious or regional context, and may be found focusing on cases such as the developing relationships between post-Soviet national identities and Orthodoxy (Flora, Szilagyi, and Roudometof 2005; Mitrofanova 2016), Islam (Hélène Thibault 2018; Hughes 2007; Turam 2004), or both (Stepaniants 2005); Western Christian contexts and the relationships between Catholicism and national identity in countries such as Canada (Zubrzycki 2016) and the Republic of Ireland (Grzymala-Busse 2015a); Hindu nationalism and the BJP in India (Anand 2016; Hansen 1999); Buddhist nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, and Thailand

(Gravers 2015; Ware 2015; Keyes 2016); an increasing sense of fusion between religious and national identity among American Christians (Straughn and Feld 2010) and the effects of this religious nationalism on anti-Muslim sentiment (Shortle and Gaddie 2015); and the role of minority—typically Muslim—religious identity in influencing sense of national identity and national belonging (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007; Gudrun Jensen 2008; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, and Ulleberg 2012).

One similarity between much of the contemporary work on relationship between religious and national identity, however, is a focus on the effects of this fusion or cleavage of religion and national identity on political behavior and outcomes. Examples include works on anti-Muslim violence in Western Asia or the development of policies on issues such as abortion, education, and same-sex marriage in the Christian West, rather than projects focusing on the causal factors that explain why religion and national identity have (or have not) become entwined. In the cases where scholars do focus on how a particular relationship between religious and national identity has developed, the focus is typically on how critical moments of national importance, such as the role religious leadership plays during the initial nation building process or during a cultural transformation, lock in a particular relationship between religious identity and national identity at the country-level that persists until the next major national juncture (for examples, see Zubrzycki 2016; Grzymala-Busse 2015a). These studies do an excellent job of explaining the relationship between religion and national identity at the level of the nation, considering how the identities propagated by clergy, political elites, and national activists fuse or cleave national and religious identity. However, the factors contributing to how individual citizens' understandings of the relationship between their religious and national identities change in the gaps of time between the moments of national birth or redefinition, after the active and focused nation-building that comes during and immediately after the fall of empire or the creation of a nation-state has subsided, remains undertheorized and more poorly understood.

Not only does the variance in the degree of fusion between religious and national identity at the country level across time merit greater exploration, but so too does the variance within countries, as the factors that contribute to individual-level constructions of religionational identity remain underexplored. This dissertation aims to provide a novel explanation for this variance, focusing on the role of the state in constructing religionational identity in the aftermath of the initial nation-building process.

In summary, I argue that states directly influence the character and strength of the relationship between religious and national identity—which I define as religionational fusion—

through their involvement in religion. The state has a number of tools at their disposal for this purpose, each with unique effects: repression and subsidy (regulation), state use of religious symbols, and state use of religious rhetoric. By utilizing religious repression, states can cleave religious and national identity, while utilizing subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric fuses the two identities.

These effects occur through the mechanism of signals members of the dominant religion receive from the state concerning the “proper” or “ascribed” role of religious identity as a component of national identity. In many contemporary nation-states the state is frequently seen as a primary arbiter of national identity, and thus actions taken by the state involving themselves in religion, regardless of whether or not the motivation behind this involvement is centered around nation building, are seen as holding significance for the construction of the nation. As citizens receive new signals due to the implementation of a new form of state involvement in religion, or existing signals are reinforced through the persistent use of regulation, religious symbols, and religious rhetoric, they will begin to internalize these signals, influencing the fusion of their religious and national identity. Note that in order for this effect to occur, the individual being effected must perceive that the state is involving itself in religion; for example, a president may persistently cite scripture and use religion to justify their policies in their addresses to the nation, but if an individual does not listen to or read about these speeches, they will have received no signal from the state, and thus no change in religionational fusion would be expected.

Using regression analysis based on original individual level data collected as part of a survey in Kyrgyzstan conducted in 2018 and 2019, and a mixture of existing and original country-year level data taken from 54 countries, I find support for the notion that each dimension of state involvement in religion has direct and independent effects on religionational fusion, holding factors such as religiosity, religious tradition, and development constant.

More specifically, I find support for the hypotheses that perceptions of religious repression decrease religionational fusion at the individual level, while at the country aggregate level, higher levels of religious repression appear to be correlated with higher religionational fusion. I also find significant support for the notions that religious subsidies, state use of religious symbols, and state use of religious rhetoric are all related to higher levels of religionational fusion.

In the following section, I illustrate the political importance of my puzzle by briefly outlining the role of religion has played as a component of national identity in Central Asia. I then introduce the core concept this dissertation aims to explain, religionational fusion, and provide a brief

summary of existing explanations of religionational fusion. I introduce my original theory on the determinants of religionational fusion and conclude with an overview of the dissertation.

### **An Example Puzzle: Religion and Political Identity in Central Asia**

After the Central Asian states achieved independence, religion was a major element of the public and elite debate over how a distinct national identity would be constructed. During this period, citizens were testing the boundaries of their newfound religious independence. Alongside the staggering rate of mosque and madrassah construction across the region, students were beginning to use their newfound religious freedom to travel abroad to study Islam in other parts of the Muslim world. Average citizens were no longer reluctant to admit they were religious, as they had been under Soviet rule, and in 1992 60% of Central Asians surveyed were willing to claim they were “somewhat” or “very” religious, with 65% claiming they were Muslims (Swafford, Kozyreva, Kosolapov, and Nizamova 2006).

Due to both historical and demographic distinctions, experts on the region reached a consensus that religion would be a driving force in determining political attitudes and behavior in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular, while neighboring in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, political identity would not develop around religion. Uzbekistan was seen as “more uniformly religious than any other republic, and where Islamic culture has had the most profound impact on the population” while Tajikistan was seen as having Islamic tendencies that were “on the whole, stronger than [Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan]” (Haghighyeghi 1996, 79). This was, in part, due to pre-Soviet religious practice in Central Asia, where a thorough Islamization had occurred in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, with more superficial observance recorded in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Olcott 1996, 31).

In the early 1990s, this presumption seemed to conform to what transpired in these countries. By 1994, 7,800 new mosques and prayer houses had been opened in Central Asia, but nearly half of these were located in Uzbekistan (Haghighyeghi 1996, 97).<sup>2</sup> Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all had active political Islamic organizations in the years immediately preceding and

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<sup>2</sup> The Deputy Mufti of Uzbekistan claimed 5,000 had been built in Uzbekistan alone, but this number was likely exaggerated.



following independence,<sup>3</sup> while in Kyrgyzstan no significant Islamic political organizations emerged initially. In both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Islam would play a critical role in the political events following independence that would set the stage for the development of national identity, while in Kyrgyzstan, Islam would remain outside of the political events that constituted the initial phase of nation building.

In Uzbekistan, Islam seemed set to quickly fill the void left by Soviet institutions. Even outside of Uzbekistan, it seemed that “the strength of Islamic proclivity in all of the Central Asian republics [was] closely related to the presence of the Uzbek population” (Haghighyeghi 1996, 78). Religious attendance, fasting during Ramadan, and other manifestations of religiosity quickly increased in Uzbekistan during the 1990s (Haghighyeghi 1996, 98–99). President Islam Karimov chose to be sworn in on a Qur’an, and shortly after his swearing-in, he gave interviews claiming he had become a believer, only ate halal meat, and intended to return nationalized property to Islamic institutions to support religious education for children (Olcott 2012a, 199; Rotar 1992, 3). In the period immediately following independence, religion was emerging as a locus of political opposition, particularly in the Fergana region.<sup>4</sup>

In Tajikistan, a similar pattern emerged. Like Uzbekistan, ritual observance was quickly on the rise (Haghighyeghi 1996, 98–99). Religious groups played a major oppositional role in the Civil

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<sup>3</sup> These Islamic political organization can be divided into two types. The first of these are republican parties, which had weak to moderate organizational and mobilizing capabilities. These included Islam and Democracy of Uzbekistan, The People’s Front of Uzbekistan, and the Islamic Democratic Party in Uzbekistan; and Alash for the National Independence of Kazakhstan. The second type was the interrepublic Islamic Renaissance Party, which commanded a large following in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and minimal support elsewhere. The Tajik branch was founded in 1990 and the Uzbek branch in 1992. Activists had plans to establish a nationwide Kazakh IRP branch in 1991, but these plans did not materialize. See (Haghighyeghi 1996, 85–95).

<sup>4</sup> In November 1991, President Islam Karimov visited Namangan in the Ferghana valley to meet with local Party and government officials. Other groups, some religious, expected to also be able to meet with the President, but Karimov flew back to Tashkent without attending these meetings. An organization called *Adolat* organized mass protests in response to the perceived slight, and Adolat leaders Tohir Yuldashev and Jumaboy Hojiyev (who would later become Juma Namangani) demanded that the President return to discuss the imposition of Sharia law and the role of Islam in the new nation-state.<sup>4</sup> On December 9, 1991, Karimov returned to Namangan where he was confronted by *Adolat* protestors. Before a massive crowd of *Adolat* supporters, Yuldashev and Hojiyev angrily berated the president, making demands including the headquarters of the local Communist Party be turned into an Islamic center, that Islamic parties be legalized, and that Uzbekistan be made into an Islamic state (Khalid 2007, 141–143; Rashid 2002). Shortly after this event, Karimov acceded to the first demand, then shortly after closed the Islamic center, arrests nearly seventy activists, had his security agencies eliminate all militias in the Fergana Valley, and became “an implacable foe of all expressions of Islam that he [had] not expressly authorize” (Khalid 2007, 141).

War, and after the conflict ended in the late 1990s, as part of the peace agreement the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan became the only legal religious political party in Central Asia.<sup>5</sup>

In Kyrgyzstan, however, scholars and policy makers believed the religious identity would remain separate from national and political identity. Unlike neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and like Kazakhstan, religion was not a point of political contention during the initial phase of nation building, nor was there as intense and immediate of a religious revival. For example, participation in Friday prayers, on the rise in the early 1990s in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, did not increase in proportion to the number of mosques opened in Kyrgyzstan (Haghyayeghi 1996, 98).

Yet, despite all of this, today religion in Kyrgyzstan is highly influential for political beliefs and behavior relative to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, at levels comparable to attitudes recorded in Uzbekistan. Religion not only thrives in Kyrgyzstan but plays an active role in structuring public debates surrounding education, good governance, and cultural values.

Today, for most Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, being a Muslim is completely imbricated within their perception of what it means to be truly Kyrgyzstani. 72% of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan believe that to be truly Kyrgyzstani, it is very important to be Muslim, compared to 39% of Kazakhstani Muslims believing the same about being truly Kazakhstani.

Beliefs about the role of religion in influencing political attitudes and beliefs are a good proxy for religionational fusion. Existing research in other contexts has shown that how superordinate identities that incorporate other collective identities such as national identity are

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<sup>5</sup> The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan was formerly founded in October 1990 as an alliance of mujadid mullahs from Gharm and Hisor with the goal of restoring the basics of Islam to society and building Islamic knowledge and values in Tajikistan (Khalid 2007, 147). The Civil War can be best understood as a conflict for power and resources between the neo-Soviet regime, supported by Uzbekistan and Russia, and led first by Rahmon Nabiyeu and later Emomali Rahmonov, and the United Tajik Opposition, a moderate alliance between the IRPT Islamists based in Northern Afghanistan and the secular-democratic Coordinating Center of Tajik Democratic Forces based in Moscow (Lynch 2001, 56). The division between the sides reflected Soviet political realities, and the alliances between secular-democratic nationalists, the “Islamists” of the IRPT, and the Shia Isma’ili Muslims was pragmatic, reflective of these divisions; the regime was primarily from the northern province of Khujand and the southern province of Kulob, while the opposition was primarily from the periphery, such as Hisor, Gharm, and Mountainous Badakhshan (Khalid 2007, 149).

As noted above, the goal of the IRPT was not to establish a theocratic, Islamic state. According to Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda, then second-in-command of the IRPT and later the deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan, the IRPT “had no intention of establishing a theocratic fundamentalist state in Tajikistan, and that they would never strive to impose Islamic ideology and their objectives on the citizens of the country...[The IRPT’s] objective was to play a role of its own in the spiritual revival and self-realization of the nation, and to defend the rights and demands of Muslims” (Turajonzoda 1995, 269).

After the war, as part of the power sharing agreement, the opposition, including the IRP, found itself incorporated into government. However, without the war providing them a platform for leadership, their role in society would diminish quickly as they struggled to organize and win votes (Khalid 2007, 153). This would later be expounded further as the regime targeted the IRP in the name of fighting religious extremism, ultimately banning the party.

constructed and understood by individuals have direct implications for policy preferences (Transue 2007), political interest and mobilization (Huddy and Khatib 2007), and intergroup relations and attitudes towards migrants (Finell, Olakivi, Liebkind, and Lipsanen 2013). In cases where national identity becomes fused with religious identity, it influences religious elites' ability to gain direct access to policy making (Grzymala-Busse 2015a), enables political parties to mobilize supporters, often against minorities (Anand 2016; Hansen 1999), contributes to anti-Muslim sentiment (Gravers 2015; Ware 2015; Keyes 2016; Shortle and Gaddie 2015), influence sense of belonging for minorities (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007; Gudrun Jensen 2008; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, and Ulleberg 2012), provide a locus of mobilization against existing regimes (Hughes 2007; Litvak 1996; Tanchum 2013), create support for international conflicts (Omer and Springs 2013, 130), and contributes to the development of conservative political attitudes and approval of authoritarian policies (Davis 2018). Thus, in cases such as Central Asia where there is little data directly measuring religionational fusion over time at the level of individuals, attitudes towards religious influence in politics can be used as a rough proxy.

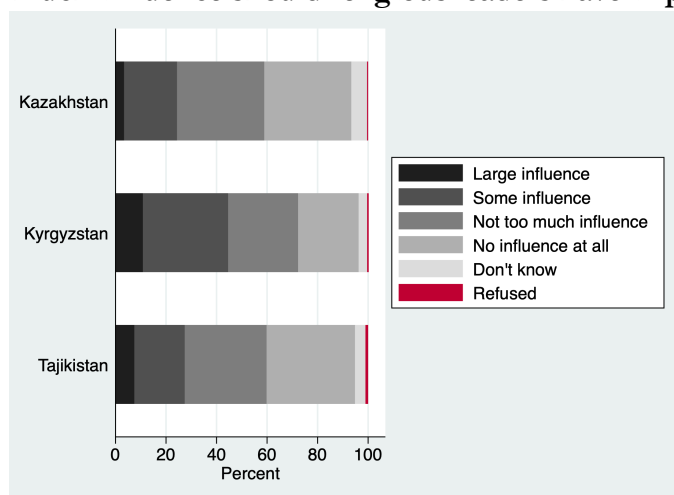
In a series of nationally-representative surveys conducted by Pew in 2011 and 2012, Muslims were interviewed on topics related to their religious and political identity in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>6</sup> The results suggest that political attitudes and beliefs are significantly more tied to religious identity in Kyrgyzstan than elsewhere in the region.

For example, when asked how much influence religious leaders should have in political matters, 45% of Muslims responded that religious leaders should have “A large influence” or “Some influence”, compared to 24% and 27% in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan respectively (see Figure I.1).

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<sup>6</sup> Political questions were not asked in Uzbekistan, likely due to sensitivity issues.

**Figure I.1: How much influence should religious leaders have in political matters?<sup>7</sup>**



When asked about concrete measures to integrate religion into state policy and politics, responses in Kyrgyzstan relative to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan remain high. For example, 35% of Muslims support making enshrining Sharia into law in Kyrgyzstan compared to 27% and 11% Tajikistan and Kazakhstan respectively. Among those that support this, over 30% more Muslims in Kyrgyzstan would prefer it be applied to Muslims and non-Muslims than in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Despite Tajikistan being the only country in Central Asia with a religious political party, 7% more Muslims in Kyrgyzstan believe that Islamic political parties are better than other political parties than in Tajikistan. These attitudes are presented in Table I.1.

**Table I.1: Support for religious influence over the law and politics<sup>8</sup>**

	Percent favoring making sharia the official law of their country	Among those favoring making sharia the official law, percent supporting applying it to both Muslims and non-Muslims	Percent favoring giving Muslim leaders and religious judges the power to decide family and property disputes	Percent favoring punishments like whippings and cutting off of hands for crimes like theft and robbery	Percent responding Islamic political parties are better compared to other political parties
Kyrgyzstan	35	60	41	36	34
Kazakhstan	11	22	13	13	11
Tajikistan	27	29	34	20	26

<sup>7</sup> Data from (Pew Research Center 2013)

<sup>8</sup> Data from (Pew Research Center 2013)

While Kyrgyz Muslims prefer the state impose Islam on Muslims and non-Muslims alike relative to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, they do not favor individuals taking conversions into their own hands. When asked whether Muslims in their country have a duty to convert others to Islam, only 37% of Kyrgyz Muslims mostly or completely agreed, compared to 68% of Muslims in Tajikistan.

This substantial variation across countries cannot easily be explained away as a result of strictness of belief or religiosity. Among conventional measures of religiosity, such as frequency of mosque attendance, self-reported religious knowledge, and self-ratings of the importance of religion, Tajikistan ranks consistently higher than Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan ranks consistently lower (see Table I.2). Yet, Kyrgyz Muslims prefer religious influence over politics and policy at a rate higher than both countries. The same pattern emerges for indicators of religious strictness and openness to multiple interpretations of Islam, with Tajikistani Muslims having stricter, less pluralistic beliefs than their Kyrgyzstani counterparts (see Table I.3).

**Table I.2: Religiosity in Central Asia<sup>9</sup>**

	Indicators of Religiosity			
	Percent responding that religion is “very important” in their lives	Percent who attend the mosque for salah and Jumu’ah Prayer once a week or more	Percent who pray several times per day outside of religious services	Percent responding that they know “a great deal” about the Muslim religion and its practices
Kyrgyzstan	48	21	18	28
Kazakhstan	19	11	4	12
Tajikistan	51	32	46	39
Uzbekistan	28	8	16	19

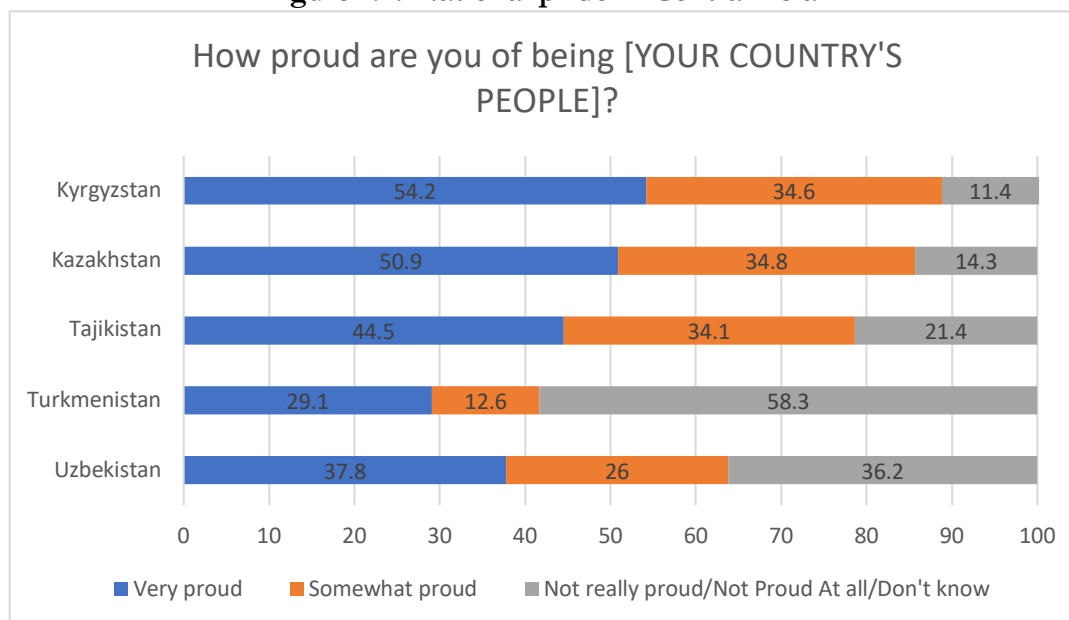
<sup>9</sup> Data from (Pew Research Center 2013)

**Table I.3: Strictness of belief and religious pluralism in Central Asia<sup>10</sup>**

	Indicators of Strictness of Belief/Pluralism of Belief			
	Percent who believe it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values	Percent who believe there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of Islam	Percent who believe that Islam is the one, true faith leading to eternal life in heaven	Percent who believe there is only one true understanding of sharia
Kyrgyzstan	63	61	68	57
Kazakhstan	40	38	32	43
Tajikistan	74	75	84	69
Uzbekistan	67	58	65	35

However, while citizens in Kyrgyzstan do not exhibit higher levels of religiosity or strictness of belief, they have exhibited higher levels of national pride than other Central Asians, with 89% of Kyrgyzstanis responding they are very or somewhat proud to be a member of their country's people, relative to 79% and 64% in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan respectively (see Figure I.2).<sup>11</sup> The role that religion plays as part of this national pride merits exploration.

**Figure I.2: National pride in Central Asia<sup>12</sup>**



<sup>10</sup> Data from (Pew Research Center 2013)

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that this pride does vary over time. When respondents were asked how proud they were of their national identity in 2011 as part of the World Values Survey, Kyrgyzstanis exhibited less pride than Uzbekistanis or Kazakhstanis. However, part of this dip could be explained by the revolution and ethnic violence in the year prior to the survey. Similarly, the 2005 results may be inflated by the then-recent Tulip Revolution.

<sup>12</sup> Data from (Inoguchi and et al. 2005)

While survey evidence indicates that the desire for religious influence in the political and public sphere are higher in Kyrgyzstan than in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, this is not to suggest that these attitudes are homogenous among Kyrgyzstani Muslims. On the contrary, these attitudes vary significantly not only across individuals. In the last ten years, debates around the proper role of religion as a component of the nation are common. These manifest through heated public disagreements about topics such as prayer rooms being constructed in parliament (Rickleton 2011), changes to the labor code to allow time off for state and private employees for Friday afternoon prayers (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service 2016), the role of the hijab as an expression of Kyrgyzstani piety in public and in schools (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017), and the influence of religion on cultural values and laws (Kupfer 2014).

How, despite predictions to the contrary, did Kyrgyz political and national identity become so closely intertwined with religion? Moreover, how do we understand the fusion of religious and national identity as it occurs gradually over time, rather than being a deterministic outcome of the initial political conflicts that surround the formation of independent nation-states? And what explains the variation in religionational fusion across individuals within a single religion in a single country?

### **Defining and Explaining Religionational Fusion**

I refer to the degree to which religious and national identity are mutually constituted as *religionational fusion* (RNF). It has two dimensions: imbrication and primacy. Imbrication refers to the degree to which the content of national identity is understood as being religious, while primacy refers to the degree of salience religious and national identity holds within an individual's hierarchy of collective identities, which is reflective of the identity's strength.

Religion, in contexts where religionational fusion is at higher levels among many members of the dominant religion, will be used to define and justify national customs and values, and may be measured by observing how essential individuals view the importance of being religious to true membership in the nation, as well as the extent to which rhetoric, goals, symbols, and composition of the nation are understood in religious terms. Attitudes that true members of a nation should also practice a particular religion and prioritizing religious and national identity above all other forms of self-identification are direct indicators of religionational fusion.

Understanding the forms religionational fusion takes, and what factors contribute to the emergence of and strength of this identity, is not merely an academic exercise; it is important if we

want to understand the role of religion in politics broadly. Religionational fusion in its various configurations can structure whether or not religious institutions are able to influence key moral policies in the secular sphere (Grzymala-Busse 2015b), depoliticize religion for the state and transform its ideological authority (Fagan 2013; Shambaugh 2008); enable and structure the relationship between local regimes who want to foster stability, economic growth, and legitimacy with religious groups who want financial support and legal protection (Koesel 2014); dictate the fault lines of violent conflict in civil war and justify revenge (Perica 2004); inspire religious violence against the secular state (Juergensmeyer 2010); threaten the traditional nation-state's political legitimacy when there is local insecurity (Gürbüz 2001); grant the state the ability to consolidate national identity in a manner that provides additional legitimacy for the ruling elites (Nevo 1998); feed into a supranational diasporic form of identification that functions politically and may supersede traditional nationalism (Mandaville 2001); or be used as an auxiliary source for creating a new national consolidation simultaneously at the public and private levels during the fall of empire (Agadjanian 2001).

This relationship may range from antagonistic forms (the *laïcité* of French secular nationalism) to complete fusion (the interconnectedness of the Iranian Shi'ite faith and some government propagated forms of Iranian nationalism (Tait 2010)). It is often a persistent element of nationalist discourse in a nation-state. It may also, however, be a relatively new form of identity, emerging as public attitudes or the goals and tactics of the regime shift.

Before presenting my theory of the determinants of religionational fusion, I briefly present alternative explanations for how religionational fusion emerges, is strengthened, and is weakened.

### *Critical Junctures*

The role religious and political elites play during the period before and during regime formation plays a role in setting a baseline level of religionational fusion. This baseline may, in part, be set by the role religion plays during and immediately the nationalist struggle between the state and the nation that ultimately leads to the birth of a nation-state and the establishment of a new regime. Anna Grzymala-Busse argues there are three ways this can occur. First, religion can protect national identity against a hostile state, leading to a high level of fusion between religious and national identity. Second, religion can help build the nation state, leading to a more moderate level of religionational fusion. Finally, religion can oppose the merging of the nation and the state, leading to low levels of religionational fusion (Grzymala-Busse 2015a, 28–31).



While Grzymala-Busse's theory is tested using predominantly Catholic cases, similar mechanisms can be observed in the Muslim world. For example, in countries such as Turkey, Algeria, and Pakistan, the role Islamic mobilization played in overthrowing non-Muslim opponents contributed to strength and persistence of recurrent challenges against the secular nation-state model that political elites adopted after independence (Akturk 2015).

However, the church is not the only actor capable of influencing religionational fusion during the early moments of a new regime or nation-state. In fact, the manner in which the state involves itself in religion during and after independence movements can lock in a particular degree of religionational fusion that may persist for years. For example, after the War of Independence in Turkey in 1923 the state, leading to a national identity that would be marginalizing towards religion for many decades. Contrasting this, early in its existence Israel "gave Judaism a positive, formal role in its ideologies and policies". As a result of these decisions during the regime-formation process, a national identity that is accommodating towards religion developed in Israel.

In considering each of these cases, Aviad Rubin argues that "the conditions in place at the moment of regime formation are of crucial importance to the future status of religion in the state...following the establishment of the new regime, the emerging political elite is likely to implement the fundamentals of its political agenda, including the role of religion, in the public, political and socio-economic institutions of the state. After being solidified in institutional and constitutional arrangements, the initial structure can remain resilient for many years despite significant social and political changes" (Rubin 2013, 498). The significance of this for my theory is not only that state involvement in religion during the first moments of the nation-state may set the baseline level of religionational fusion, but also that the institutions in place that dictate state involvement in religion are sticky and resistant to change, at least in the initial period following independence.

That said, these critical junctures that lock in a baseline degree of religionational fusion do not solely occur during periods of regime change, but can also occur more spontaneously due to socioeconomic and political changes. For example, Québec's Quiet Revolution completely transformed the role of religion as a component of Québécois national identity (see Zubrzycki 2016 for a thorough account of the transformation of French Canadian identity from ethno-Catholic identity to a new, secular Québécois identity). And yet, it occurred during the 1960s, long after the segmentation of French-Canadian identity had been consolidated along linguistic, religious, and ethnic lines (Fenwick 1981, 199–203). These moments of national redefinition that occur long after

the birth of a nation can also foment cultural change that redefines the relationship between religious and national identity indefinitely.

While I agree with the core argument here—that new policies concerning the role religion will play under a new regime will be sticky and influence how identity develops in a manner that persists long after regime change—I argue that shifts in state involvement in religion can and do occur, and that when they do, they have the potential to transform religionational fusion at the level of individuals who perceive this state involvement in religion during the long periods between critical moments of national genesis or transformation to varying degrees. By identifying the determinants of this individual level religionational fusion within a single country, I am able to control for the effect of critical junctures.

#### *Religious Representation in Governance*

Existing research has shown that political representation breeds national identification. In a study of 132 countries since the 1980s, Andreas Wimmer found that national identification is a function of political representation (Wimmer 2018). Individuals who see their identities reflected in the representatives of the nation-state—the government—will be more likely to embrace the notion of the nation as a meaningful category of identification. Simply put, individuals who find themselves in contexts where they see their ethnic identity represented in government are more likely to respond that they are proud of their national identity (Bornman 2006, 396).

An argument could be made that this ethnonational representation effect is transferrable to RNF through religious representation. Thus, when members of the dominant religious perceive their government leaders of religious, RNF will increase. However, I argue that this effect is, in large part, related to mechanisms of state involvement in religion that are prone to cause greater perceptions of religious representation in government *and* increases in religionational fusion. For example, politicians and political parties who utilize religious rhetoric in their speeches and party platforms and pass religiously-subsidizing legislation are more likely to be perceived as religious. I argue that these actions independently and directly increase both perceptions of religious representation in government as well as religionational fusion for the groups being represented.

#### *Religious Fractionalization and Diversity*

Existing research has demonstrated that the ethnic configuration of populations can contribute to nationalist conflicts (Cederman and Girardin 2007) and to determining the form of national identity and attitudes present in the population (Brett and Moran 2011). Religious fractionalization may influence aggregate levels of religionational fusion in a similar manner.

Demographic realities such as whether or not there are minority religious groups competing for resources and the size of these minority groups may determine whether or not religious identities can be used as an “other” against which to define the borders of the nation, and thus influence the potential degree of religionational fusion present in the population. Thus, in my cross-national study, I include controls for religious fractionalization and diversity.

### **A New Theory of Religionational Fusion**

The state is frequently the most significant actor in creating, sustaining, activating, and guiding national identity. People look to representatives of the nation-state to dictate the content of collective national identity, emphasizing and reinforcing the beliefs, symbols, attitudes, and practices that constitute the nation, while also attempting to stifle beliefs and behaviors that are seen as against the national ethos. In particular, when the state makes significant changes in how it treats or uses identity, people are more prone to notice and internalize the state’s message. Thus, when the state takes a new position on another form of identity often associated with national sentiment—in this case religion—it will have an impact on how individuals understand the relationship between these two identities. However, repeating existing involvement in religion also has a strong effect, normalizing the signal and reinforcing it such that it becomes both banal and generally accepted by members of the dominant religion.

The tactics that constitute state involvement in religion can be disaggregated into three dimensions: regulation, rhetoric, and symbolism.

Religious regulation is the state’s use of institutions, policies, and resources to directly support or repress religious beliefs, behaviors, and institutions. It is what the state *does* about religion. It includes repression—i.e., the restrictions placed by the state on the selection or profession of religious beliefs and practices—and subsidy—i.e., institutional, fiscal, or political benefits to particular religious organizations.

Religious rhetoric reflects what the state *says* about religion. In particular, I am interested in how the paramount spokespeople for the nation-state—e.g., heads of state and heads of government—attempt to define national identity and the nation itself in religious terms, and further how they use religious rhetoric to justify policy, legitimize their rule, or attack political opponents.

Religious symbolism includes how the state *uses* representations of religious tradition in its construction of the nation-state. Examples include religious symbolism on the flag or currency, holy books being used in government practice such as taking oaths or during swearing in ceremonies,

listing of religious affiliation on identity cards, the presence of prayer rooms in government buildings, the use of religious language or references in national anthems, the use of religious decoration in government offices, the wearing of religious clothing by heads of state, and the recognition of religious holidays as official state holidays.

Shifts in state involvement in religious regulation can create cognitive dissonance when repression is high, creating conflict within individuals who see themselves as members of the nation but are receiving signals from the state that their religious beliefs and practices go against their own national identity. As a result, religious and national identity can become cleaved, reducing religionational fusion. The state can also use regulation through subsidies to increase and reinforce religionational fusion by signaling support for religious identity, granting that identity special privileges, rights, and benefits that other religions or forms of collective identity may not enjoy. Elevating religion to this special status signals to citizens that the state views religion as a core component of the nation-state and thus an element of state ascribed national identity.

State use of religious symbols has a persistent effect on religionational fusion by sending a consistent, ever-present signal concerning the relationship between national and religious identity that fades into the background and become almost unconsciously internalized. Individuals may not consciously consider the fact that they see a cross on their currency every time they take out their wallet, see a crescent moon and green coloration representing Islam every time they drive past a flag, recite that God has chosen their nation when they sing the national anthem, or see the President place their hand on a bible while being sworn in. Nonetheless, the daily repetition and reproduction of these symbols over time by the state ensures that the signal concerning religious identity being fused with national identity is developed and maintained.

Religious rhetoric influences religionational fusion by sending a direct and explicit signal. The strongest form of comes directly from leaders of nation-states. Heads of state may imbue religion with national significance by extolling its position as a building block of national identity in their writings and speeches, use religious scripture to justify policies and their legitimacy to rule, or may simple reference religion as culturally significant during speeches by referencing God. In all of these cases, the mechanism affecting religionational fusion is the same: state leaders, as spokespeople for the nation-state, serve to directly communicate the state's prescribed positions on identity. They are also often looked to as exemplars of national identity and citizenship.

However, support for religion through rhetoric, which is the most direct mechanism of involvement since it is perceived as originating directly from representatives of the state, can

backfire and reduce religionational fusion when the regime involving itself in religion becomes unpopular.<sup>13</sup> The precise nature of these impacts is dependent on the tactics used by the state in involving itself in religion.

This theory of the determinants of religionational fusion contributes to the existing literature explaining religionational fusion in a number of ways.

First, my account of religionational fusion is dynamic, rather than static. I treat religionational fusion as a concept that can shift gradually or dramatically over relatively short periods of time in response to signals from the state, rather than as a concept that is fully determined by the processes surrounding initial nation-building. I argue that religionational fusion is not only a concept that can be constructed by the state, but that it also must be maintained through their ongoing involvement in religion.

Second, rather than focusing solely on aggregate understandings of religion and nationhood, I treat religionational fusion as an identity that will vary across individuals within a single nation-state, within the dominant religion. Instead of looking solely at how religion is configured as a component of national identity in the eyes of the state or nationalist activists, I focus my analysis on average members of the dominant religion. This allows me to better disentangle the mechanisms that are actually influencing religionational fusion.

Third, I break down religionational fusion into two components, imbrication, reflective of its content, and primacy, reflective of its strength. This allows me to better understand not only whether religion and national identity have become fused, but also allows me to parse out whether the mechanisms influencing the fusion of the two identities have the same direction of effect on the identity's strength.

Fourth, I break from the majority of the literature considering the effects of state regulation of religion on religious identity (which I discuss in chapter 3) by developing a rich account of the state's involvement in religion that goes beyond just subsidies. States have a wide variety of motivations to involve themselves in religion, often resulting in seemingly contradictory forms of involvement; a state may simultaneously strictly repress religion while also heavily utilizing religious rhetoric and symbols. By maintaining an agnostic stance towards the motivation behind state

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<sup>13</sup> This is a variation of Tocqueville's argument in *Democracy in America*, where he argues that the politicization and therefore instrumentalization of religion may contribute to its de-popularization. For Tocqueville this explains why the clergy supports separation of church and state.

involvement, and looking at each aspect of this involvement independently, I am better able to tease out the individual mechanisms influencing religionational fusion.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

This study is primarily concerned with identifying the sources of religionational fusion under secular regimes, looking primarily at the role of state involvement in the dominant religion.

In chapter 2, I fully define and operationalize my primary dependent variable, religionational fusion. I then use global data on religious and national identity to demonstrate that religionational fusion varies not only across regions and countries but also over time.

In chapter 3, I develop a theory of religionational fusion, focusing on the role that state involvement in religion plays in structuring how individuals reconcile the relationship between their religious and national identity. I first define and operationalize my primary explanatory variable, state involvement in religion. I then introduce my theory, and from this theory I derive a series of hypotheses regarding the determinants of religionational fusion that will be tested in subsequent chapters.

In chapter 4 I provide a novel account of the evolution of state involvement in religion in Central Asia. Using process tracing and historical analysis relying on data including primary legislative and legal documents; textual analysis of presidential speeches and publications; NGO records and news reports; government evaluations of religious repression, and analysis of national symbols such as flags, anthems, currency, and other sources I identify shifts in the form and degree of state involvement over time. I conclude by presenting survey data from throughout the region collected over the last three decades to show how proxy indicators of religionational fusion have shifted over time alongside changes in religious regulation, state use of religious symbols, and state use of religious rhetoric.

Chapter 5 focuses directly on religionational fusion by presenting the results of an original nationally representative survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2018/2019. These results are used to test a series of hypotheses concerning the relationship between state involvement in religion and religionational fusion at the individual level. A separate series of hypotheses concerning religious minority status and feelings of national belongingness are tested.

In Chapter 6, using a mixture of original and existing cross-national data on state involvement in religion, religionational identity, and political attitudes, I test a series of hypotheses concerning state involvement in religion and religionational fusion at the country-year level. Using

global data, variables such as religiosity, dominant religious tradition, religious fractionalization, and GDP per capita are controlled for.

Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the dissertation's implications for work on political attitudes and political behavior. I introduce ongoing projects in Central Asia considering the effects of religious regulation on propensity to support or contest the regime. I also propose extensions to the dissertation that will help develop a deeper understanding of religionational fusion and its determinants, with a focus on expanding the scope of the work to include both religious minorities and state involvement in minority religions.

## CHAPTER II

### Religionational Fusion

#### Conceptualizing Religionational Fusion

Religionational fusion is the manner in and degree to which religious identity constitutes national identity. Thus, prior to breaking down this concept into its constituent dimensions and attempting to operationalize it, it is first necessary to clearly define “religious identity” and “national identity”.

Anthony Smith defines religious identity as being “based on alignments of culture and its elements—values, symbols, myths and traditions, often codified in custom and rituals...[which] join in a single community of the faithful all those who feel they share certain symbolic codes, value systems and traditions of belief and ritual, including references to a supra-empirical reality, however impersonal, and imprints of specialized organizations, however tenuous” (Smith 1991, 6). Religious identity, thus, is the set of discourses, symbols, practices, values, institutions, and resources that individuals perceive as constituting their religion, which I define as “explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions that include statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning” (Grim and Finke 2006, 4). For the purposes of this dissertation, I am interested in looking at how dominant religious identities, or religions that constitute a plurality of citizens in a nation-state, are fused with national identity

Nations are imagined political communities, which are imagined as both limited and sovereign. They are imagined in the sense that individual members will not know or meet most members, but still believe they are part of this same group. It is a community in the sense that regardless of actual inequality, it is conceived as a horizontal comradeship. It is limited because even the largest nation has boundaries, beyond which are other nations. Finally, it is sovereign because the concept of the nation was born during an age where the legitimacy of divinely-ordained dynastic political units were being delegitimized, and rather than a leader being given power over a realm, the nation itself was seen as having sovereignty (Anderson 2016, 6–7).

National identity, thus, refers to the manner in which people perceive the character, traits, goals, members, and territory of the imagined political community of which they consider



themselves a part. Critically, it also implies an understanding of common institutions a shared code of rights, and duties for members of this community (Smith 1991, 9). Since I am most interested in how individuals understand their own national identity, I use Ernest Gellner's second provisional definition of the nation, which stipulates that a core element of a nation is that members recognize each other as belonging to the same nation and thus sharing national identity.<sup>1</sup>

### **Understanding Religionational Fusion**

I define religionational fusion as the degree to which members of the nation perceive that religious identity constitutes national identity. In other words, religionational fusion refers to both the centrality of religious identity as a component of national identity, and the importance of this fused identity relative to other forms of collective identity. This includes the proportion of national identity that is explicitly informed by or borrowed from religion, and how well people feel their national identity reflects their religion. When this is low, an individual's sense of what the nation is will not be informed by religion; there will be a purely secular understanding of the nation. When it is high, however, an individual's sense of what the nation is will overlap with his/her understanding of religion. Religion will influence the character and strength of national identity by supplying the "myths, metaphors, and symbols that are central to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation" for the individual, and/or the boundaries of the nation, potentially answering the questions of "who belongs?" and "what is distinctive about us as a people, in terms of our history, character, identity, mission, or destiny?" respectively (Brubaker 2012, 11–12).

Individuals with a high degree of religionational fusion will begin to recognize religious narratives and symbols as having national significance and will desire that their religious identity likewise be represented in policies and symbols representing the nation. Put another way, religionational fusion refers to the extent that a person's sense of national identity is religious in

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Gellner's provides two "temporary" definitions of the nation. Since I am not interested in the nation as observed from outside, but instead am interested with how individuals view their own national identity and that of their co-citizens, I favor the second definition: "2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non- members" (Gellner 2009, 6–7).

nature; it is the degree to which these two identities are connected. Understanding the extent to which national identity is fused with religious identity is thus critical if we wish to fully understand the role of religion in the construction of political attitudes and the ability of political leaders to garner legitimacy.

To further develop this concept, I build on Anna Grzymała-Busse's (2015a, 25–27)(2015a, 25–27) work on the fusion of religious and national identity. First, religionational fusion is a continuum; it is not unique to any single set of contexts and appears to widely varying degrees across and within national contexts over time. While one of the outcomes of religionational fusion, religious nationalism, which occurs when “the fusion of nationalism and religion...are inseparable” is better thought of as a type among many types of nationalism (Rieffer 2003, 225), religionational fusion can vary in degree from no fusion up to a complete fusion of religious and national identity. As Grzymała-Busse observes (2015, 26), “nation and religion fuse to differing degrees...even within any one country, some people view religion as far more central to national identity than others.” This variation “in the precise settlement between national and religious worldviews” (Eastwood and Prevalakis 2010, 105), both at the level of individuals within countries and at the aggregate level across countries, is what this dissertation aims to explain.

Second, religionational fusion is not static, and can change drastically in response to external factors over short periods of time. While nationalists frame national identity as unchanging and enduring, originating from some shared and often imagined past, in fact this identity can transform quickly. An example of this is the quiet revolution in Quebec, when the religious identity was cleaved from national identity over the course of a decade, in part due to the state taking powers from the Catholic Church (Grzymała-Busse 2015, 26). I argue that this change, which can be sudden, can also be gradual, shifting in small increments over decades in response to factors including but not limited to state involvement in religion.

Third, power over determining degrees of religionational fusion is not hegemonic, and influence on the construction of the national narrative can be held by many different stakeholders, including religious or nationalist activists, clergy and religious institutions, and government elites. However, while all of these groups and individuals can influence religionational fusion, there is no simple one-to-one mechanism for translating the “imagined” or “ascribed” national identity propagated by elites into the “real”, “inhabited” national identity as understood by different individuals. Further, particularly in Central Asia, the focus of research on national identity is on the

top-down perspective, failing to take into account how this elite-level nationalist discourse is received and inhabited (or not inhabited) by ordinary citizens (Isaacs and Polese 2015).

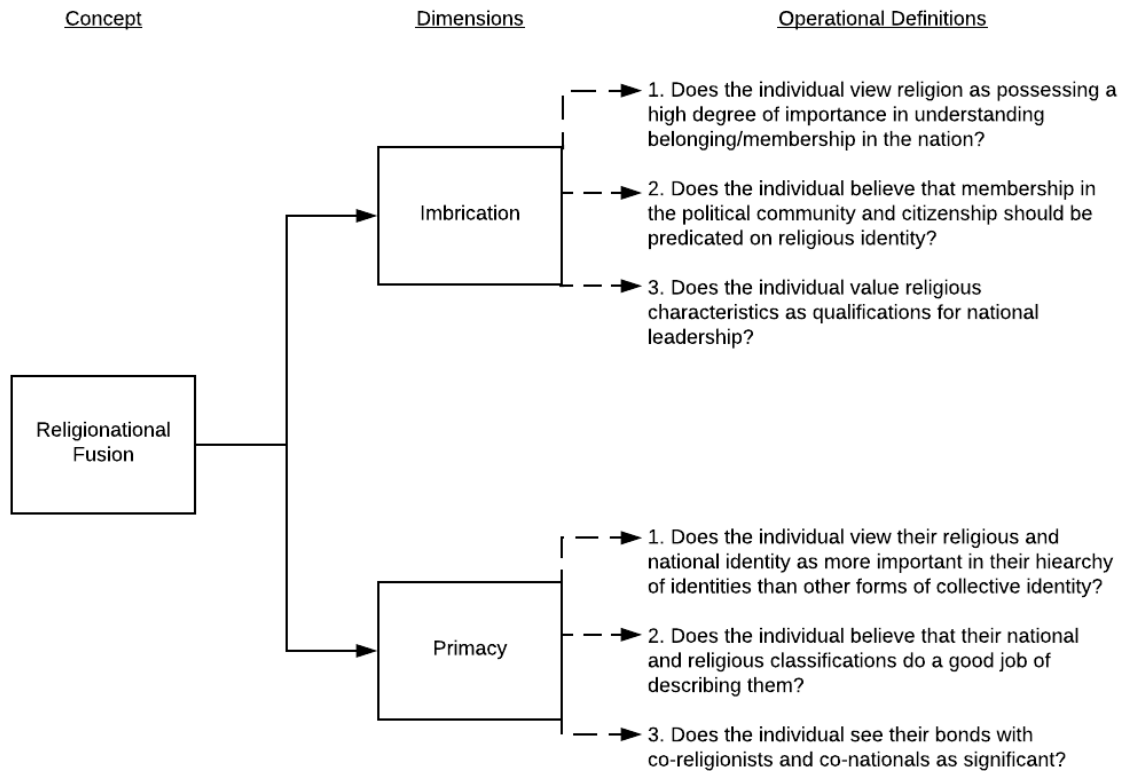
Finally, religionational fusion need not be the product of some primordial history of nations; like national identity, ethnic identity, and other forms of collective identities, religionational fusion is constructed. For example, as Grzymała-Busse (2015, 26) demonstrates, the idea that to be Polish is to be Catholic is a recent construct, merely decades old. This occurred because the “Roman Catholic Church became an important vehicle to safely house political opposition to the communist regime...[embodying] the only means for spiritual, nationalistic, political, and intellectual expression outside the dictates of communist ideology,” not only serving to house nationalist activists but also contributing to the ideological position of Solidarity (Froese 2004, 70–71; Osa 1997). I make the same constructivist argument about most if not all religionational fusion today, which is the product of a number of factors that can transform identity over years and decades, rather than centuries.

Note that religionational fusion is distinct from but related to religious nationalism, a concept that I define as the desire for the state and its laws and policies to be religious in content and character, and for these policies to be imposed on all residents regardless of religious affiliation when at high levels. While I argue that religionational fusion is a necessary condition for religious nationalism to emerge, it is not sufficient to explain this political resource.

### **Operationalization of Religionational Fusion**

As Figure II.1 illustrates, religionational fusion has two core dimensions: imbrication and primacy. Imbrication is reflective of the content of this composite identity, while primacy is reflective of its strength.

Figure II.1: Operationalization diagram of religionational fusion



*Imbrication*

Imbrication is the degree to which the content of national identity is understood as being religious; in other words, it is the extent to which the two identities overlap as perceived by members of each collective identity. It includes not only how the individual perceives the nation, but also their perceptions of how religion should be reflected by national institutions and national leadership.<sup>2</sup>

Imbrication refers to the degree to which individuals understand membership in the nation, as well as national myths, symbols, and traditions, as *explicitly* religious in character and content, coming from a *specific* religious tradition. The importance of religious identity as a membership criterion is both inward and outward looking, reflecting Ernest Gellner’s idea that members of a nation must not only share culture, but also *recognize* each other as belonging to said nation (Gellner 2009, 6–7). How important religion is in the recognition of this membership is one indicator of imbrication. For two individuals to share national identity, they not only must not only see themselves as members of the same nation, but also mutually recognize each other as members of

<sup>2</sup> See (Brubaker 2012, 11–16) for a review of different understandings of religion as imbricated or intertwined with nationalism.

said nation. Thus, the extent to which religion is perceived as a critical component in defining membership in the nation, both as individuals perceive themselves and as they perceive their co-nationals, is a core element of religionational fusion.

Imbrication also includes how the role of religious identity is perceived as important for defining good national leadership. Individuals in positions of national leadership are perceived—internally and externally—as representing the nation, and thus their actions and attitudes hold symbolic value. Much as an individual who has a highly ethnic sense of national identity would be more likely to prefer their ethnic group be represented in national leadership positions and experience cognitive dissonance endorsing a leader of the nation-state who came from a competing ethnic group, individuals with higher levels of religionational fusion will desire religious characteristics be reflected in national leadership positions.

Note that this does *not* include religious ideas that have been secularized as part of their incorporation into national identity, such as notions of chosen-ness of a people, ceremonialism, and the sacralization of a founding father. While a large proportion of national identity may be borrowed from many of the tropes and characteristics of religious identity, unless these characteristics are understood explicitly to be borrowed from a particular religious tradition or denomination and to still be religious in character, they are not considered to be indicative of religionational fusion as they are not contributing to a sense of overlap between a particular religious identity and national identity.<sup>3</sup> This definition also excludes multi-denominationalism or religious pluralism as a component of national identity from being considered indicative of religionational fusion, such as is seen in pluralistic “philosemitism” of the center and left that challenges Polish-Catholic religionational fusion in contemporary Poland (Zubrzycki 2006) and the multi-religious denominationalism seen as part of some understandings of national identity in the United States (Casanova 2007; Amesbury 2009). That said, what is important is how the citizenry perceives their national identity, not the national narrative the state supports; state policy may indicate support for religious pluralism or multi-denominationalism as a core component of national identity, but if people still see their identity as fundamentally of a particular religious character, then imbrication is high. If an American feels that being a protestant Christian is fundamental to being truly American, and a Pole thinks being Catholic is fundamental to being truly Polish, then religious and national

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth account of how religious traditions are transformed into national culture, through a process the author calls “patrimonialization”, see (Zubrzycki 2016)

identity are fused for those individuals regardless of how religious or state actors attempt to frame the relationship between these identities.

### *Primacy*

If we are ultimately interested in the effects of religionational fusion on attitudes and mobilization, we must also understand its strength relative to other forms of collective identity. I refer to the strength of religionational fusion as *primacy*. Primacy refers to the degree of salience religious and national identity holds within an individual's hierarchy of collective identities. Put another way, it reflects the individual's intensity of feelings and closeness towards the religious and national components of their identity, both absolutely and relative to other collective identifiers.<sup>4</sup>

Primacy, as a dimension of religionational fusion, is important because it reflects the strength of the individuals fused identity, and thus, how easily this identity can be converted into action or mobilization. If an individual sees their nation as fundamentally religious, but does not feel any bond with co-nationals or co-religionists and does not think their own religionational identity describes them well relative to their other identities, religionational fusion will be weak and inconsequential.

Primacy of identity can be measured using relativistic indicators, as well as absolute indicators measuring the individual strength of each of these forms of identity. Relativistic indicators include how strongly individuals rank order religious identity relative to other collective identities associated with national identity, such as linguistic identity, ethnic identity, regional identity notions of civic duty, etc.

Absolute indicators that measure the strength of national and religious identity include how well individuals feel their religious and national identity describes them as a person and whether or not they feel a bond with their co-nationals and co-religionists. Each of these indicators is measuring the strength of fused identity, in the first case in terms of how completely it encompasses their sense of self, and in the second case how strongly it informs the sense of collective belonging.

### *What Religionational Fusion is Not*

Note that this imbrication and primacy are distinct from both patriotism and religiosity. Patriotism refers to love and feelings of affection for one's country. This concept is frequently divided in blind patriotism, or "a rigid and inflexible attachment to country, characterized by unquestioning positive evaluation" and constructive patriotism, or "an attachment to country

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<sup>4</sup> This is adapted from a conceptualization of national identification that treats it as intensity of feelings towards one's nation. This concept, however, is used to describe the intensity of these feelings regardless of their qualitative content (Schmidt and Westle 2001, 6).

characterized by critical loyalty” (Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999, 153). Primacy does *not* refer to attachment to the state or country, but rather, how intensely individuals associated with co-religionists and co-nationals and how central this religionational identity is to their sense of self.

Religiosity, in contrast, refers to the degree to which an individual is religious, as measured through beliefs, practices, and affiliations. While individuals who are highly religious may be more likely to have high degrees of religionational fusion, these two concepts do not perfectly overlap. It is easy to imagine, for example, an individual who is highly religious and believes this is a completely distinct identity from their national identity, either because they are a religious minority, or because they believe religion should be kept strictly separate (and thus protected) from politicized identities such as national identity. Conversely, an individual who only attends mosque or church on major holidays and who never prays may nonetheless see being a Muslim or Christian respectively, at least through affiliation, as central to belongingness in the nation.

### **Empirical Data for Measurement of the Dependent Variable**

While other scholars have endeavored to conceptualize the relationship between religion and national identity, there have been few attempts to operationalize these concepts and develop appropriate measures. One of the issues with existing studies on the relationship between religion and nationalism is that they fail to adequately distinguish between “ascribed” national identity, or the strength and form of national identity as seen from the top-down perspective of nationalist elites, and “inhabited” popular national identity, or the manner in which everyday citizens perceive themselves. Since I am interested specifically in how elites’ actions influence the “inhabited” popular religionational identity of citizens, as well as how citizens’ religionational identity differs from the ascribed national identity propagated by elites, this dissertation relies primarily on survey data taken from the general population of members of the dominant religion in their respective states to develop indicators of religionational fusion.

Survey data is well suited for creating indicators used to measure religionational fusion. Like interviews, surveys allow a research to directly capture attitudes and beliefs of how individuals understand and construct their personal religious and national identity as they understand it. Surveys also have the benefit of being able to be conducted on a mass scale, allowing me to not only capture variance at the level of individuals, but also in the aggregate at the country level.

### *Central Asian Cases*

In Central Asia, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, there is no available data that allows imbrication and primacy of identity to be directly measured at the individual level in a nationally representative manner. Instead, I rely on smaller-scale surveys, and utilize data on religious identity, national identity, and attitudes towards religious influence in politics as a proxy for religionational fusion.

Existing work has shown that high levels of fusion of religious and national identity are strongly associated with religious influence over public policy by allowing religious leaders to gain direct access to policy making (Grzymala-Busse 2015, 27). Attitudes towards religious influence in politics also appear to be closely related to religionational fusion. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, imbrication—measure as the degree to people believe being Muslim is necessary to be truly Kyrgyzstani—is significantly and positively associated with beliefs that religious people should occupy government positions and believers should have more influence over government decisions.<sup>5</sup> I thus attitudes towards religious influence in politics and the administration of the nation state as proxy indicators for religionational fusion.

### *Kyrgyzstan Case Study*

For the Kyrgyz case study, I rely predominantly on data taken from an original nationally-representative survey I co-created that was administered in Kyrgyzstan in late 2018/early 2019. The overall structure and content of the survey will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. The unit of analysis for my Kyrgyz case study is individual citizens. This survey was constructed using insights from semi-structured expert interviews with religious leaders, government leaders, local academics, NGO leaders, and journalists in Kyrgyzstan in 2015. Additionally, successful surveys administered elsewhere were used to aid with question design and to ensure that key question on the survey could be used for cross-national comparison.

To measure imbrication, I consider how members of the dominant religion in a country respond to questions about the importance of religious identity in determining national identity. Indicators include questions probing whether or not being a member of the dominant religion is necessary for being truly a member of the national identity, questions about religious influence in

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<sup>5</sup> A Spearman's correlation was run to assess the relationship between imbrication and attitudes using a large sample of 2532 Kyrgyzstani citizens. There was a positive statistically significant relationship between imbrication and attitudes towards religious influence in politics,  $r_s=.2640$ ,  $p=.0000$ .



constructing the nation-state such as whether religion should be a component of citizenship, and questions concerning the desirability of religious characteristics in national leaders.

I also include a question gauging whether or not respondents view the Hanafi madhhab as an essential component of national identity. This is included to help gauge whether or not the state's ascribed religionational identity—which is explicitly based on following the Hanafi madhhab presented as traditional Kyrgyz Islam—aligns with inhabited popular religionational identity.

To measure primacy of identity, in Kyrgyzstan I use a series of survey questions about the importance of religion to the respondent relative to other forms of identity in constituting national identity. I also use questions that directly measure whether respondents feel that their national identity does a good job describing them, and questions that measure the strength of their bond with both co-religionists and co-nationals separately. In particular, I create a “soft” and “hard” indicator of primacy that gauges whether an individual expresses Islam and national identity as their top two most important identities in any order, or with religion taking precedence, respectively.

I supplement this data with country-specific surveys, such as the Life in Kyrgyzstan questionnaire. While these surveys do not allow me to directly test the relationship between my primary explanatory variable, state involvement in religion, and religionational fusion at the individual level, they do all me to observe how shifts in religionational fusion have occurred over time at the aggregate level, in response to broader nation-wide shifts in state involvement in religion.

#### *Cross-National Study*

In my cross-national study of religionational fusion, I utilize questions similar to the questions used in the Kyrgyz case study but taken from existing global surveys. One benefit of relying on this existing data is that these studies have multiple iterations, allowing me to test my hypotheses about the determinants of religionational fusion not only across countries, but also over time. The unit of analysis in my cross-national study is country-year. Sources include surveys conducted by Pew, the International Social Survey Program, the World Values Survey, and various Global Barometer Surveys.

Unfortunately, given data limitations, it is only possible to measure imbrication in my cross-national study. This is because a wide range of surveys over time have asked identical questions about the importance of religion for being truly a member of the nation. While questions about primacy are present in some of the surveys used, I do not have common indicators across enough countries to come to any definitive conclusions. I thus focus my cross-national study only this single dimension of religionational fusion.

## Unexplained Variation in Religionational Fusion in Cross-National Context

In the previous chapter, I presented variation in Central Asia among attitudes towards the influence of religion in politics, arguing that to begin to understand this variation, we must first identify and explain variation in religionational fusion. In this section, I demonstrate the world-wide variance in religionational fusion, illustrating that simple explanations such as religious tradition or region are not sufficient to explain why the degree of fusion varies.

### *Cross-National Variation*

There is substantial evidence that there is significant variation in the degree of religionational fusion within and across countries over time. In countries such as Turkey or the Philippines, large majorities of the population consider being “Turkish” or “Filipino” fundamental to being Muslim or Christian respectively. In other countries, particularly those with strong religious institutions such as Ireland, majorities of the population do not consider religion to be an essential component of national identity. This variation merits explanation.

Few cross-national surveys have included questions that can be used as indicators for the degree of religionational fusion, as I have conceptualized it in this dissertation. However, recent surveys conducted by the International Social Survey Programme and Pew Research Center do include questions that can be used to measure the degree of religionational fusion. The International Social Survey Programme has asked respondents how important being a member of the dominant religion is for being a true member of their country’s primary nationality 3 times—in 1995, 2003, and 2013 (ISSP Research Group 1998, 2012, 2015).<sup>6</sup> In 2003 they also asked respondents to rank order their identities, which can be used to create a measure of primacy. Pew has also asked a nearly identical question in recent years in many of their surveys (Pew Research Center 2016, 2017, 2018).<sup>7</sup> These questions are good indicators of religionational fusion as they directly measure the first operational definition of each dimension, and have been asked using the same formulation in a wide variety of countries over many years, facilitating longitudinal cross-national comparison. In Table II.1, I present country-level indicators for religionational fusion from the 2003 ISSP survey, and in

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<sup>6</sup> “Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [COUNTRY NATIONALITY]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think it is to be a [DOMINANT RELIGION]?” Response options are very important, fairly important, not very important, not important at all, and can’t choose.

<sup>7</sup> “Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [INSERT SURVEY COUNTRY CITIZENSHIP]. Others say that they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is? To be a [DOMINANT RELIGION]”. Response options are very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important, and don’t know.

Figure II.2, I present frequencies for the levels of imbrication using country means from all available Pew and ISSP surveys used in this study, as well as my original survey in Kyrgyzstan.

**Table II.1: Example aggregate indicators of religionational fusion, dominant religion subpopulation<sup>8</sup>**

Country	Dominant Religion	Imbrication <sup>9</sup>	Primacy <sup>10</sup>
Australia	Protestant	48.85%	2.56%
Austria	Catholic	61.2%	4.01%
Bulgaria	Orthodox	82.85%	4.55%
Canada	Catholic	58.53%	6.11%
Chile	Catholic	67.06%	3.47%
Czech Republic	Catholic	56.52%	3.8%
Denmark	Protestant	35.66%	1.48%
Finland	Protestant	27.46%	2.03%
France	Catholic	25.86%	7.46%
Germany	Protestant	43.14%	1.42%
Great Britain	Protestant	54.99%	1.61%
Hungary	Catholic	43.35%	N/A
Ireland	Catholic	62.26%	15.81%
Israel	Jewish	85.36%	15.86%
Japan	Buddhist/Shinto	46.4%	2.27%
Latvia	Protestant	21.24%	.87%
Netherlands	Catholic	13.97%	1.35%
New Zealand	Protestant	49.65%	1.09%
Norway	Protestant	21.82%	1.62%
Philippines	Catholic	92.06%	10.65%
Poland	Catholic	80.02%	12.90%
Portugal	Catholic	71.12%	3.87%
Russia	Orthodox	70.04%	2.25%
Slovak Republic	Catholic	60.32%	7.2%
Slovenia	Catholic	32.12%	6.49%
South Africa	Protestant	84.69%	6.71%
South Korea	Buddhist and Confucian teachings	53.42%	1.6%
Spain	Catholic	46.98%	1.93%
Sweden	Protestant	20.29%	.88%
Switzerland	Catholic	44.93%	1.32%
Taiwan	Chinese religions	30.54%	4.48%

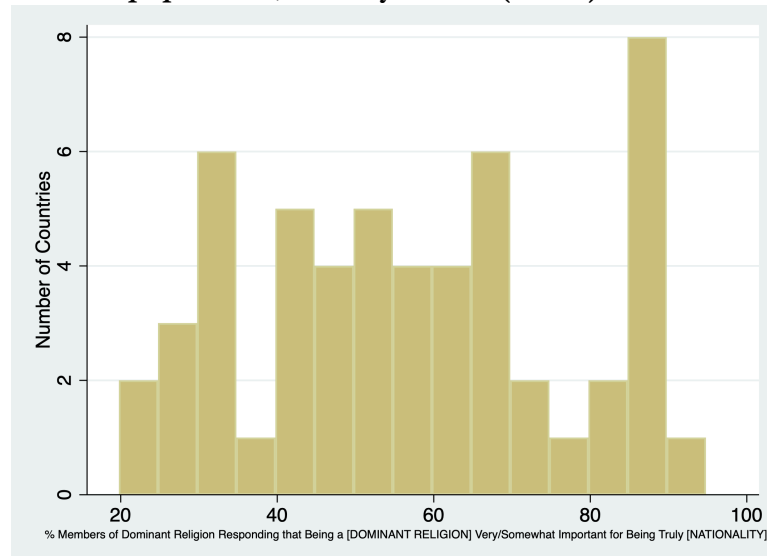
<sup>8</sup> Data from 2003 iteration of ISSP national identity survey (ISSP Research Group 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Percent of the population that responds that to truly be a member of the nation, it is very or fairly important to be a member of the dominant religion.

<sup>10</sup> Percentage of the population that ranks religion AND national identity as among their three most important identities. Options given were occupation, race/ethnicity, gender, age group, religion, political party or group, nationality, family or marital status, social class, and the part of the country the respondent lives in.

United States	Protestant	79.74%	2.56%
Uruguay	Catholic	45.03%	4.12%
Venezuela	Catholic	87.12%	9.65%

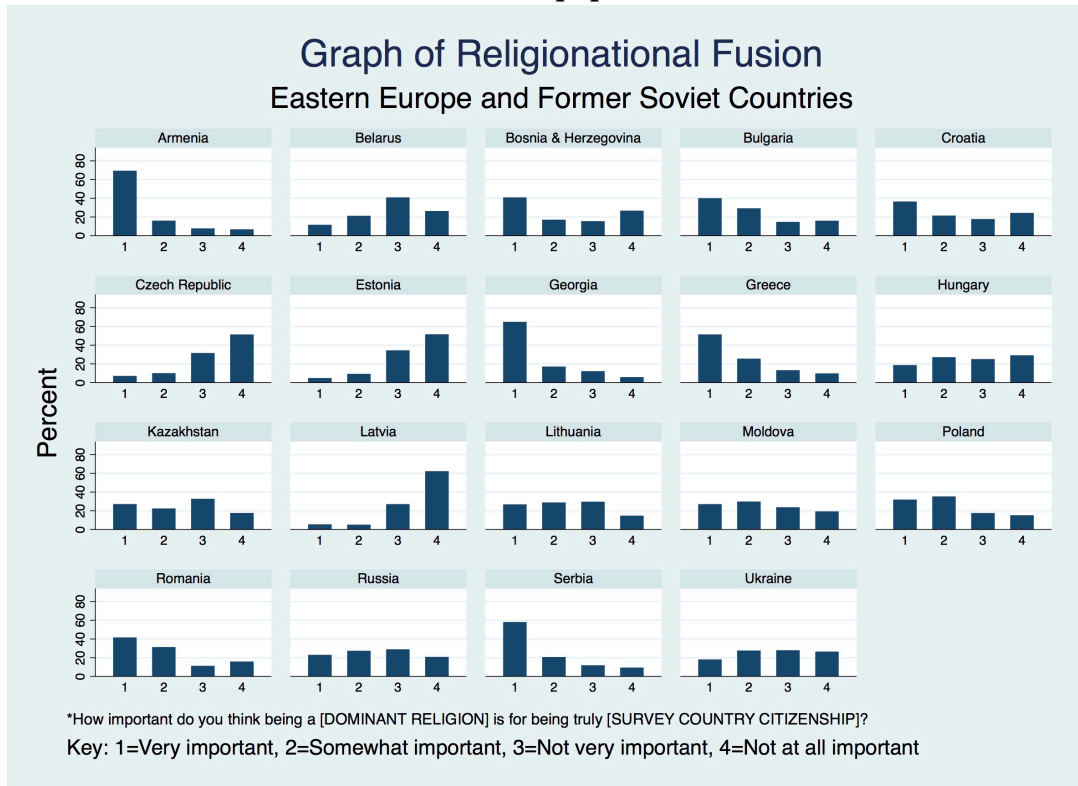
**Figure II.2: Frequencies of imbrication in cross national sample, dominant religion subpopulation, country means (N=54)<sup>11</sup>**



How religionational fusion is distributed varies even across countries with similar characteristics. For example, in Eastern Europe and former Soviet countries, there are a number of distinct distributions in attitudes towards the fusion of religious and national identity, despite sharing the historical legacy of the communist period and in many cases sharing religious traditions. As the graphs demonstrate, in countries such as Armenia, Georgia, and Serbia, citizens tend to believe belonging to the dominant religion is very important in determining national identity, while in others, such as Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia, very few people believe religion is of any significance in determining national identity. In other countries, such as Kazakhstan and Ukraine, attitudes are much more evenly distributed, with close to a quarter of respondents placing themselves in each category. I graph this variation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in Figure II.3.

<sup>11</sup> Sources: (ISSP Research Group 1998, 2012, 2015; Pew Research Center 2016, 2017, 2018)

**Figure II.3: Variation in religionational fusion in Eastern Europe and former Soviet countries, full populations<sup>12</sup>**



This variation in distributions also exists within religious contexts. For example, in Catholic majority countries, the amount of people claiming that being a Catholic is very or somewhat important to their identity ranges from 64% in Poland to 43% in Hungary, while in Orthodox-majority countries, it ranges from 82% in Armenia to 45% in Belarus.

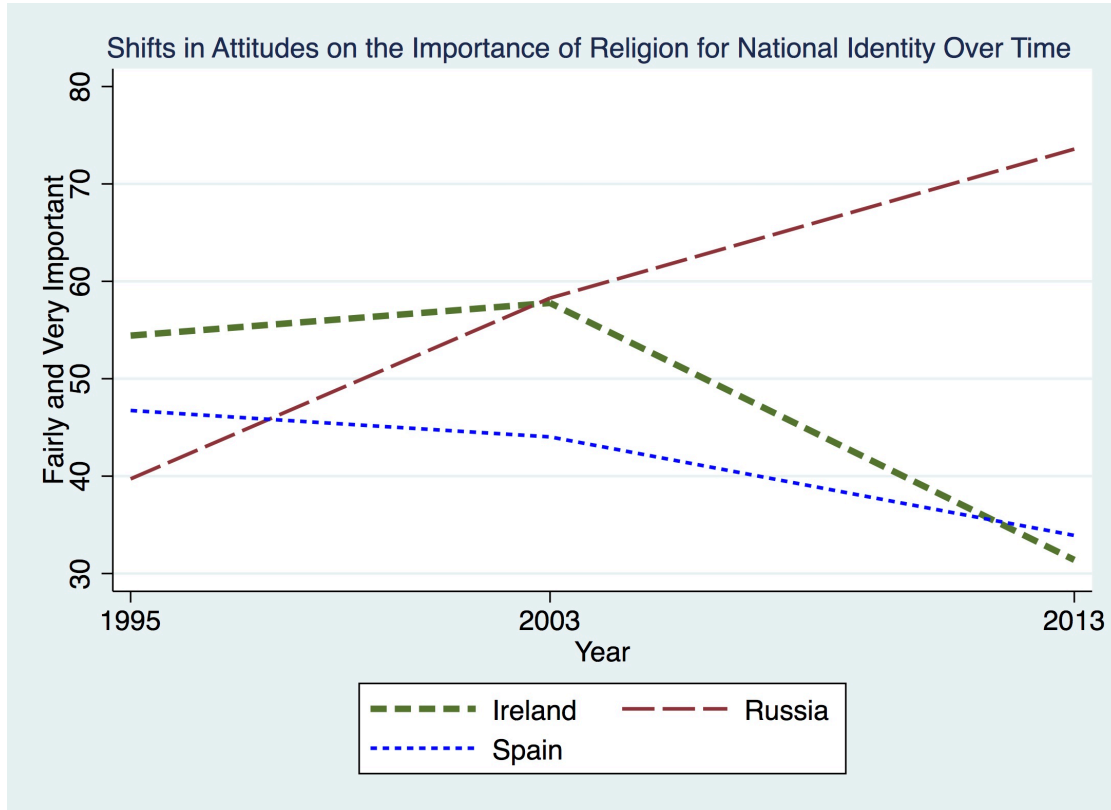
Though only three Muslim-majority countries are covered by this data, each represents a distinct distribution of attitudes. In Turkey, 89% of people claim that being a Muslim is very or somewhat important to being truly Turkish. In Kazakhstan and Bosnia, the distribution at first appears similar, with 50% and 58% claiming that being a Muslim is important to being truly a member of the nation, but Bosnians feel much more strongly about this, with 41% claiming religion is very important, while only 27% in Kazakhstan answer very important.

Within countries there is also substantial variation over time. While it is true that in some countries, such as Germany, the UK, Finland, and Norway, there have only been marginal shifts in

<sup>12</sup> Source: (Pew Research Center 2017)

attitudes of a few percentage points, in many other contexts there have been significant shifts in less than a decade (see Figure II.4 for selected examples)

**Figure II.4: Example shifts in religio-national fusion over time (full populations)<sup>13</sup>**



For example, from 1995 to 2013, the number of citizens claiming that being an Orthodox Christian is fairly or very important in determining if someone is truly Russian has increased from 40 to 74 percent. Another example of a stark increase occurred in Canada, where the number responding that religion is fairly or very important to being truly Canadian increased from 25 percent in 1995 to 54 percent in 2003.

In contrast, these attitudes have declined in some countries. In Portugal, the number of respondents who thought religion was fairly or very important in determining national identity declined by 30 percent, from 66 to 36 percent. Israel has also seen a sharp decline; between 2003 and 2013 there was a decrease of 16 percent, from 76 to 60 percent. Other countries have seen more gradual but sturdy decline, such as Spain, which declined by 3 percent from 1993 through 2003, and then 10 percent from 2003 through 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Source: (ISSP Research Group 1998, 2012, 2015).

These changes are also not unidirectional. In the United States, for example, between 1995 and 2003, the percentage of people believing religion is fairly or very important to being truly American increased by 12 percent from 54 to 66, and then decreased by 20 points by 2013. In Ireland, we observe a similar trend, with these attitudes increasing from 54 to 58 percent between 1995 and 2003 and then starkly decreasing to 31 percent by 2013.

Religious minorities demonstrate on average less feelings of fusion between the dominant religious identity and national identity. However, even within religious minorities, there can be substantial variation in this distribution. For example, 65% of Muslims in Russia think it is at least somewhat important to be Russian Orthodox to be truly Russian, while only 26% of Bulgarian Muslims feel that to be truly Bulgarian it is at least somewhat important that you be Orthodox Christian.

## **Conclusion**

This existing data is useful for establishing a puzzle: distributions of attitudes towards the importance of religion as a component of national identity vary both across and within countries. Secularization theory suggests that as time goes on and states modernize, these attitudes should converge towards apathy or even rejection of religion as a component of national identity, and yet, the data does not suggest such a relationship; on the contrary, a high degree of importance of religion in defining national identity is common, and in many cases is increasing. To understand this variation, I propose an examination of the role the state plays in regulating and utilizing religion (here defined as state involvement in religion).

## CHAPTER III

### How the State Influences Religionational Fusion

#### Introduction

Existing research shows that the state plays an important role in influencing the composition and strength of national identity. Regimes and political elites have control over how the state is symbolically represented through the national icons and tropes they choose to utilize and reinforce (Billig 1995; Sahm 1999; Bornman 2006; Wallach 2011), the identities and ideologies they choose to support or repress through both policy (Kuru 2002; Miguel 2004) and rhetoric (Stuckey 2006), all of which influence the strength and content of national identity. Two particularly potent tools at the state's disposal are policies influencing the language (Hailemariam, Kroon, and Walters 1999) and ideological content (Telhaug, Mediås, and Aasen 2004; Waghid 2009) of public education.

While studies like those referenced above have considered how specific tools at the state's disposal affect national identity, I explore the effects of various forms of state involvement. I argue that, in order to understand how religion becomes fused with national identity, it is important to consider the role of three mechanisms that operate *simultaneously* and *independently*. Broadly speaking, the regime in power engages with religion through three distinct dimensions of involvement in this collective identity: regulation as repression and subsidy, symbols, and rhetoric as national-leader discourse and educational curriculum.

In this chapter, I introduce the concept of "state involvement in religion" to explain the variation in degree of religionational fusion across both individuals and states. In contrast to many existing studies that examine the state's role in the construction and strengthening of different aspects of national identity, I consider the independent effects of multiple dimensions of state involvement used to coopt and control the identity of interest.

After conceptualizing state involvement in religion, I present a novel theory of how state involvement in religion influences religionational fusion. In summary, I argue that, given the state's role as a primary arbiter of national identity, each dimension of state involvement in religion sends a distinct and independent signal concerning the ascribed role religious identity should play as part of (or as completely distinct from) national identity. These signals are boosted by the strength and



scope of each dimension of state involvement in religion. As these signals are received by religious adherents and reinforced over time, they can have deleterious (in the case of repression) or beneficial (in the case of subsidy, symbols, and rhetoric) effects on the degree of religionational fusion among members of the dominant religion.

Importantly, my theory is limited to explaining the degree of religionational fusion among members of majority religions, not the degree of religionational fusion among all citizens. Since this theory is predicated on how citizens interpret signals sent by the state through its involvement in the dominant religion concerning the “true” or “ideal” relationship between religion and the nation-state, it becomes problematic to include religious minorities without the development of a separate theory. Thus, in this dissertation I only focus on dominant religions within a single context, both as a target of state involvement in religion and in terms of religionational fusion.

### **Conceptualizing State Involvement in Religion**

Before detailing my theory on how state involvement in religion influences religionational fusion, it is necessary to fully develop this concept. State involvement in religion includes the ways in which the state restricts, supports, and uses religious identity, institutions, traditions, doctrine, and practice in a manner that members of that religion can reasonably understand to originate from the state. By this definition, for example, the state officially passing a law that controls the content of religious sermons would constitute an example of state involvement in religion, while the state secretly meeting with members of the clergy and telling them what can and cannot be included in their sermons would not. This is because in the second case, religious consumers could not reasonably be expected to consciously or unconsciously perceive the state’s involvement in religious practice.

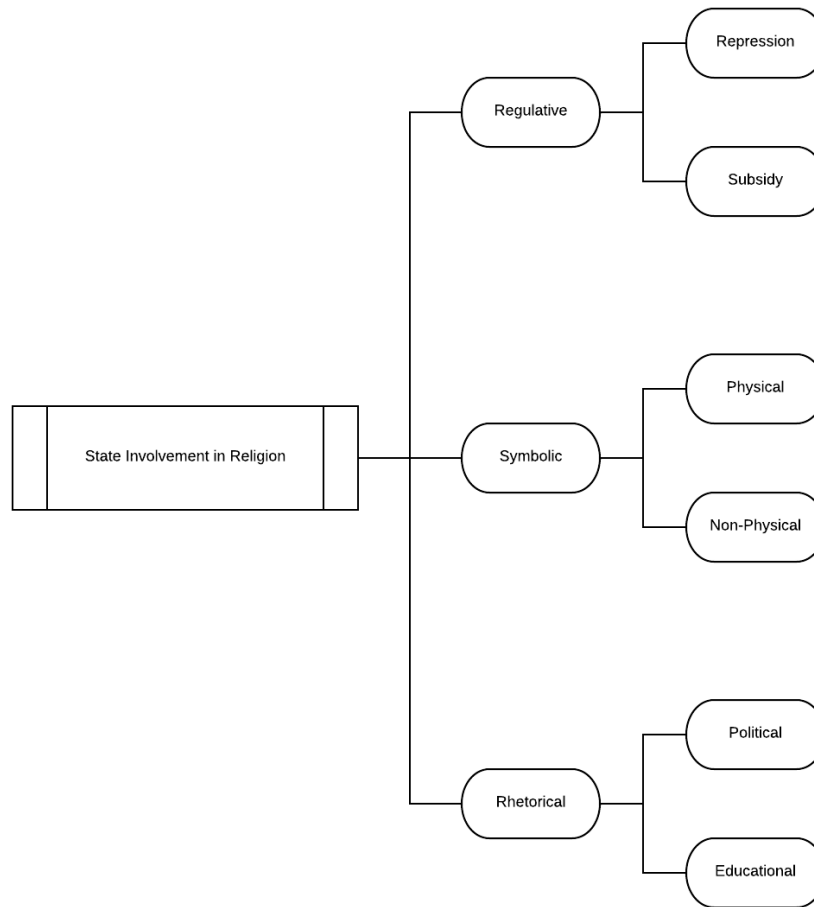
State involvement in religion is comprised of three distinct elements: regulation (what the state does about religion), state use of religious symbols (how the state uses religion), and rhetoric (what the state says about religion) (see Figure III.1). These dimensions are selected because they unambiguously originate from the state. It is often clear to adherents, for example, that when police raid mosques, when tax funds are allocated to churches, when a reference to “In God we trust” is added to the pledge of allegiance,<sup>1</sup> or when a President cites Qur’anic or Biblical verses in their annual address, that the state is taking a position on religious identity. It is this position—and the

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “under God” was added to the American pledge of allegiance to the flag by Congressional Joint Resolution on June 14, 1954. See: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Public\\_Law\\_83-396](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Public_Law_83-396)

signal it sends to believers about the ascribed role of religion as part of national identity—that influences religionational fusion. In the case of repression, the signal is negative, while subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric create positive signal. The content of these symbols influences the direction of effect on religionational fusion, while the scope and strength of the signal—as indicated by how heavily the state involves itself in each dimension—dictates the strength of the effect.

**FIGURE III.1: Dimensions of state involvement in religion**



*Regulation*

The regulative dimension of state involvement in religion reflects the legal framework and enforcement that restricts or supports the beliefs and behaviors associated with religion. Regulation reflects what the state *does about* religion.

Broadly speaking, states have two regulative tools at their disposal for regulating religion: religious repression or religious subsidy. Religious repression includes “the restrictions placed on the

practice, profession or selection of religion” (Grim and Finke 2007), while religious subsidies include the fiscal, institutional, or political support of a religious group.

Distinct from use of religious symbols and religious rhetoric, state involvement in religious regulation can be motivated by a large number of factors other than nation-building, sustaining, and transforming. For example, religious repression may be used to suppress potentially dissenting political activity, to gain legitimacy by combating a national “threat” or foreign influence in the eyes of constituents, to harass political opponents, or to support a particular ideology by rooting out competition. Meanwhile, subsidies can be utilized to create cooperation with religious institutions, gain legitimacy or popularity from a religious constituency, or to coopt religion by creating a loyal cadre of clergy. However, as I will argue later, regardless of intent, the signal that the state sends religious adherents by involving itself in religious regulation has the potential to influence levels of religionational fusion.

However, if elites do want to rebalance (or reinforce) the fusion of religious and national identity, religious regulation provides the most direct tool set they have available. In authoritarian states in particular, where there are less checks and balances on state interference in what is often seen as private matters, there are a wide range of strategies available to authorities to manipulate religion through regulation.

Governments may repress expression and association, attempting to restrict or control beliefs and practices. The tactics that are used to accomplish this are varied, and include discriminatory registration requirements, restricting proselytizing, forcing individuals to observe religious laws, and dictating the content of sermons. States may also repress the political expression of religion, through legislation restricting religious political parties, or denying access to political office based on religious identity (Sarkissian 2015).

Religious repression varies not only in degree, but also in terms of which groups and what elements of religious life are targeted. The distinction between private and public practice is important. As religious repression increases, public intrusions become more profound. Censorship becomes common, and more extreme punishments such as jail time as opposed to fines become the norm. At this point, the government may begin to repress the private practice of religion, monitoring and controlling rituals and behaviors at events such as funerals or weddings. Finally, at extreme levels, repression in the private sphere becomes pervasive. Religious activity in the home may be banned, and the government may utilize local enforcement to track private religious behavior such as prayer.

Religious subsidy is the second half of the regulatory toolkit. The benefits of religious subsidies—support from clergy, legitimacy garnered from an affiliation with religion, etc. —can be accrued not only by the regime, but also by parties or individual politicians. For example, in Russia many politicians flaunt their support for local religious institutions by placing plaques next to religious landmarks they have helped fund, presenting their name, department, and the amount contributed (Koesel 2014, p. 164). Such subsidies can occur at both the local level and national level.

Fiscal support is any material support for a religion. This includes tax breaks, direct funding, grants or other support for building places of worship or restoring sites of religious significance, and government funding of clergy.

Institutional support occurs when the government uses its influence to empower the ability of religious communities to reach believers and provide religious services, as well as incorporating religious doctrine into secular law. This includes government recognition of a national “center” of religious practice (such as muftiates) and special privileges being granted to religious groups or congregations.

Political support grants direct and indirect influence in policymaking and enforcement. Examples of political subsidy include governments consulting religious organizations in the policy making process, parliamentary seats being allocated to religious groups (such as confessionalism in Lebanon and the Lords Spiritual in the British House of Lords), and government enforcement of strictly religious edicts or laws, such as fatwas.

The institutional structures of governments, as well as level of political competitiveness and religious demographics, can all influence the regulatory structure that occurs in a country (Sarkissian 2015). For example, in Russia, non-fiscal, institutional and political subsidies are common. Politicians can and do invite religious figures into policy-making circles. In China, the subsidy strategy functions differently. While fiscal support is relatively common, institutional and political support is rare due to the manner in which lower-level politicians are beholden to politicians above them, and due to the fact that being a party member requires professed atheism (Koesel 2014, p. 165).

One important element of religious subsidy that is rarely captured by the existing literature is how subsidy is targeted. Subsidy can be general (targeting an entire religious tradition, such as Islam, or multiple religious traditions) or it can be selective (Gamza and Jones 2019). Selective subsidy occurs when the state chooses to support a particular interpretation of a single faith. It should be noted that the content of this interpretation can change over time to suit the needs of the state.

These selective subsidies can be used by the state to signal appropriate boundaries of belief and behavior, as well as to create a loyal cadre within the majority faith. Selective subsidies may be particularly useful when the state hopes to influence doctrine and reduce the cost of controlling specific elements of beliefs and rituals, or to root out religious ideology that threatens the regime.

Among countries that do (*de jure* and *de facto*) involve themselves in religion, there is great variation both in the scope and form of this involvement. For example, some countries, such as Ireland and Poland, focus heavily on subsidies, granting their favored religion or religions direct access to policy making and other concessions in order to maintain legitimacy and to avoid making an enemy of powerful religious institutions (Grzymala-Busse 2015). In other cases, the state cracks down on religious practice, imposing restrictive policies on groups they find politically threatening. This strategy can be explicitly anti-religious when all religion is seen as a threat to state ideology, such as in China, or be more targeted, primarily repressing select religious groups that have the potential to serve as a locus of political opposition, such as in religiously and ethnically divided Kyrgyzstan (Sarkissian 2015, 46–48).

Repression and subsidy are not mutually exclusive; states frequently coopt religious elites through legal, institutional, or fiscal favoritism in an attempt to dictate religious policy agendas from the top down or legitimize their rule using the existing moral authority of the dominant religion, while at the same time cracking down on independent expression of religion that does not fall within the boundaries of what the state deems “traditional”. Russia, with its favoritism of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Turkey, with its government support for Sunni Islam in recent years, are clear examples of this strategy of heavy support for one faith while cracking down on religious minorities, including minority groups within the subsidized religious tradition (Sarkissian 2015, chap. 4).

### *Symbols*

The symbolic dimension of state involvement in religion reflects the manner in which the state *uses* religion. Symbols are the primary material means with which the state discursively narrates and reproduces the nation; they answer the *how* of the nation (Skey and Antonsich 2017, 2). This dimension is defined as the extent to which the state draws on religion by incorporating its symbols, mores, and values into the material and institutional trappings of the state. Religious iconography and content can appear on state flags, in national anthems, on currency, on state identity cards, and posted in public spaces. Prayer rooms may be constructed in public buildings. Holy books can be used for swearing in heads of state and for placing individuals under oath in court. References to

religion can appear in pledges of allegiance and in the preambles of constitutions. Prayers can be given before meetings of legislative bodies.<sup>2</sup>

These symbols can be material or institutional. Material symbolic state involvement is defined as adopting religious iconography into national iconography or national contexts, which include the adoption of religious iconography in national contexts, such as religious symbols on flags, crosses displayed on government buildings, mosques displayed on currency, etc. Institutional state involvement is defined as the incorporation of the mores and values of religion into national traditions or rituals. For example, this includes placing religious references in anthems or pledges, giving reference to religion in core national documents such as constitutions, requiring prayers be given before a legislative body sits, requiring individuals be put under oath using a holy book, etc.

State involvement in religion through the use of symbols is explicitly outward looking, drawing on religious motifs and doctrine by incorporating them into state symbols, but it does not necessarily reflect the functional substance of state institutions. For example, heads of state may be required to be sworn in on a holy book, which sends a strong and periodic signal about the connection between the nation and religion. This does send a signal regarding the connection between religion the nation-state's ascribed national identity. It does not, however, reflect the religiosity of the leader or signal how they will govern.

In extreme cases, national qualities may also be imposed upon religious symbols. Frequently, this occurs when national political leaders are imbued with symbolic qualities; their work and imagery depicting them are treated as national symbols that can be reproduced in the religious sphere by the state. For example, a church or mosque may be named after a president, or a state leader's writings or portrait may be placed in places of worship.

People care deeply about how the nation is reproduced and represented in these public ways. As a result, these gestures can ignite public controversy and political passions, as has been seen in American debates about displaying the ten commandments in front of courthouses, or in Kyrgyzstan over the addition of a prayer room to parliament.<sup>3</sup>

More often, however, national symbols, including those infused with religious content, fade into the background, becoming an ever-present but only passively noticed aspect of daily life. This does not mean that they are unimportant or insubstantial. On the contrary, evidence suggests that

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<sup>2</sup> For example, explicitly Christian prayers are read before sittings in both the House of Lords and House of Commons in the United Kingdom, with no multi-faith element. See: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/prayers/>

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic\\_prayer\\_room\\_opened\\_in\\_kyrgyz\\_parliament/24245721.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic_prayer_room_opened_in_kyrgyz_parliament/24245721.html)

contexts where religionational symbolism is common will have national ideologies more consistent with the corresponding religion. For example, at the federal level, the Russian government incorporates Orthodox symbolism to establish post-Soviet national identity and bolster its legitimacy among a population that increasingly identifies with the Church, and survey data suggests that the political ideology of students are consistent with the Patriarchate's political ideology (Papkova 2011).

### *Rhetoric*

The rhetorical dimension reflects what the state *says* about religion, including how it uses religious rhetoric to garner support and legitimacy. It includes incumbent elite statements about the role of religion in the nation-state and performative displays of piety, the role of religious political parties in guiding national discourse, state media portrayal of religion and its role in public and private life, and state administered religious education. State rhetoric and discourse can play a role in the construction of national identity by directly sending signals about the state's relationship with religion to citizens.

State involvement in religious rhetoric can be divided into political rhetoric, state administered religious education, and state religious media.<sup>4</sup> The primary distinction between each of these types of religionational rhetoric is the agent who delivers to rhetoric to the population. In the case of political rhetoric, it is delivered directly through agents of the state, including presidents and other national leaders, as well as political parties. Religious education, though controlled and administered by the state, is delivered through an intermediary, in this case educators. State media works in a similar way, with the media outlets serving to deliver the religionational rhetoric rather than representatives of the state directly doing so.

State involvement in religious rhetoric occurs in a number of ways. The state can directly control the doctrine that is learned by youth by directly intervening in the internal workings of religious education. Religious political parties can elevate religious ideas and discourse to the level of national politics when they are permitted and successful. Heads of state can draw in religion in their

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<sup>4</sup> An argument could be made that state control of the content of religious sermons is an additional kind of religionational rhetoric, with the deliverer of the signal concerning religionational identity being the clergy themselves. However, I classify this as religious repression rather than religious rhetoric for two reasons. First, such policies are a restriction places on the practice of religion, satisfying the definition for repressive regulation. Second, the average religious consumer will be unlikely to understand the message as originating from the state, instead perceiving this rhetoric as coming directly from religious institutions. While this may make this form of rhetoric particularly powerful for transforming identity, it also fails to meet my criteria for state involvement in religion, which stipulates that the involvement must be reasonably understood to be originating from the state. Thus, the content of state-sanctioned sermons is beyond the scope of this study.

speeches, edicts, interviews, and decrees. The state can also elevate religious rhetoric into the public sphere by mandating air time for religion in state and even private media.

Rhetoric plays a crucial role in both the genesis and redefinition of national identity. The form this rhetoric takes can be thought of as a triad, focused on the glorious past, the degraded present, and the utopian future (Levinger and Lytle 2001). Together, these elements can prompt nationalist mobilization: the *glorious past* presents a baseline from which the diagnosis of a problem is identified in the *degraded present*, and a prescription for a solution is proposed to create a *utopian future*. Religion can be invoked as part of each element of this triad.

Heads of state in particular can invoke religion to justify policy changes, draw support for or against members of particular religious groups, legitimize the regime, or mobilize coreligionists for political purposes.<sup>5</sup> This rhetoric can be as simple as a head of state referencing God in a speech, or as detailed as government leaders publishing a treatise on the national religion. A famous, albeit extreme, example of this is the late Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov's "Rukhnama", a spiritual text that was made a mandatory text in schools, was promoted by the state as equal to the Qur'an and placed in Mosques, and defined the nation as "the transformation of human groups in the context of certain spiritual foundations...shaped materially according to those spiritual foundations" (RFE/RL 2013).

More commonly, however, religion may garner passing reference, comment, tribute, or exaltation in the content of annual speeches and proclamations given by national leaders and heads of state. The purpose of this inclusion may vary from usage-to-usage, but nonetheless each time religion is referenced in a positive manner, an association is made between the state's ascribed national identity and religion by virtue of its source, and a signal is sent to those exposed to this rhetoric concerning the form religionational identity "should" take.

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that religionational rhetoric is not exclusively within the purview of state leaders. Spiritual and religious leaders too may invoke religion to attempt to construct or transform national identity and activate nationalism, becoming nationalist leaders themselves. Prominent examples include Mahatma Ghandi in India and Jacques Grand'Maison in Quebec. The ethics framing Ghandi's nationalism, and in *Hind Swaraj* he presents a view of Indian nationalism that is "aimed at personal, religious transformation and at the creation of a political state" (Baum 2001, 48). Theologian Jacques Grand'Maison wrote extensively against the rhetoric of Catholic messianic nationalists like Lionel Groulx, instead arguing that the rational, secular program of Parti Québécois nationalism and the Quiet Revolution met very particular universalist conditions that warrant the support of Catholics, who had been "summoned by the Vatican Council to assume reformist political responsibility" (Baum 2001, 105). Religious leaders can align themselves with the state's ascribed national identity and boost this signal from the pulpit, or contest secular or anti-religious national narratives using their influence. However, the role that clergy and religious institutions play in reinforcing or contesting the fusion of religious and national identity is beyond the scope of this study.



For example, in a 2016 study, Mariya Omelicheva used discourse analysis to examine the religious content of speeches given between 1992 and 2015 by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Uzbek President Islam Karimov. She classifies references to religion into four categories of discursive presentation based on their goals: traditional, official, radical/foreign, and moderate/modern (Omelicheva 2016, 155). Each of these discursive presentations allows the regime to legitimize its power, but each also has different secondary uses. “Traditional” discourse is aimed at creating national unity through Islam as a common, cross-cutting collective identity that can be incorporated into national identity, “official” discourse is aimed at creating a particular state form of Islam that allows the state to institutionalize its control over religion, “radical/foreign” discourse is used to justify repression and shift responsibility for failures onto religion, and “moderate/modern” discourse is aimed at creating an image of a secular state that contributes to the war on terror.

Traditional and official state religious rhetoric are aimed at coopting and bolstering religion, while radical/foreign and moderate/modern discourse are aimed at stifling it. Much like repression often occurs alongside subsidy, traditional and official state religious rhetoric does not preclude leaders from using radical/foreign and moderate/modern rhetoric. While this study aims to examine traditional and official discourse, that is not to say that moderate/modern and particularly radical/foreign rhetoric does not influence religionational fusion. On the contrary, not only might this rhetoric mitigate some of the potential effects of positive religious rhetoric, it may also actually contribute to increases in religionational fusion. For example, rhetoric about the foreign nature of particular Islamic practices implies that other Islamic practices are native and “natural” in a country, thus potentially increasing religionational fusion for adherents of these “non-foreign” Islamic interpretations and practices.<sup>6</sup>

Religious rhetoric can also manifest as public, performative displays of piety by state leaders. A president praying while the cameras are focused on him/her, making the hajj and allowing state media to publish photos of him during ritual practices, or wearing traditional religious clothing during state events and publishing photos of the presidential website all send a signal directly from the state concerning religion in the same manner that words do.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that, well rhetoric can be purely negative by attacking religion without explicitly privileging the state’s desired religious practices, for the purposes of explaining religionational fusion this dissertation is focused solely on positive rhetoric that exalts religious identity and doctrine. In Chapter 4, for the purposes of completeness, I do acknowledge negative religious rhetoric used by state leaders to attack religion. However, in my hypothesis-testing chapters, I do not include negative religious rhetoric in my measures.

Finally, religious education, when administered or officially influenced by the state, may also be thought of as a form of religious rhetoric. Through involvement in education, the state can determine whether religious education is allowed, if it is mandatory, how much is available, what restrictions are placed on who can participate, and most importantly, the content of textbooks and curriculum. Explicit choices can be made concerning what sort of doctrine is taught and excluded, as well as how closely these lessons are associated with the history, values, and ideology of the nation.

While existing research identifies clear reasons that states involve themselves in religious affairs—including to coopt or curtail religion as a source of opposition, to maintain legitimacy by satisfying powerful religious institutions and elites, to maintain security, and to promote an ideological separation of church and state to promote religious pluralism—what is less well understood is the role that the state’s involvement in religion plays as part of an ongoing project of nation building and national redefinition. In the following section, I introduce a theory focused on how the signals the state sends to members of the dominant religion through its involvement in religion transform, reinforce, and weaken religionational fusion.

### **The Ubiquity of State Involvement in Religion**

The primary tool with which most states involve themselves in religion is through regulation. Religious regulation, or the policies states pass and enforce that are related to religion, includes both repressive and supportive policies.

Despite widespread constitutional provisions separating church and state, truly hands-off approaches to religion are the exception, not the rule. Over 90% of states have clauses in their constitutions that protect freedom of worship, and yet, more than 70% restrict religious freedom (Fox 2008). Other constitutional guarantees, such as bans on discrimination on the basis of religion and guarantees of equality regardless of religion, have no significant effect on policy outcomes such as whether or not the state engages in religious discrimination (Fox and Flores 2009, 1509). In 2008, only 35 out of 177 countries have no legal or practical restrictions in place on minority religions and no subsidies being given to one or more religions. In states that do have restrictions, 64 have formal legal limitations on religion, with 25 of those states having some or all religions being completely banned.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Data from Jonathan Fox, 2008, Religion and State Dataset

Central Asia, the region the next chapter of this dissertation will focus on, conforms to this global pattern. Each state's respective constitution guarantees freedom of worship and selection of religion, among other religious rights. However, these constitutional guarantees on their own present an incomplete and inadequate picture of religious regulation. According to the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion Dataset (2014), for example, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have the 3rd, 10th, 11th, 16th, and 27th highest levels of government restrictions on religion in the world, respectively. By the mid 1990s, the constitutions of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had become a 'mere [showcase] concealing increasingly stricter laws...mainly [concerning] Muslims...' (Peyrouse 2007, 247). Since the late 2000s, the legal structures in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have also increasingly deviated from protections enshrined in their respective constitutions.

While absolute non-interference in religion is essentially non-existent today,<sup>8</sup> the extent to which and manner in which states involve themselves in religion varies widely across countries and time. In fact, globally government-imposed restrictions on religion seem to be increasing. In a study of 198 countries, the Pew Research Center found that the share of country with what it deems "high" or "very high" levels of government restrictions has risen from 25% in 2015 to 28% in 2016, just below the 10-year peak of 29% recorded in 2012 (Kishi and Schiller 2018, 4). Part of this increase can be explained by the rapid rise of nationalist politicians and parties, as well as religiously tinged nationalist rhetoric, which frequently targets religious minorities (Kishi and Schiller 2018, 7)

Supportive religious regulation, or subsidies, are also common. These subsidies occur alongside religious repression; in a global study of religion and the state, Jonathan Fox found that with the single exception of South Africa, all states support religion in at least some small way (Fox 2015, 105), and, in many cases, this support is increasing. For example, as of 2008, 45.8% of states provide funding for religious primary or secondary level education compared to 40.1% in 1990 (Fox 2015, 86). Between 2007 and 2016, the number of governments recognizing a favored religion or religions increased by 17%, from 28% to 45% (Kishi and Schiller 2018).

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<sup>8</sup> For example, according to the Pew Research Center's Government Restrictions Index, in 2016 only 19 countries scored lower than a 1, or roughly 10% of the total number of countries. This index measures government restrictions on religion on a 0-10 scale based on 20 questions. The index does include questions on support for religious groups such as whether the government provides funds and resources for religious activities, whether the government defers to religious institutions on legal issues, and whether the government supports or favors a religion, but these items only affect the index score if the supportive practices put other religious groups at a disadvantage (Kishi and Schiller 2018, 76)

However, regulatory policies and actions are not the only ways in which the state involves itself in religion. Symbolic and rhetorical involvement in religion is also common. For example, 57% of national anthems reference religion and religious holidays being adopted as state holidays occurs in 94% of states (Charles 2013). While little cross-national data on rhetoric by heads of state exists, other rhetorical strategies, such as requiring religious education in public schools, are common. For example, as of 2016, 40% of states have religious education required by the national government (Pew Research Center 2018), and 31% of countries have officially religious political parties that are capable of being elected as of 2014 (Fox and The ARDA 2016). For a summary of indicators of state use of religious symbols globally, see Table III.1.

**TABLE III.1: Example indicators of state use of religious symbols<sup>9</sup>**

Question	Percent of Countries
Are there religious symbols on the state flag?	17%
Is religious affiliation listed on state identity cards?	10%
Are there religious references in the national anthem?	57%
Are there religious symbols on the state coat of arms?	42%
Are some national holidays also religious holidays?	94%

There are some differences in the particular ways in which states involve themselves in religion, depending on which religion is the majority religion. For example, majority-Muslim states are much more likely to have institutions or laws that enforce religion, with 70.2% of Muslim countries using state institutions to enforce religion in some way, compared to 14.3% of Christian countries (Fox 2015, 82).

That said, even within countries that have high rates of religiosity, there is a great deal of variance. For example, the Catholic-majority German state of Bavaria legally required in 2018 that Christian crosses adorn the entrance of all government buildings, while the traditionally Catholic Canadian province of Quebec has been pushing for a ban on the wearing of religious symbols by civil servants (Khan 2018; Shingler 2018).

Use of religious rhetoric is also common worldwide, even in contexts where religious regulation is rare. For example, in my study of 54 countries, 52% either have religious political

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<sup>9</sup> Source: (Charles 2013, 24)

parties capable of being elected to office, or have religious programming included in state media. An additional 17% engage in both forms of rhetoric. A cursory examination of presidential and prime ministerial speeches in countries purported to be secular, such as Tajikistan as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, reveals that religious rhetoric may still be a normal part of leaders' addresses.

### **Related Literature: State Involvement in Collective Identities and Religious Regulation**

The theory I present in the next section of this chapter draws on insights from predominantly two sets of literature: studies on state involvement in influencing politically useful collective identities as part of nation-building, and studies on religious regulation. Before detailing my theory, I review the ideas and concepts I expand upon from each of these lines of research.

#### *Involvement in Collective Identities as Nation Building*

State involvement in religion is but one type of state involvement in collective identity. Many of the same mechanisms at play when the state influences national identity through involvement in, for example, ethnic or linguistic identity, are also at play when the state involves itself in religious identity.

When the state involves itself in collective identities by attacking them through repression or supporting them through subsidies, rhetoric, and symbols, the state sends a signal to citizens concerning which aspects of their identities the state considers worthy of receiving an official endorsement or elevating to nationally recognized status. These strategies frequently have the expected effects but can also have unforeseen consequences.

Linguistic regulation and the development of a shared print vernacular through print capitalism and standardized education, for example, is considered an essential aspect of the initial nation-building process by classic theorists of nationalism (Hobsbawm 1991; Greenfeld 1995; Gellner 2009; Anderson 2016). Linguistic regulation and its effects on national identity, however, is not limited to the initial construction of the nation. For example, in 2017 and 2018 Kazakhstan adopted a new script based on the Latin alphabet as part of a de-russification program led by President Nazarbayev. The initial proposal was set to base the alphabet on the Turkish model, but this was rejected by the President in favor of apostrophes designating sounds that don't normally appear in the Latin alphabet. It is speculated that Nazarbayev vetoed the simpler Turkish model so as "to avoid any suggestion that Kazakhstan is turning its back on Russia and embracing pan-Turkic unity" (Higgins 2018). The reception of this new language policy has been tumultuous at best, leading to protests by the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian nationalists, and mass petitions by

general citizens who are unhappy with the convoluted apostrophe plan (Higgins 2018). This has led to the abandonment of the apostrophes in favor of the accents used by Turkmenistan (Coleman 2018).

Another example can be found in Tanzania, where the state instituted 30 years of policy aimed at promoting Swahili as the national language of “African-socialist ideas and values”, with citizens being defined as monolingual, Swahili-speaking individuals who were socialists and Africans. However, the result of these programs was not, as was hoped, to create a monolingual Swahili national identity that had a set political ideology, but instead simply to spread the Swahili language broadly without reducing usage of other languages or creating a single collective ideological identity (Blommaert 2005, 246–249).

Policies targeting ethnic identities are another example of how regulation can influence national identity. By using tools such as language policy, educational curriculums, and local institutional reforms, states have the potential to help create a multi-ethnic national identity, such as was seen in Tanzania, or to keep these identities distinct and tribal and ethnic salience high, such as in Kenya, ultimately influencing not only national identity but also inter-ethnic cooperation and economic outcomes (Miguel 2004). As the author of the above study points out however, “the state articulating and imposing a single national identity through coordinated public policies can have serious negative costs for communities that do not fit neatly into the dominant national vision” (Miguel 2004, 361), perhaps even creating backlash culminating in the creation of an anti-state national identity.

Symbolic involvement includes the degree and manner in which the state reproduces its desired ideology and national narrative through physical and non-physical representation. Examples include the symbology incorporated into flags, or the meaning and motifs incorporated into the anthem. These actions serve two purposes in construction and sustaining national identity: priming national identity to be of a higher salience at particular moments or in particular places and reinforcing this identity through banal but consistent reminders of the nation and its particular character. Such symbols can be material, such as the display of flags, the way the nation is represented on currency, and visual references on official documents such as passports, or institutional, including the invocation of religion in founding documents such as constitutions, the recitation of pledges of allegiance in schools, and national leaders being sworn in on a Bible or Qur’an.

The fact that these symbols are so routine and everyday as to blend into the background of life and be “forgotten” is what gives them their unique power; they are rarely questioned or challenged, ever-present, and keep national identity salient in the background in a manner that can be converted into “hot” nationalism when political mobilization is needed (Billig 1995).<sup>10</sup>

These symbolic resources are not always rich enough to convey particular characteristics of national identity but can still reinforce national identity by keeping it primed and ready to be activated when nationalist mobilization is needed. For example, the symbols and rhetoric around international sporting events may help make observers more nationalistic and engender national coherence, but end up being interpreted by consumers in complex and diverse ways that don't fit any singular intent of the organizers (Fox 2006). However, even sports can potentially be filled with specific meaning, and states use sports to help “achieve its objectives of legitimacy, territorial integrity, and citizen commitment” (Houlihan 1997, 113).

There is a large body of research demonstrating the psychological and social effects of national symbols on the strength of national identity as well as the makeup of the components of national identity. For example, flag exposure can raise levels of nationalistic identification (Kimmelmeier and Winter 2008), can increase the degree to which individuals unconsciously and implicitly associate self-concepts with national-concepts (Butz 2009, 782), can create moderation in political attitudes by priming senses of unity among members of the nation (Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski, and Gross 2007), and can interact with existing nationalist sentiments to prime national ideology and affect attitudes such as egalitarianism or out-group prejudice, dependent on the qualities associated with the flag (Butz, Plant, and Doerr 2007; Becker, Enders-Comberg, Wagner, Christ, et al. 2012).

As Michael Billig puts it, the homeland is flagged daily, not only by the “flag hanging outside the public building, or the national emblem, whether bald eagle or furry marten, on the coinage of the realm” but also through the “unmemorable clichés and habits of political discourse” that are “constant, but barely conscious, reminders of the homeland, making ‘our’ national identity unforgettable” (Billig 1995, 93).

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of banal nationalism being used to prime “hot” nationalism, Billig references the British perspective in the Falklands Wars and the push to protect Kuwait by the Americans during the 1991 Gulf War (Billig 1995, 2–3). The relationship between banal and hot nationalism can also be more nuanced and intertwined. For examples of how this occurs through everyday mechanisms such as state discourses on topics such as independence and micro-level contexts, see the Argentine expression of territorial nationalism during the Malvinas/Falklands conflict (Benwell and Dodds 2011) and Finland's reinforcement of its independence (Paasi 2016).

The rhetoric of nation-building and nation-sustaining, or what the state says about the nation, can be found in sources such as state publications, party manifestos, and speeches given by heads of state. Leaders of the nation-state are uniquely positioned to manufacture and tweak the content of ascribed national identity through rhetoric. While regulation of identity and national symbols indirectly signals to citizens what the state deems as nationalistic and un-nationalist or even anti-nationalistic, rhetoric allows political elites to directly signal to their constituents the identity boundaries of the nation. This rhetoric can be direct, concretely stating which identities do and do not belong to the nation as the government ascribes it, or indirectly, using tactics such as “dog-whistle” rhetoric to signal to nationalist supporters of the regime who does not belong in the nation without using directly exclusionary terms.

For example, nation-state leaders can select themes in their statements and speeches to reorient national identity around particular national heroes and the ideology surrounding them. This was seen as part of the cultural program instituted by President Akayev in Kyrgyzstan the mid-1990s centered around the *Manas* epic. The epic, which depicts inter-ethnic and inter-tribal cooperation and victories and portrays the titular hero as the ideal “male, warrior, defender of the motherland, exemplary son, husband, and father”, was seen as an ideal model for both Kyrgyz collective identity and ideology. As part of the program to imbricate national identity with this myth, Akayev emphasized *Manas* in his speeches and public talks, as well as authoring a book dedicated to the epic (Marat 2008, 15). Akayev argued that *Manas* was the physical representation of the Kyrgyz genetic code (Akaev 1998, 24). This strategy of rhetoric was then supplemented by subsidizing the epic, through mass public celebrations in 1995, including the introduction of new decorations and honorific titles with names taken from the epic, the government commissioning of artists and architects to produce and distribute work based on *Manas*, the staging of national dances and game in *Manas*'s hometown of Talas, and the construction of an enormous three-story yurt (Marat 2008, 16).

Political parties that have political power may also serve to influence state rhetoric through their manifestos and the statements of party leaders. Parties, through their manifestos and other rhetoric, can create a discourse of shared values that can sustain and strengthen particular notions of nationhood, helping to generate or strengthen a specific idea of “*who we are as a people*” (Henderson and McEwen 2005, 189).

States construct and reproduce the nation by setting and implementing educational curricula. Unlike many of the other tools with which the state can involve itself in collective identities,



education can not only be used to strengthen and influence national identity, but can also serve to create this imagined community, setting a baseline for national identity that is instilled in individuals during the most critical phase of their identity development. Education and funding for it can instill in young children the basic ideology and story behind state ascribed national identity and citizenship (Koh 2010), influence the development of ethnolinguistic identity (Orusbaev, Mustajoki, and Protassova 2008), increase vote share for pro-nationalist parties (Cinnirella and Schueler 2018), and influence chauvinism and ethnic exclusivism (Coenders and Scheepers 2003). Unlike other forms of rhetoric, the state can easily make the consumption of this form of rhetoric mandatory, ensuring an entire generation receives the same “story” of national identity.

This literature merits extension in a few ways. First, religion as an identity around which nationalism can be constructed (RNF) has unique qualities distinct from these other forms of identity, discussed in the previous chapter, and it thus merits additional attention. Religion’s qualities as an identity around which societal values can be projected, constructed and enforced; which has clear existing boundaries defining the in-group and out-group; and that through appeals to the supernatural can motivate political mobilization or foster loyalty by providing justification for political positions and legitimacy for political rule make it an appealing target for states to attempt to influence, as well as a natural fit as a core component of national identity. Second, a consideration of how negative involvement in collective identity—in this case, defined as repression—have an effect on the composition of national identity simultaneously with positive involvement in collective identity—through subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric—is needed, as in reality state treatment of complex collective identities often has both negative and positive elements. A richer account of this state involvement may help explain why outcomes concerning the fusion or cleavage of collective identities with national identity do not always occur in the ways the state appears to intend.

### *Religious Regulation*

It is clear that state policies towards various identities can have long-term impacts on the content, strength, and salience of national identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, religion is frequently a central component of national identity. Even when the nation is not understood as religious, religion has the potential as a collective identity to become part of how individuals perceive their national identity, and thus, serve as the basis for nationalist mobilization both in service of and against the state.

The most substantial contemporary literature that considers the effects of state involvement in religion on identity and politics focuses on the effects of religious regulation on religious markets.

These works, generally speaking, argue that state involvement in religion—most frequently operationalized as religious subsidies—influences the marketplace for religious ideas and services, which in turn influences religiosity and by implication the politicization of religion and salience of religion as a collective identity. As religious monopolies are created in part due to state interference, religiosity decreases, because religious institutions have less incentives to converge with congregants' preferences and innovate on the goods and services they provide. Conversely, when the state does not regulate and thus allows a diverse religious marketplace, competition fosters innovation, and religiosity increases as religious institutions change their behavior to satisfy demand (for a comprehensive review of this literature see Grzymala-Busse 2012, 433–438).

I extend on the religious regulation literature in three distinct ways. First, I consider the full spectrum of ways in which the state involves itself in religion simultaneously, rather than focusing solely on religious subsidies as many of these studies do; put another way, I respond to Anna Grzymala-Busse's call to “develop a richer account of the state“ (Grzymala-Busse 2012, 437). Second, I examine the effects of state involvement in religion on the structure of a political identity—in this case religionational fusion—rather than explaining religiosity. Third, I do not adopt the position that religious identity is structured by the state's influence on the religious marketplace; instead, I argue that the state can have direct influence on individuals through the signals it sends about identity through its regulative (as well as rhetorical and symbolic) actions, rather than indirect effects on identity by increasing or decreasing supply or demand for religious identity. This is particularly important in the case of subsidies, which may indeed reduce religiosity by fostering a religious monopoly, but also simultaneously send a strong signal to citizens concerning the religious component of national identity.

### **A Theory of How National Identities and Religious Identities Fuse and Cleave**

The state is frequently the most significant actor in imagining, creating, sustaining, activating, and guiding national identity. The key tools of nation-building—the creation of national paraphernalia, mass educational curricula, provision of support for or repression of collective identities, the development of national myths and shared history, providing a focal point of leadership that represents the character and political will of the nation, etc.—are all primarily in the hands of state actors. The possession of this capacity to influence identity on a massive scale frequently puts states in a unique position as the primary arbiter of “official” national identity.

These nation-building and nation-sustaining actions seep into daily life, showing up during the school day through curriculum and pledges of allegiance, at the work place through national holidays, on the news through presidential speeches, at sporting events through the display of flags and singing of anthems, in political discourse reflected through party manifestos and debates, every time an individual opens their wallet and sees national symbols displayed on currency, and in civil society through the identities and organizations that are privileged by the state and its resources and those that are restricted or even banned. The state can thus influence the content of national identity both directly, by sending signals to constituents about what this identity “should” look like, and indirectly, by reinforcing and strengthening these signals over time such that they fade into the background and become a collectively experienced and unquestioned aspect of everyday life.

As a result of this influence, the state in large part controls what aspects of individuals identities are reflected back at them on a day-to-day basis, and which aspects of their identity are marginalized and repressed in public life. Individuals who see themselves as a member of the nation that the nation-state represents will internalize these signals about national identity, and dependent on the strength and consistency of the signal, it will over time be internalized to affect how individuals structure and prioritize or downplay the different components of their national identity.

Thus, when the state takes a position on a form of collective identity often associated with national sentiment—in this case religion—it will have an impact on how that identity is perceived in relation to national identity. How individuals understand the relationship between religion and nationalism, and how central this fused identity is to their sense of self, will in part be determined by not only the intentional form of national identity that the state propagates, but also by its involvement in religion that is not necessarily motivated by nation building and sustaining efforts. In both cases, regardless of the state’s intent, by involving itself in religion, the state conveys a signal concerning a connection between the nation-state and the form of religious identity it is involving itself in. I refer to this signal as the state’s ascriptive national identity.

Note that ways in which the state involves itself in religion are not all directed at influencing national identity. On the contrary, states have incentives to insert themselves into religious identity including but not limited to promoting economic growth, stifling dissent and political threats, and garnering political support and legitimacy through the exploitation of identity politics. These actions may not be directly related to the construction of national identity, but they nonetheless send a signal about the “proper” content of national identity and can thus have effects on the strength and content of national identity. Thus, a disconnect may exist between the “ascriptive” religionational

identity the state appears to be propagating, and the actual form of national identity that the regime desires. As a result, they may inadvertently contribute to shifting the “inhabited” national identity that citizens actually possess in a direction that is not aligned with their desired outcome.

The influence that the state’s involvement in religion has on religionational fusion occurs primarily through two mechanisms: the content of the signal citizens receive from the state regarding the state’s “approved” ascriptive national identity, and the reproduction and reinforcement of this content. The state sends a “signal” regarding the religious content of national identity by instituting a new position through shifts in their involvement in religion, and reinforces and rebroadcasts this signal by maintaining this involvement. Positive signals—subsidies, use of religious symbols, and use of religious rhetoric—will increase religionational fusion, while negative symbols, transmitted through religious repression, will decrease religionational fusion.

For example, the state instituting a policy that funds all Muslim clergy through the state budget sends a signal to citizen that the Muslim religion is of some special importance to the nation, by virtue of it originating from the primary arbiter of national identity, the state. The reproduction and reinforcement mechanism occurs when the state enforces or reiterates the existing positions it has taken on religious identity. Using the previous example, clergy salaries being payed year-after-year would constitute reinforcement and reproduction of the original signal. Thus, state involvement in religion must be maintained to continue to have a strong effect.

It is important to note that for state involvement in religion to successfully influence religionational identity, the tactics the state is using must be perceived by citizens as originating from the state. This is because without this understanding, individuals will not perceive the involvement as a signal concerning the ascribed relationship between religious and national identity, and thus, while this sort of involvement may influence religious identity and religiosity, it will not influence religionational fusion. In the case of state use of religious symbols and religious rhetoric, the state is clearly perceived as the source, with rhetoric being understood as coming from the state by coming directly from government representatives, and symbols by virtue of being incorporated into the trappings universally understood as representing the state. Repression and subsidy, however, may be misunderstood as originating from other sources.

For example, if a regulation is instituted that restricts minors from attending mosques, but adherents believe this is a rule devised and enforced by clergy, it will not have an effect on how these individuals understand the relationship between their national identity and religious identity because the interference in their spiritual life appears to be strictly religious in nature. Ironically, this also

means that individuals may perceive the state as being *more* involved in religion than it actually is, thinking, for example, that the state uses taxes to fund clergy or maintain and build mosques when it in fact does not. As a result, such individuals could be expected to exhibit higher levels of religionational fusion than those that have an accurate understanding of the degree to which the state subsidizes religion.

Signals about the “proper” degree of religionational fusion are sent by the state through the passage and implementation of new regulation on religious identity, as well as through state religious rhetoric. These signals, which contain information on the ideal form of national identity according to the government representing the nation-state, are then replicated and reproduced through the enforcement of regulation, the repetition of rhetoric, and the usage of religious symbols.

These signals influence religionational fusion by creating and sustaining the notion that “to be Kyrgyzstani is to be Muslim”, “to be Russian is to be Orthodox”, or “to be French is to be secular”. Individuals see state signals as demarcations of the ascribed identity-boundaries of the nation. This involvement directly affects both aspects of religionational fusion: imbrication and primacy. In particular, the content of the signal itself influences imbrication by indicating whether their religious identity is compatible with national identity or not, while the reinforcement and reproduction of signals influences primacy by strengthening or weakening the connection between the individual’s religious identity and national identity through gradual internalization of the signal.

Note that the signal the state sends to citizens can be mixed; as mentioned above, policies supporting religion almost always exist alongside repression. As a result, the impact the state has on religionational fusion need not be the one the state intended (if the state even has an intention to influence the degree of religionational fusion). Rather, state involvement in religion may influence religionational fusion in a manner that is averse to the regime’s preferences. This is particularly likely among practitioners of minority faiths or interpretations of the majority faith that are not aligned with the state’s strategy.

For example, the state may create a religious monopoly through the subsidization of Islam, so it can garner legitimacy from a popular communal identity and create a loyal cadre of clergy members that can channel their authority downwards to the masses. However, this support for empowering an Islamic religious monopoly is only reluctantly given, because the state views Islam as a source of potential dissent and a nexus-in-waiting for anti-regime political mobilization. Thus, alongside support for religion the government also institutes significant repressive policies governing religious beliefs and practice. The balance of this simultaneous repression and subsidy sends and

reinforces a mixed signal to the citizens who receive it, with the two strategies potentially having simultaneous opposing effects on religionational fusion.

After a signal about the content of national identity is received by an individual, the signal must be reproduced and reinforced in order for it to be fully internalized. A signal sent by a policy repressing or subsidizing religion will not be effective in weakening or strengthening religionational fusion in the long-term if it is not enforced or funded, just as a symbol will not be effective if it is not seen, a speech about the religious character of the nation will not be internalized if it is not heard, and the content of an anthem will not matter if it is never sung. State involvement in religion is reinforced and replicated through enforcement and repetition.

Though it is important that the regulation, symbols, and rhetoric be understood as originating from the state, the internalization of these signals to influence religionational fusion is not necessarily a conscious process; for example, through involvement such as religious education, the initial signal about the ascriptive religionational fusion the state is sending won't be recognized by young children as deliberate, and instead will just be taken as fact. Repetition and reinforcement of these signals also will push them into the background of awareness as they are internalized. However, this does not mean they are not having an effect on how individuals reconcile their religious and national identity; it just means that the recipients of the signal may not consciously recognize that these signals are influencing how they perceive their national identity.

The promulgation of this ascriptive identity has differential effects on individuals, varying due to both individual-level characteristics and varying degrees of exposure to the state's involvement in religion. For example, if the state only enforces a repressive policy banning the wearing of religious clothing in a single region, or only mandates crosses be displayed over the entrances of public buildings in a single region, we would not expect this policy to influence religionational fusion outside of the affected region. Individual-level variables, such as religiosity, will also filter how this signal is received.

Note that, at the individual level, it is not the state's involvement in religion itself that influences identity, but instead individual's *perceptions* of how and to what extent the state involves itself in religious affairs. For example, if the state introduces a law banning the hijab, but an individual never learns of this law and never witnesses its enforcement, we would not expect that it has any effect on how they understand their religious and national identity. Similarly, if a president frequently cites Qur'anic verses in their speeches but an individual does not consume media

presenting these speeches, this higher level of religious rhetoric will not be expected to have any direct effect on religionational fusion in the case of that individual.

The reverse may also be true. For example, if an individual is misinformed and erroneously believes the state provides imam salaries, that green color on currency or a flag represents Islam when it actually stands for something else, or mistakenly thinks that the president frequently includes prayers as part of their addresses to the nation, this individual would be expected to have higher levels of religionational fusion because of the strong positive signal they perceive from the state regarding the ascribed position of religion as part of national-identity, even if the state in reality is not sending this signal.

In the following section, I discuss the expected effects and mechanisms behind these effects for each individual dimension of state involvement in religion, and from this theory I derive a number of testable hypotheses. I discuss a number of alternative explanations for religionational fusion and conclude with a discussion of data and measurement of the independent variable.

Each of the hypotheses in the following section are developed focusing on individual level effects, given that the theory is based on mechanisms that occur at the level of individuals who are exposed (or think they are exposed) to state involvement in religion. However, given that I focus on state involvement in religion at the national level, these individual-level effects can also be observed in the aggregate. Thus, in chapter 5 I test each of these hypotheses using individuals as the unit of analysis, and to ensure the robustness of these findings, in chapter 6 test each hypothesis at the aggregate, country-year level. In Table III.2, I provide an overview of each hypothesis, and how it is reformulated at the individual and aggregate level for testing.

### *Repression*

The signal that states send regarding the construction of ascriptive national identity through repression is dependent on the degree of repression. States rarely outright ban religions, much less the dominant religion, and instead repress particular aspects of religious institutions and behavior. How pervasive this repression is, and who it targets, determines how individuals understand the associated signal about national identity.

Given the nature of repression, the signal sent by the state is strictly negative. Repression is explicitly outward looking; it concerns how the state pushes against religious identity. As repression increases, religionational fusion will decrease as individuals continue to receive an actively anti-religious signal from the state that may increasingly seem unchangeable.

However, this does not mean it will be interpreted by all members of the dominant religion in the same manner. For example, the state may ban a subset of religious practices that an individual does not personally engage in. In cases such as these, the individual receiving the signal could write off the repression as only targeting... However, as repression increases, and individuals become more likely to *experience* repression, rather than merely perceiving repression targeting their coreligionists, the state's negative signal will become increasingly internalized. Further, as this repression continues to exist as high levels, the perception of a threat of future repression may galvanize religious identity as an independent identity, cleaved from national identity.

At extremely high levels of repression, this effect may become more difficult to observe, as individuals become increasingly afraid to express attitudes that religion is a core component of their sense of national identity. In these cases, repression is playing more of a reinforcing role rather than communicating content; after repression reaches critical levels, the signal concerning ascribed religionational identity is already clear, and further repression and enforcement serves more to discourage existing attitudes towards religionational fusion due to the risks involved rather than actually influencing identity.

H1: State involvement in religious repression will decrease the degree of religionational fusion

### *Subsidy*

Religious subsidies signal the extent to which religious and national identity are aligned. Individuals who receive the signal that the state endorses religion daily through fiscal, institutional, or political actions—such as the funding of clergy and institutions, granting of special rights and privileges to religion, or the provision of political benefits to the dominant religious group—will come to understand the nation-state, and their own national identity, as fundamentally religious.

Thus, religious subsidies will increase religionational fusion when the majority group receives subsidies. When religious identity is reinforced as part of the day-to-day substance of the nation-state through fiscal, political, or institutional endorsement of religion, people will come to view religious identity as a core component in defining the nation.

H2: State involvement in religious subsidies will increase the degree of religionational fusion



## *Symbols*

Religious symbols, depending on how ubiquitous they are, can have a long term, “banal” effect on religionational fusion. As the state incorporates religious symbols into the corpus of national symbols, it signals and reinforces the idea that their ascriptive national identity is religious, recreating the nation as religious every time the symbols are seen. As David Butz puts it, “the mere perception of national symbols may automatically heighten the degree of overlap between people’s self-concept and their identification with the nation, suggesting that if perceived on a large scale, symbols may erode the boundaries between many people’s personal and group identities” (Butz 2009, 786). I argue that when these national symbols are infused with religious content, the lines between religious self-identity and collective national identity can also be eroded, leading to an increase in religionational fusion for groups whose symbols are being utilized by the state. This effect is predicated on saturation; people are more likely to internalize the idea that religion is a component of national identity when they are inundated with religious motifs and references within the corpus of state symbols, such as on currency, on flags, on national seals and on state documents, and within anthems and in constitutions.

Over time, symbols can have a particularly acute effect on religionational fusion. By virtue of religious symbols becoming associated with signaling of national identity, religious practice in and of itself will begin to reinforce this fusion for members of the religious groups whose symbols are used by the state. Note that for symbols to have their full effect on religionational fusion they should be understood as religious in the sense that they signal a connection to contemporary, practiced religion, understood not just as an identity that the nation has inherited from its history, but an active, practiced component of current national identity.

Religious symbols and traditions can also be transformed into national culture—a process Genevieve Zubrzycki refers to as “patrimonialization” —taking religion’s sacred content and converting these symbols not into a call “for religious belief but for belief in religious tradition as culture...[with the state] funding and supporting not religion per se but rather the memory of a religious past transformed into the broader and putatively neutral notion of cultural patrimony” (Zubrzycki 2016, 168). In contexts where religious symbols have been converted into signals of cultural patrimony, void of their original theological implications, we might expect the effect of symbols on religionational fusion to be diminished, but still positive.

H3: State use of religious symbols will increase the degree of religionational fusion

## *Rhetoric*

Religious rhetoric, as part of national discourse, will increase religionational fusion. When religious political parties elevate explicitly religious motifs onto the national stage, or heads of state reference the dominant religion in their speeches and publications, or state bodies define a specific religious curriculum to be taught in schools, they not only instrumentalize religion, but signal and reinforce a connection between the nation-state and religion. As this signal is received and becomes normalized through repetition, citizens will increasingly come to view national identity as religious.

This mechanism depends on two factors: 1) the significance of the rhetorical device in terms of the —e.g. presidential addresses vs. religious broadcasts on state media—and, 2) the degree of saturation of the rhetorical device (e.g. state religious curricula that is mandatory for all students versus state religious curricula that is opt-in). Rhetoric has little effect if it is both not perceived as originating from members of the government who have the authority to speak on behalf of the nation-state and is infrequently reproduced.

### H4.1: State use of religious rhetoric will increase the degree of religionational fusion

However, more so than regulation or symbols, state religious rhetoric is explicitly political by virtue of its source. Religious regulation is one degree removed from politics in that it is experienced by citizens through law enforcement or religious institutions that are being subsidized. Religious national symbols, even though they are understood as originating from the nation-state, are not seen as political unless they are presented in explicitly political contexts; instead, they fade into the background, taken as an aspect of everyday life. State religious rhetoric, on the other hand, most commonly originates directly from politicians or parties, with no intermediary.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while religious rhetoric does send a signal regarding the ascribed national identity of the nation-state, this signal is boosted or tainted by the individual or group from which it is perceived to originate.

Alexis de Tocqueville argued that religion was strongest when church and state were kept separate. This is because religion seen as sponsored by the government becomes entangled with parties and politicians, and when those groups and individuals become unpopular as they inevitably

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<sup>11</sup> State's do sometimes directly controls the content of religious sermons and use this control to encourage a particular national narrative. In these cases, however, rhetoric is filtered through a non-state entity (the clergy) and thus would not be considered state use of religious rhetoric.

must, religion too will fall out of favor. Tocqueville used this argument to explain why Catholicism had become deeply unpopular among French democrats in post-revolutionary France; it was Catholicism's close association with the overthrown monarchy, rather than Catholic doctrine, that had contributed to its unpopularity (Tocqueville 2003, chap. 17).

Thus, religious rhetoric serves as a double-edged sword for the state—when trust in leadership is high, invoking religion can garner further support from the groups positively referenced and increase religionational fusion, and when trust is low, the cognitive dissonance created by the instrumentalization of one's religion by a political figure one disapproves of will reduce religionational fusion. In other words, as the source of religious rhetoric become unpopular, its positive effect on religionational fusion will be reduced. At extreme levels of distrust of leadership, use of religious rhetoric can tarnish the moral authority of religion and contribute to cleaving religious and national identity; religious rhetoric may even diminish religionational fusion by reducing the moral authority of religion as an identity that is “above” politics.

H4.2: Religious rhetoric will have a negative interaction with distrust of the government. As distrust of the government increases, the magnitude of the effect of religious rhetoric on religionational fusion will decrease. Thus, the effect of religious rhetoric on religionational fusion will be lower in contexts where the regime is unpopular

#### *The Special Role of Rhetoric as Education*

While state funded or administered religious education is an aspect of state religious rhetoric, it will have a distinct effect on religionational fusion. This is because religious education, and education covering national identity in general, influences identity through different mechanisms than other forms of religionational rhetoric. First, unlike other forms of state rhetoric, it is one degree removed from its political source, channeled through educators rather than being used directly by leaders of the nation-state and politicians. As a result, the strength of this form of rhetoric in influencing religionational fusion comes from the actual content and frequency of the message itself, rather than the nationalistic credentials of its source.

Second, education begins being received at an early age, when identity is more malleable, indoctrination is more straightforward, and signals being sent by the state about the “proper” composition of national identity are less likely to be questioned as legitimate by their audience.<sup>12</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> Children may be less likely to question the national “script” they are given through education, but this does not mean they do not question it at all. Research has demonstrated that all children, and in particular minority children, do challenge and reinterpret the national narrative they are given in school to fit themselves into it (Koh 2010, 231–232).

Ernest Gellner states, “the culture in which one has been taught to communicate becomes the core of one’s identity” (Gellner 2009, 63). Further, research has demonstrated that children begin being able to talk about their national identity by age 5, and the importance they attribute to this identification increases significantly between the ages of 5 and 11 (Barrett 2000). This is not to say that education is the only critical factor in determining childhood national identity, but instead that education is an important factor that provides a common national story and national boundaries that children interpret, negotiate, accept, and challenge dependent on other factors such as family immigration status, minority status, and media consumption (Koh 2010).

Education, more so than other aspects of state involvement in religion, establishes the baseline level of religionational fusion for individuals from which their national identity will shift over time in response to other factors. Thus, I predict that religionational fusion will be higher for individuals who have received religious education irrespective of their age, and that countries that have higher levels of state involvement in religious education will have higher levels of religionational fusion.

#### H5: State involvement in religious education will increase religionational fusion

#### **Alternative Explanations**

Beyond state involvement in religion there are other factors that are important for enabling and sustaining religionational fusion. I briefly outline some of these below.

##### *Religiosity*

First among the mechanisms that enable the possibility of religionational fusion is religiosity. If individuals are not religious, it makes little sense for them to perceive of their national identity as being explicitly religious, unless they do not see themselves as members of the nation. That being said, while religiosity may increase religionational fusion, I argue that state involvement in religion will have a direct effect on religionational fusion separate from religiosity. Thus, I control for religiosity in both my country and individual level studies.

Note that in both cases, I only observe the population that self-identities as a member of the dominant religion. Within the group, I control for religiosity, and argue that even when held constant state involvement in religion will have direct effects on RNF.

##### *Age*

At the individual level, different age cohorts may have experienced different types and degrees of state involvement in religion. In my individual-level study on Kyrgyzstan, I control for age. This is because in Kyrgyzstan and the post-Soviet space, I expect that age will have a negative correlation with religionational fusion, with a cohort effect differentiating those who were raised during the Soviet period and those who were raised afterwards. This is because those who lived during the late-Soviet period were exposed to a strategy of state involvement in religious and national identity that was marked by heavy repression of public expressions of religion.

As a result of this experience, I expect there to be a cohort effect, where those who reached adulthood during the Soviet period exhibiting lower levels of RNF than younger cohorts.<sup>13</sup> The mechanism at play here, however, is not age itself, but rather the experience of Soviet-era state involvement in religion, which relied heavily on the repression of public expression of religious identity.

H6: In Kyrgyzstan, individuals born in 1973 or earlier will exhibit lower levels of RNF than younger individuals.

Note that others would argue that the Soviet experience may increase religionational fusion. The Soviet strategy of state involvement, particularly during the late Soviet period, unintentionally “gave rise to the merging of national and religious identification...[by permitting] private and ‘cultural’ elements of religious identification...[and] discouraging mosque visitations and public prayers perceived as ‘extreme’ religious manifestations incompatible with the ways in which ‘Soviet’ people defined their Muslimness” (Omelicheva 2016, 148). As a result of the Soviet state promoting markers of national identity such as rituals in the home and certain state-approved Muslim holidays, combined with the memory of the harsh repression of Islam during the earlier Soviet period, resulted in Islam being transformed into a largely cultural category that was “fused with the static, primordial notion of national identity so that, tautologically, Kyrgyz and Uzbek national dress, dishes and holidays became Muslim as well because the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were Muslims” (Mcbrien 2006, 344).

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<sup>13</sup> While there are studies that have shown a relationship between religiosity and age (e.g. Argue, Johnson, and White 1999), to the author’s knowledge there have not been studies making generalizable claims about age and RNF. I expect that any effect age may have on RNF is highly dependent on context and the experiences with religion and politics that individuals had during their formative years, and thus I do not make any claims as to the effect of age on RNF at the cross-national level.

Including age in my individual level models allows me not only to test my own hypothesis, but also the validity of these existing claims in the literature.

#### *Development/Financial Status*

Existing research has argued that those living in weak and vulnerable societies tend to place a higher degree of importance on religious values given their need for “existential security”, while those in richer, more secure contexts have less need for religion (Norris and Inglehart 2011). I thus include controls for development and financial status to observe the direct effects of state involvement in religion on RNF.

#### *Dominant Religious Tradition*

An organized, centralized religious authority that can make a legitimate claim to represent the faith within a nation-state may be able to directly and indirectly influence RNF by using its structure to impose its desired identity and policies within a state. On the other hand, in non-Catholic, non-Orthodox secular states, denominational pluralism and less hierarchical religious traditions makes such direct, coordinated religious influence over policy making (and potentially state involvement in religion) uncommon. In fact, the opposite trend may occur, wherein the regime takes advantage of the moral authority of religious institutions by coopting these institutions--which do not have the same resilience against such control due to their less international hierarchical structure--to channel their authority downward and garner legitimacy.

For example, in Muslim contexts such as Central Asia, muftiates may appear to influence policy, but experts note that these institutions are independent on paper only. In fact, these spiritual boards and muftiates, staffed by clergy loyal to the state, provide an institutional channel for the regime to channel its religious preferences downward under the guise of fatwas and religious interpretation. Much like religious political parties in Western, Christian countries may indicate religion is operating from a weak political position (Grzymala-Busse 2015), this indicates that religious institutions are acting from a position of political weakness.

To account for differences between the organizational capacity of different religious traditions to potentially influence RNF and state involvement in religion, I control for dominant religious tradition in my cross-national analysis.

### **Plan for Hypothesis Testing**

From the above theory, I derive a series of hypotheses to be tested in the remaining chapters. Due to the nature of each aspect of state involvement in religion, as well as the alternative

explanations discussed above, some hypotheses are tested using individual-level analysis, some are tested using country-level analysis, and some are tested using both methods.

Where possible, individual level analysis is used. The causal mechanism connecting state involvement in religion to levels of RNF—the receipt of signals from the state’s involvement in religion—is dependent on individuals actually perceiving that the state is involving itself in religion. Thus, it is better to measure the independent variable as *perceptions* of state involvement in religion rather than measuring the involvement itself. Perceptions of religious regulation are easy to measure at the individual level, and thus hypotheses pertaining to regulation are tested in the individual-level analysis.

Some secondary explanators are also possible to measure at the individual level. For example, the popularity of government leaders is easy to measure through simple questions about trust in leaders and institutions and whether the country is moving in the right direction. Variance in other relevant factors, such as age and religiosity, is also easily captured across individuals.

However, some aspects of state involvement in religion are not easily measured at the individual level. For example, religious symbols and rhetoric, unlike regulation and education, operate primarily through reinforcement and by consistently reconstructing the nation as religious. This is predicted to have an unconscious but significant effect of RNF. However, given that religious symbols and rhetoric are potent due to repetition until they are internalized, individuals may not consciously understand how ubiquitous these forms of state involvement are in their daily lives. Further, symbols in particular are slow to change, resulting in little variance across individuals within a single country context. Thus, while I do attempt to test these hypotheses at the individual level, I also compare RNF across countries with varying levels of symbolic and rhetorical involvement in religion to better identify the correlations between state involvement in symbols and rhetoric and RNF.

Finally, some control variables and alternative explanatory variables are better measured at the cross-national level given that they do not vary at the level of individuals. For example, the potential effects of regime type, religious fractionalization, development, dominant religious tradition, and the role of religious institutions during the founding of the nation will only vary at the cross-national level, making a cross-national test of my theory necessary to understand whether my causal mechanisms only operate under certain regime type or religious conditions.

**TABLE III.2: Overview of hypotheses**

Hypothesis	Explanatory Variable	Formulation by Level of Analysis
<i>H1: State involvement in religious repression will decrease the degree of religionational fusion</i>	Regulation as Repression	<p>Individual-level: <i>Individuals who perceive higher levels of religious repression will have lower levels of RNF</i></p> <p>Country-year level: <i>States with higher amounts of religious repression will have lower levels of aggregate religionational fusion</i></p>
<i>H2: State involvement in religious subsidies will increase the degree of religionational fusion</i>	Regulation as Subsidy	<p>Individual-level: <i>Individuals who perceive higher amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of RNF</i></p> <p>Country-year level: <i>States with higher amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion.</i></p>
<i>H3: State use of religious symbols will increase the degree of religionational fusion</i>	Symbols	<p>Individual level: <i>Individuals who perceive higher state use of religious symbols will have higher levels of RNF</i></p> <p>Country-year level: <i>States with higher levels of religious symbols incorporated into national symbols will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion.</i></p>
<i>H4.1: State use of religious rhetoric will increase the degree of religionational fusion</i>	Rhetoric	<p>Individual-level: <i>Individuals who perceive higher amounts of state religious rhetoric will exhibit higher levels of religionational fusion</i></p> <p>Country-level: <i>States with higher levels of religious rhetoric will have higher aggregate levels of religionational fusion.</i></p>
<i>H4.2: Religious rhetoric will have a negative interaction with distrust of the government. As distrust of the government increases, the magnitude of the effect of religious rhetoric on</i>	Rhetoric and Government Approval	<p>Individual-level: <i>Individuals who distrust the president or prime minister and perceive religious rhetoric as high will have lower religionational</i></p>



<i>religionational fusion will decrease. Thus, the effect of religious rhetoric on religionational fusion will be lower in contexts where the regime is unpopular.</i>		<i>fusion than those who trust the national leadership</i>
<i>H5: State involvement in religious education will increase religionational fusion</i>	Rhetoric (Education)	Individual-level: <i>Individuals who have received state influenced or controlled religious education will have higher religionational fusion</i>  Country-level: <i>States with higher levels of state involvement in religious education will have higher levels of religionational fusion.</i>
<i>H6: In Kyrgyzstan, individuals born in 1973 or earlier will exhibit lower levels of RNF than younger individuals.</i>	Regulation as Repression	Individual-level: <i>Individuals exposed to the more repressive Soviet era of state involvement in religion will exhibit lower levels of RNF that persists into the present.</i>

In my individual level study, I select Kyrgyzstan as my case. This has a few substantial benefits. Notably, the fall of the Soviet Union and independence demarcates a clear cut-point where state involvement in religion breaks from the strategies and institutions of the past, allowing me to account for the issue of endogenous state involvement in religion. I discuss these advantages at length in chapters 4 and 5.

## Conclusion

Nation-states, by virtue of their ability to act as the official arbiters of national identity, wield great power to influence how people perceive the content of their nation. By sending signals to members of the dominant religion concerning what ascriptive national identity *should* look like, they have the power to fuse, cleave, or reinforce the relationship between a collective identity like religion and national identity. However, this power can also result in unforeseen and adverse effects on the relationship between religious and national identity that the state does not foresee. States and politicians involve themselves in religion for myriad reasons beyond just nation building, sustaining, and transforming, such as to garner legitimacy, to mobilize the religious population towards a political goal, and to neutralize dissent or a political threat, among others. Regardless of intent, state involvement in religion signals and reinforces a particular notion of national identity, and as this notion is internalized by members of the dominant religion that receive this signal, it will influence how they understand their religious and national identity over time.

In the following chapters, I test the hypotheses derived from the theory presented in this chapter. First, I introduce my in-depth case study, Kyrgyzstan, and trace the evolution of state involvement in religion over time from independence in 1991 through 2018. Then, I introduce an original survey on religious identity, national identity, and perceptions of state involvement in religion that allows me to analyze the effects of these perceptions on religionational fusion. I then use existing cross-national data from 54 countries to test my country-level hypotheses.

## CHAPTER IV

### State Involvement in Religion and Religionational Fusion in Central Asia

#### Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, each of the newly independent Central Asian states faced considerable obstacles in their attempt to construct a common national identity and consolidate a nation-state. These included, in contrast to many other Eastern and Central European countries, no existing prior history of a true nation-state around which to build a state, but a patchwork diversity of subnational identities including ethnic, tribal, and regional affiliations. Given the challenge that the Central Asian states faced of building a state where one had not existed prior, scholars predicted that Soviet institutions would be rejected, through the “reemergence of pre-Soviet tribal divisions and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism; the violent outbreak of nationalism and ethnic conflict; or the adoption of democratic and market-oriented reforms” (see Jones Luong 2002, 1–2 for examples). Instead, however, with the exception of the civil war period in Tajikistan in the 1990s and the violence in Osh in 2010, there has not been wide-scale conflict, and each regime (with the exception of the 2005 and 2010 revolutions in Kyrgyzstan) has proven stable. Until Islam Karimov’s death in late 2016 and Nursultan Nazarbayev’s retirement in early 2019, both states had been ruled by the same Soviet-era leader since independence, and as of April 2019 Tajikistan is still led by Emomali Rahmon, who has been president since 1992. Though leaders and scholars alike believed religion would be a dominant oppositional social force, religion has turned out to be neither as strong of a social force nor as oppositional as many predicted (Jones 2004, 13). There is, however, empirical evidence suggesting that religion has become a strong determinant of political attitudes and national identity in recent years (see the penultimate section of this chapter and chapter 5). The potential role of religion also significantly complicated the nascent Central Asian nation-states’ efforts to construct and consolidate a national identity that was aligned with their goals and interests. Each new state shared the experience of the harsh repression of Islam during the 1920s and 1930s, and the regulation and cooptation of Islam under the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM). While Islamic practice was still widespread during the Soviet period, both under the auspices of SADUM and the Council

for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), there has since independence been a religious revival, with people becoming more comfortable openly expressing religious beliefs and practices. The Soviet Union's collapse gave each new state an opportunity to develop its own approach toward involvement in religion, and thus both directly and indirectly craft religious identity.

Each state would utilize differing degrees of religious regulation, use of religious symbols, and religious rhetoric. Over time, this arguably has impacted each regime's legitimacy with opposition groups structured around religion, contributed to the elimination of religion as a viable locus of political mobilization, and served as an attempt to stifle what was quickly labeled as dangerous "foreign" interest. Most importantly, as I will argue later in this chapter and in chapter five, this variable use of regulation, symbols, and rhetoric has contributed to the fusion (and in the case of repression, cleavage) of religious identity and national identity.

Not only did the ways in which each regime interacted with and used religion deviated immediately after independence, but also there continue to be significant differences in the dimensions of state involvement in religion that each regime emphasizes today.

In this chapter, I trace the development of state involvement in religion in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan since independence, and using proxy indicators of religionational fusion, consider the relationship between these shifts in strategy and evolving religious and national identity. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the validity and utility of the concept of state involvement in religion, and to explore the relationship between state involvement in religion and the degree of religionational fusion. The next two chapters provide novel empirical evidence to test the hypotheses discussed in chapter 3.

### **Case Selection**

The Central Asian states provide an ideal set of comparative cases to examine the influence of state involvement in religion on religionational fusion. There are three reasons: 1) they allow me to partially control for the endogeneity problem inherent in an examination of state policies related to collective identity and the strength of that same collective identity, 2) they provide a set of most-similar cases that share common histories, a common baseline for state involvement in religion, similar religious demographics, and, with the exception of Kazakhstan, similar socioeconomic characteristics, and 3) they provide examples of states that have heavily and dynamically involved themselves in religion over time, but have done so utilizing varying strategies of regulation, rhetoric,

and symbols. I briefly discuss these states' shared Soviet history, and then elaborate on each of these three factors below.

Each Central Asian state began from the same baseline of state involvement in religion under SADUM from the 1940s until the fall of the Soviet Union. This Soviet regulatory body, one of the few that extended beyond the boundaries of a single Republic, was aimed at allowing limited religious activity overseen by the state so as to prevent it from moving underground, to monitor the practice of Islam, and to give the Soviet state an institutional mechanism for intervening and influencing religious activity when it saw fit (Ro'i 2000; Khalid 2007, 78–79). SADUM's role in serving as the Soviet state's instrument of involvement in Islam in Central Asia was complex. On the one hand, the founders of SADUM were ulama who had survived the harsh repression of the 30s, and SADUM gave them a platform for preserving Islamic learning, which it did through the creation of an office to issue fatwas, the creation of religious learning opportunities such as the Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent and two madrasas, the selection of a delegation to make the hajj each year, and starting in the 60s selecting students to be sent to study Islam in Egypt, Syria, and Libya. However, SADUM was also used as a mouthpiece of the Soviet state, which exerted its influence by using SADUM to monitor Islamic activity, leveraging the ulama who operated SADUM to foster positive relations with Muslim-majority countries by serving as goodwill ambassadors and by claiming there was freedom of religion and that Muslims were active participants in the creation of a new Soviet society, and by channeling its authority downward through SADUM by having the ulama issue fatwas that served Soviet values, such as declaring honest work an Islamic virtue, declaring that the Ramadan fast was not required for laborers, and that expenses associated with ritual practice such as the sacrifice of livestock for Kurban Ait, the celebration of iftar, and the collection of alms for the poor were not mandatory (Khalid 2007, 110–111).<sup>1</sup> This strategy of using state controlled religious leadership as a mouthpiece for state preferences can still be seen today in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where fatwas are channeled downward reflecting repressive preferences of the state, such as a January 1998 fatwa in Uzbekistan restricting using loudspeakers to amplify the call to prayer (Khalid 2007, 171), and a September 2017 fatwa in Tajikistan forbidding “criticism of the ruling powers” (RFE/RL 2014). Regulations reflecting the legislation of morals from this period have also been adopted recently in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, such as the laws and decrees

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<sup>1</sup> None of this should be taken to mean that Islam did not exist outside of its state-sanctioned incarnations during the Soviet period. On the contrary, “SADUM never accounted for more than a small fraction of Islamic activity in Central Asia”, with independent ritual observance being widespread but not necessarily political, in many cases being explicitly anti-political (Khalid 2007, 112).

restricting how life-cycle and ritual events such as weddings, funerals, religious holidays, and births can be celebrated.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this shared history, as each country “reluctantly” achieved independence and the Tashkent-based SADUM was dissolved along with the Soviet Union, each respective state was given an opportunity to break with the past to determine how national identity would be constructed and what role religion would play in this identity. In each case, there were no discernible popular nationalist movements to speak of that could have dictated the initial nation-state building strategy (Isaacs and Polese 2015, 372). Evidence from the region suggests that not only was national identity weak during this early period, and so too was religious identity; surveys conducted in 1993 in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, for example, revealed that only 24% of Kazakhstanis and 46% of Uzbekistanis consider themselves Muslims, and only 4% of Kazakhstanis and 13% of Uzbekistanis considered “people of their nationality” to be the most important group for them to belong (Lubin 1995, 16–17). Compare this to 2011, when the World Values Survey suggested that 50% of Kazakhstanis and 95% of Uzbekistanis considered themselves Muslims, and 62% of Kazakhstanis and 87% of Uzbekistanis claimed they were “very proud” of their nationality (Inglehart et al. 2014).

First, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all achieved independence from the Soviet Union during the same period, each had no direct antecedent modern nation-state that existed prior to the Soviet period (Isaacs and Polese 2015, 372), and each inherited the same history of state involvement in religion, with a harsh persecution of Islam and traditional society in the 1920s and 1930s that transitioned into a softer, state-guided approach in 1943 with the creation of SADUM to increase mobilization in Central Asia for the war effort (Khalid 2007, 78). One of the problems associated with attempting to identify the how state involvement in religion influences religionational fusion is the role that existing religious identity, institutions, and national identity play in influencing state policy. In a state with high levels of religiosity and strong religious institutions that push the state to involve itself in religion, we would expect state policies to evolve to appease these constituents and strong religious nationalists who desire state policy to be more reflective of their understanding of national identity. As a result, a cyclic effect may occur where high levels of religionational fusion begets higher state involvement in religion over time, which then reinforces religionational fusion. Central Asia, however, allows me to partially mitigate this issue thanks to the

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<sup>2</sup> For an example, see the 2007 Tajik “Law on Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations, and Rituals (No. 272)”: [http://base.mmk.tj/view\\_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174](http://base.mmk.tj/view_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174).

recency of independence, the shared history of Soviet involvement in religious identity each country inherited as a baseline for state involvement in religion, and similar religious demographics.

Second, in addition to their shared Soviet history, the Central Asian states share a number of characteristics that may affect religionational fusion, while different in their types and degrees of state involvement in religion. All four countries are Muslim-majority, with over 70% of the population identifying as Muslim in each state. Each country has experienced non-democratic rule, though Kyrgyzstan has democratized since independence. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan all have few natural resources and experience similar levels of poverty, ranking 31<sup>st</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and 60<sup>th</sup> lowest GPD (PPP) per capita based on 2017 World Bank data. During the early years following independence, the little data we have available suggests religiosity itself was low by many conventional measures relative to today. For example, only 24% of individuals surveyed in Kazakhstan and 46% of those surveyed in Uzbekistan professing belief in Islam. Other indicators of religiosity were also low; for example, of those who said they follow Islam in Kazakhstan, nearly 20% disagreed with the Shahada (There is no God other than Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet) as a statement, and nearly 75% of self-proclaimed Muslims claimed they never pray, with another 75% claiming they never fast. In Uzbekistan, responses were similarly low (Lubin 1995, 14).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, each state has exhibited and continues to exhibit variation in state involvement in religion in two important respects. First, they have employed different combinations of regulation, symbols, and rhetoric, significantly varying from each other. Second, each state's involvement in each dimension of state involvement in religion has varied over time.

Ultimately, the primary purpose of this chapter is to illustrate what variation in state involvement in religion looks like empirically, focusing separately on each element of state involvement expected to have an independent effect on RNF (repression and subsidy, symbols, and rhetoric) and to begin building a case as to why it matters; as I have argued, the Central Asian cases provide excellent examples for this purpose. In the following two chapters, I build on these insights to test my hypotheses presented in Chapter 3.

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<sup>3</sup> While religiosity alone does not explain religionational fusion, as I will demonstrate in chapter 6, it is strongly associated with religionational identity when measured as frequency of attending religious services, and as others have argued, some degree of religiosity is necessary but not sufficient for religionational fusion to occur (Grzymala-Busse 2015).

## State Involvement in Religion in Central Asia

Following independence, and despite expectations to the contrary, each Central Asian state swiftly adopted divergent strategies regarding state involvement in religion. Though ultimately I view each dimension of state involvement in religion as a continuum, for the purposes of descriptive clarity each dimension of this state involvement can be thought of as ranging from low to high in Central Asia. Descriptions of these categories are summarized in Table IV.1 below.

Kazakhstan began with relatively low levels of state involvement in religion, choosing not to draw on religious symbols and rhetoric as part of the nation building process, but also not to repress religion heavily. Over time, the state would gradually more heavily involve itself in religious regulation, using it as a tool to define acceptable Islamic practice. The state, however, never significantly involved itself in the use of religious rhetoric or symbols.

Kyrgyzstan, like Kazakhstan, did not heavily involve itself in religion in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, more so than Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz state has increasingly involved itself in religion from the mid 2000s into the 2010s. This has included increases in all forms of state involvement in religion—in particular regulation and rhetoric to moderate levels—since 2008 through the present day.

**TABLE IV.1: Spectrum of state involvement in religion in Central Asia<sup>4</sup>**

	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Regulation as Repression</b>	The public and private practice of the dominant religion occurs unimpeded by the state, or with minimal restrictions that do not interfere with typical religious practices or beliefs	The public practice of the dominant religion occurs unimpeded by the state, but public expressions of religion are subject to state repression. Restrictions on practices are more frequent than outright bans, and punishments are typically minor (e.g. fines versus imprisonment)	The public and private practice of the dominant religion is subject to state repression. Bans of religious practices and organizations are common. Punishments are harsh, with heavy fines or jail time being commonplace. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Each dimension of state involvement in religion is better thought of as a continuum (as they are treated in chapters 5 and 6), rather than as categorical. However, for the purposes of empirical clarity, in this chapter I use these broad categories to better highlight the distinctions across countries and time.

<sup>5</sup> This public/private distinction is also an element of how Gamza and Jones differentiate low and high levels of religious repression (Gamza and Jones 2019).



<b>Regulation as Subsidy</b>	The state does not fiscally, politically, or institutionally support the dominant religion, or does so only superficially; e.g. recognizing a faith as “historically significant” without providing substantial support otherwise.	The state fiscally supports the dominant religion, typically through tax breaks or funding religious shrines/places or worships. There may be some institutional support of religion, such as the recognition of an official body to represent a religion (e.g. a muftiate).	In addition to fiscal support, the state provides institutional and/or political support to the dominant religion. Fiscal support goes beyond funding for religious sites and tax break; for example, some or all clergy may be state employees, drawing a state salary. The government uses its enforcement capacity to implement and/or enforce its preferred explicitly religious doctrine, teachings, or morals. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Symbols</b>	That state does not incorporate religion into its national symbols, or it only appears on 1 or 2 national symbols (e.g. on currency, on the flag, in the anthem, etc.)	In most/all national symbols, religion is included as a design element. State traditions may include a religious component, such as political officials being sworn in on holy books, or prayers being given prior to legislative meetings	In addition to most/all national symbols including religious components, the state imposes national symbols onto religion, such as by naming places of worship after presidents, using allied religious institutions to endorse political leaders as religious experts, placing presidential speeches or publications in mosque or madrassah libraries, etc.
<b>Rhetoric</b>	State leaders do not reference religion in positive terms or do so without favoring a single dominant religion. Leaders or party platforms may emphasize the importance of multi-denominationalism or religious pluralism or acknowledge the historical significance of a particular faith. The state allows religious education to occur with minimal state oversight of specific curriculum.	A specific, dominant religion is commonly referenced positively in presidential speeches. The favored religion is explicitly tied to national identity in this rhetoric, with references to its historical, scientific, cultural, social, moral, and/or spiritual importance characterizing these references. The state has oversight of religious education but does not exert complete control over curriculum.	In addition to the characteristics of moderate rhetoric, specific religious doctrine or scripture is cited by religious leaders in their speeches and interviews, often to justify policies which may or may not be directly related to religion. The head of state regularly engages in performative public expressions of piety. Formal religious educational curriculum is completely controlled by the state.

Tajikistan faced a unique set of conditions in developing its involvement in religion due to the role religious identity played in the Civil War. In the aftermath of the war, state involvement in religion began low, steadily increasing into the 2000s, and then becoming high in the late 2000s and 2010s. During the post-war period, President Emomali Rahmon has made heavy use of religious

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<sup>6</sup> This reflects the distinction between targeted or selective subsidy addressed by Gamza and Jones (Gamza and Jones 2019).

rhetoric, writing and speaking extensively on Islam, and since the late 2000s has referenced specific Islamic doctrine in his speeches and proclamations and engaged in prominent public displays of religiosity. This occurs despite a simultaneous high degree of religious regulation: repression that targets any political or non-traditional form of Islam, both in the public and private spheres, and subsidies that treat clergy as state employees.

Uzbekistan quickly used the successor institution to its branch of SADUM, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU), to construct a “national” form of Islam, supporting a loyal cadre of clergy and labeling everything outside of accepted practice as “Wahhabi”, foreign, or extremist. This religious component of national identity was primarily, but not solely, propagated through regulation as repression and subsidies, which by the late 1990s reached high levels. The Uzbek state also incorporated religious symbols into most of its national imagery immediately after independence, and early on Islam Karimov utilized moderate religious rhetoric to elevate a politically inert Islam as the national religious tradition while denigrating other forms that contested this narrative. This focus on religious repression as the core component of Uzbek state involvement in religion only began to truly shift after Karimov’s death in 2016. Since this time, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has not only reduced repression towards more moderate levels, but actively condemned Uzbekistan’s history of religious repression, and has shifted state involvement towards greater subsidy and rhetoric.

## **Data Sources**

In the following section, I trace the evolution of state involvement in religion in each of my four cases from independence through 2018. To accomplish this, I rely on qualitative data taken from a variety of primary sources, as summarized in Table IV.2.

In addition to the primary sources listed here, I supplemented my research with a review of the secondary academic and policy literature. This is to verify that I had not missed anything relevant in my review of primary materials.

To measure state involvement in religion through regulation, subsidy, and education, I analyze primary legal documents from each country, including legislation, presidential decrees, ministry orders, constitutional amendments, budgets, etc. These documents were systematically scraped from official legal databases, and documents pertaining to religion were identified and analyzed. These resources are supplemented by news and NGO reporting on religious regulation, as well as reporting from organizations including the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom and the U.S. Department of State’s annual Religious Freedom Report. Though

subsidies and repression are expected to have opposite effects on religionational fusion, I present each dimension together under the umbrella of regulation, since they derive from the same sources. Education is treated as a special case, given that the mechanisms through which it is expected to influence religionational fusion are classified under rhetoric, and thus I present information on religious education in these sections.

For state use of religious symbols, I conduct content analysis of each country's national symbols, such as anthems, armorials, flags, currency, and traditions such as how oaths of office are conducted and whether or not state institutions have other religious traditions. Whenever possible, this information is taken from legislation, each country's constitution, and government websites.

To measure state involvement in religious rhetoric, I focus on presidential rhetoric, rather than rhetoric by other government leaders or state religious leaders, as each state in Central Asia has an extremely powerful presidency. In each case, presidents have the power to set the national agenda and have used this position in an attempt to construct a national ideology.

I rely primarily on content analysis of significant presidential speeches taken from each country's presidential website, supplemented by less significant presidential speeches and interviews recorded in news media. For presidents who were currently in office during the time of writing (Akayev and Jeenbekov, Nazarbayev, Rahmon, and Karimov and Mirziyoyev). For presidents who were no longer in office, and thus did not have their speeches and interviews available on official presidential portals, I relied primarily on LexisNexis database searches of news coverage of speeches and interviews that reference religion. I also relied primarily on news sources for speeches earlier than the 2010s, which were not documented on state websites.

In cases where they exist, I also reviewed books that gave attention to religion published by presidents while in office. I include these in my data because in some cases, presidential publications have served as part of school curriculum. While it is difficult to gauge readership by the general population of these texts outside of the school setting, and thus difficult to gauge their influence on religionational fusion, I nonetheless include these sources to fully reflect presidential rhetorical use of religion in the Central Asia context.

**TABLE IV.2: Overview of primary data sources<sup>7</sup>**

Regulation (Repression and Subsidy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws related to religion taken from official state legal databases</li> <li>• State constitutions</li> <li>• NGO and news reporting on religious regulation. In particular, I utilized NGOs that focus on human rights and religious rights issues in Central Asia such as Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, Forum 18, Eurasianet, and Fergana.ru</li> <li>• Government reporting on religious regulation, including the U.S. Department of State’s Annual Religious Freedom Reports and the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom Countries of Particular Concern Reports.</li> </ul>
Symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic laws on state symbols, such as flag codes and laws on national holidays</li> <li>• State coinage and bills taken from currency databases and state treasury websites</li> <li>• National anthems taken from <a href="http://nationalanthems.info/">http://nationalanthems.info/</a></li> <li>• News and NGO reporting on presidential use of religious symbols</li> </ul>
Rhetoric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential speeches and interviews taken from 1) the official presidential web sites and, 2) news articles obtained through the LexisNexis news database</li> <li>• Books that were published by presidents during their time in office</li> </ul>

**Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Low and Moderate State Involvement in Religion**

In this section, I trace the evolution of state involvement in religion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Both of these cases have maintained low levels of each dimension of state involvement in religion for long periods. However, Kazakhstan has increased state involvement in religion via regulation to moderate levels since the 2000s, while Kyrgyzstan has increased state involvement in religion via regulation, rhetoric, and (to a lesser extent) symbols from low to moderate levels since the late 2000s.

*Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan has historically had low levels of state involvement in religion across all three dimensions. During the 1990s and 2000s, the state employed little religious regulation, rhetoric and symbolism. Religious tolerance, rather than being deployed to create and involve itself in a state form of Islam, has been core to Kazakhstan’s approach toward religion as part of the nation building process (Olcott 2014, 2).

During the 1990s, the country did not involve itself heavily in religious regulation. The Kazakh state incorporates very little religious imagery into its national symbols, and throughout Kazakhstan’s history, Nazarbayev has avoided using explicitly religious rhetoric, instead highlighting the secularity of the state or emphasizing Kazakhstan’s leadership in the Muslim world when talking about religion.

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the primary sources listed here, I supplemented my research with a review of the secondary academic literature. This is to verify that I had not missed anything relevant in my review of primary materials.

This is not to say, however, that the state has not tried to influence religion. By the 2000s, policy and rhetoric was shifting towards counter-extremism efforts, and the state began to become more interested in directly intervening in Islam, marking a shift from low to moderate repression and subsidy. In 2011, Kazakhstan passed a new comprehensive religion law.<sup>8</sup> This law marked a substantial shift towards subsidizing specifically Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity, while also granting the government greater powers to repress and securitize religion. However, despite this increase, the state's involvement in religion through regulation, symbols, and rhetoric remains low.

#### Regulation as Repression and Subsidy

The first major piece of legislation regulating religion was the 1992 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations.<sup>9</sup> This law, and the constitution that would follow in 1995, was relatively tolerant of religion, and did not create significant institutional capacity aimed explicitly at regulating religion. The law did not require that groups register unless they wanted legal status to own property and hire employees, and the threshold for registration was a mere 10 members (Article 9). In cases of refusal of registration, the government had to give reason in writing, provide legal recourse, and could only refuse if the charter was in conflict with other legislation (Article 10), though this provision was removed by presidential decree in 1995.<sup>10</sup> Freedom to worship and conduct religious rituals is granted not only in publicly accessible religious sites, but also in private homes and apartments, hospitals, military units, jails and prisons (Article 12). Religious groups and individuals are granted the right to possess and acquire religious literature, and religious associations are given the right to public, produce, export, import, and distribute religious items, liturgical literature, and informational material on religion, and to use mass media, notably with no censorship provisions established beyond general legislation regulating the press (Article 13). While the law does separate religious associations from public education, it does allow for the inclusion of religious courses in public education institutions (Article 5), and allows religious associations to establish their own study groups and educational activities (Article 14).

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<sup>8</sup> 2011 Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations (N 483-IV):  
[https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=31067690](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31067690)

<sup>9</sup> 1992 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations (N 1128-XII):  
[https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=1000934#pos=5;-245](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1000934#pos=5;-245)

<sup>10</sup> 1995 Presidential Decree on making amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan and On State Registration of Legal Entities (N 2489):  
[https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=1005051](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1005051)

The Constitution, approved on August 30, 1995, has little to say about religion.<sup>11</sup> Article 1 establishes Kazakhstan as a secular state. Article 5 bans religious political parties as well as groups that “incite religious enmity” and requires that foreign religious entities coordinate their activities with the appropriate state bodies. Article 14 bans religious discrimination, Article 19 grants the right to freely select one’s religious affiliation, and Article 20 bans propaganda aimed at creating religious superiority.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the state largely maintained its secular position of not favoring any one religion, and not interfering in religious affairs beyond promoting a multi-confessional society. There are recorded cases of local officials intervening to attempt halt the practice of “nontraditional” religious groups during this period, but in most cases this repression was reversed when higher-level officials or courts intervened, and religious groups were generally allowed to practice unimpeded by authorities (U.S. Department of State 2003).

This commitment to a multi-confessional society went beyond state discourse and was put into practice through policy subsidizing even minority religions. For example, shortly after independence, Nazarbayev returned hundreds of shrines and churches to the Orthodox Church (Tabyshalieva 1999). In recognition of this, in 1996 Nazarbayev was awarded the Order of the Holy Prince Daniel of Moscow (First Degree) (Interfax 1996). The government also allows certain general religious activities, such as collections from parishioners, to be done tax-free (Podoprigora 1999, 584).

Subsidies have also been used generally to support the notion of a multi-confessional society. In 2001, Nazarbayev signed a joint statement with President George W. Bush confirming his their “mutual commitments to advance the rule of law and promote religious freedom and other universal human rights” (U.S. Department of State 2003). In 2003, Kazakhstan held the inaugural Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana. Nazarbayev decided to make the events a triennial tradition, and the massive Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Astana, commissioned by Nazarbayev, was conceived as a permanent venue for the meeting and as a “global center for religious understanding” (Merrick 2006; Foster + Partners 2019).

In the early 2000s, government regulatory involvement in religion began to increase as part of an effort to prioritize counter-extremism in state policy. In 2000, there were credible allegations that the government selected the new Mufti, though the government and the Muftiate deny that the

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<sup>11</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (with amendments through 2019): [https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=1005029](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=1005029)

government is involved in Muftiate business (U.S. Department of State 2001). In February of 2001, a new Administrative Code went into effect that allowed national and local authorities to fine the leaders of unregistered religious organizations (Article 375).<sup>12</sup> However, this became a source of legal confusion since it conflicted with the Religion Law, which does not oblige religious groups to register. As a result, an estimated 80% of cases brought on Article 375 violations in the early 2000s were dismissed (U.S. Department of State 2003).

In April of 2001 as part of a broader shift in state interests towards counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, a series of repressive amendments were considered to the 1992 Religion Law, but in part due to pressure from the international community, these were withdrawn in June of the same year. However, a revised set of amendments were proposed in November of 2001 and passed in January of 2002. These amendments included “mandatory registration; banning “extremist religious associations;” increasing the membership required for registration from 10 to 50 persons; authorizing local officials to suspend the activities of religious groups for criminal violations of 1 or more of their members, or for conducting religious activity outside of the place where they are registered; and requiring that foreign religious organizations be affiliated with a nationally registered organization”. However, a provision that required the Muslim Spiritual Association (the Muftiate), ostensibly a non-government religious organization, to approve or deny the registration of Muslim groups was found to be in violation of the Constitution by the Constitutional Council. The Constitutional Council also expressed concerns that the other elements of the amendments may infringe on the right to share religious beliefs freely, and thus the full package of amendments was thus repealed (U.S. Department of State 2002).

In 2005, a series of laws were passed that increased penalties for crimes related to religious extremism and broadened the scope of enforcement. First, in February, the Law on Countering Extremism,<sup>13</sup> as well as the Law On Introducing Amendments and Addenda to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Countering Extremism were passed.<sup>14</sup> These laws directly tie extremism to religion (the primary law mentions religion ten times), and provide a loose, tautological definition of extremism, as "the organisation and/or the carrying out of actions by a person, group of people or organisation in the name of organisations that are formally recognised as extremist"

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<sup>12</sup> 2001 Administrative Code with Amendments through 2014: [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=1021682#pos=5846;-11](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1021682#pos=5846;-11)

<sup>13</sup> 2005 Law on Countering Extremism (N 31-III): [https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=30004865](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=30004865)

<sup>14</sup> 2005 Law On Introducing Amendments and Addenda to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Countering Extremism (N 33-III): [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=30004937](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30004937)

(Rotar 2005). The penal code is equally vague, and thus gives the state a wide margin for interpretation. Combined with article 404 and 405 of the penal code forbidding “public associations” that call for religious intolerance or exclusiveness, allows the authorities to crack down on political, but often non-violent, extremist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (Cornell, Starr, and Tucker 2018, 68–69).

The religion law was also amended in July of 2005, mandating registration of religious organizations with the government and with the oblasts they operate in, and gave the government the right to fine and shut down religious organizations over administrative issues.<sup>15</sup> The amendment also expanded penalties and definitions of crimes related to extremism. Amendments were also passed that stipulated that “religious training of a child shall not cause damage to a child's all-around development or physical or moral health” without clarifying how this is to be determined or defined, and the Ministry of Education issued a circular instructing teachers to look out for behavior indicating children were exposed to extremism (U.S. Department of State 2006). Nonetheless, during this period, citizens did not report increases in levels of government harassment, and most religious organizations claimed to have a positive cooperative relationship with the government (U.S. Department of State 2006).

2011 marked a substantial shift in religious regulation in Kazakhstan, from interest in preventing violent extremism into the securitization of religion, as well as a shift towards explicit preference for Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity. Most notably, a new law on religion was passed that fully replaced the 1992 law that had served as the basis of state regulatory involvement in religions since independence.<sup>16</sup> The preamble of the law subsidizes Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity as national forms of religion by “recogniz[ing] the historical role of Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people”. The law then goes on to place draconian restrictions on religion that had not been present in the previous version. For example, it required religious organizations to register (or reregister), created a hierarchical registration structure, and increased the membership threshold for registration to 50 for local registration, 500 for regional registration, and 5,000 for national registration (Article 12). The law also introduced government inspection of religious literature (Article 6), strict limitations on import

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<sup>15</sup> 2005 Law On introducing changes and amendments to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on issues of ensuring national security (N [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=30015850#pos=0;0](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30015850#pos=0;0))

<sup>16</sup> 2011 Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations (N 483-IV): [https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=31067690](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=31067690). For unofficial English Translation, see <http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/Z1100000483>.



and distribution of religious literature, limiting it to registered association and only in religious buildings (Article 9); and bans on religious ceremonies in many public buildings such as public schools and government buildings (Article 7).

The same year, a new agency, the Religious Affairs Agency, was established to research, formulate, and implement policy related to religion. This dedicated body took responsibility for religious affairs from the Committee for Religious Affairs that had previously existed under the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and it marked a significant increase in the state's capacity to involve itself in religious regulation. Rules established by this new agency finally gave approval over Muslim registration to the Muftiate, resulting in non-Hanafi or otherwise non "traditional" Muslim groups being denied registration. Along with this newfound state-given power, the Muftiate also had gained tremendous influence over mosque construction, imam appointments, and attestation exams for new religious leaders (U.S. Department of State 2012).

In an interview with the Astana Times, the head of the new Agency, Kaira Lama Sharif, made it clear that the agencies primary mandate was to take measures against religious extremism. For example, pursuing this goal included examining over 4,000 religious books and materials within the first 2 years, and finding 148 to contain "negative content", and in 2012 identifying 1,900 websites containing illegal materials. The agency also conducted 3,450 anti-propaganda events in 2012, which reached 218,000 people. The agency also used mass-media to spread their messaging, publishing over 500 articles and interviews in the first two years, and conducted conferences and forums with themes such as "Religion and a Woman", "Tablighi Jamaat is a Destructive Movement", "Youth Against Extremism", "Islam Is Against Terrorism", "Takfirism is one of the Most Dangerous Species of Religious Extremism", "Islam and Jihadism", "Freedom of Religion in the Republic of Kazakhstan", "Kazakhstan is our Common Home", and "Role of Religions in the CIS Countries" (Aubakirov and Sarybai 2013).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education introduced a mandatory ninth grade course to be implemented in 2016 on "Secularism and Foundations of Religious Studies". The purpose of the course was is to emphasize secularism as a core principle in the stability of society, give knowledge of traditional religion and destructive religious movements, and inoculate students against extremism and radicalism in favor of a humanistic world view (Cornell, Starr, and Tucker 2018, 86–87).

These shifts in regulation marked a turn toward increasing repression of "non-traditional" forms of Islam. For example, in 2015 and 2016 18 and 22 convictions were made respectively against individuals for being members of Tablighi Jamaat. Of the 22 sentenced in 2016, (U.S.

Department of State 2017). Enforcement and monitoring continued to increase, and in 2017, 284 administrative charges were brought related to the practice of religion, with 263 of these cases resulting punishments including jail time, bans on activity, deportations, and seizure and destruction of property. Notably, for the first time, 22 cases were related to Muslims praying in mosques in ways the Muftiate had forbidden, such as using the word Amen (Corley 2018b). During the same year, 24 criminal convictions were made related to religion, with 21 of these targeting Sunni Muslims, in 16 cases for being members of Tablighi Jamaat, a missionary group banned by an Astana court in 2013 (Corley 2018a).

These actions indicate a shift not only towards policy consolidating a “national” Islam, but also enforcement supporting this goal. This period in the 2010s is also the first period in Kazakhstan’s history when the state is frequently and very visibly directly involving itself in religious affairs through regulation.

In June of 2016, eight people were killed and 37 were injured in a terrorist attack carried out by a group the government described as Salafist “followers of radical, nontraditional religious movements” (U.S. Department of State 2017). In response to this, the state built further capacity to regulate religion through the creation of an independent Ministry of Religious Affairs by presidential decree, moving responsibility from the Committee for Religious Affairs (formerly the Religious Affairs Agency) under the Ministry of Culture and Sport.<sup>17</sup> While administratively this was not a major change, the regulation defining the responsibilities of the new Ministry emphasized the connection between religion, political stability, state youth policy, and the development of civil society, and thus aimed to bring these issues under the jurisdiction of a single state institution.<sup>18</sup> The new ministry, according to the Minister for Religious and Civil Society Affairs Nurlan Yermekbayev, would allow the government to “strengthen our determination to preserve the secular nature of our country and its religious moderation while protecting the rights of religious believers and preventing and countering extremism through well-thought-through and balanced policies” by focusing on the intersection of youth, civil society, and religion (Yermekbayev 2016).

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<sup>17</sup> Decree On Measures to Further Improve the Public Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 9/13/16: [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal\\_acts/decrees/o-merah-po-dalneishemu-sovershenstvovaniyu-sistemy-gosudarstvennogo-upravleniya-respubliki-kazahstan](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-merah-po-dalneishemu-sovershenstvovaniyu-sistemy-gosudarstvennogo-upravleniya-respubliki-kazahstan)

<sup>18</sup> Regulation on Some Questions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <http://web.archive.org/web/20170423093332/egov.kz/cms/ru/law/list/P1600000594>

The following year, the government adopted “The Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2020”.<sup>19</sup> This document emphasized Kazakhstan’s secularity, and mandated the government focus on the prevention of the use of religion for “destructive” purposes by tightening control over religious activities, improving the legislative framework, increasing monitoring of the “religious situation”, promoting secularism, increasing collaboration between religion and government institutions, engaging in counter-ideology campaigns, improving rehabilitation for “non-traditional (radical) religious movements)” and promoting “the traditional spiritual culture of the people of Kazakhstan”, among other goals targeting government institutions, mass media, education, health care, culture, and the socio-economic sphere.

By decree on June 29, 2018 the less than two-year-old Ministry of Religious Affairs was renamed to “The Ministry of Information and Social Development”, which then absorbed the responsibilities of the Ministry of Culture and Sports.<sup>20</sup> Religious policy remained under the purview of the renamed ministry through its various committees, but the reorganized ministry approaches religion holistically alongside youth policy and policy on civil society. Among projects currently being undertaken by the ministry are efforts to standardize religious training for clergy, which has included the opening of an institute for retraining theologians on prevention of extremism at Nur-Mubarak University, and implementing the 2017-2020 Concept.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout 2018 and until the draft law was withdrawn on January 29, 2019, a series of amendments to the main religion law were being considered by parliament. These amendments, at different stages of their development, would have established new restrictions on children’s ability to attend worship meetings, requiring clergy receive explicit permission from a parent or guardian; harsh restrictions on distributing religious literature or materials to children under 16; greater restrictions and penalties for religious teaching without state permission; more restrictions over sharing religious beliefs; increased but vaguely defined restrictions related to possession of censored religious literature; functional defining of individuals practicing their religious beliefs without state permission as a “risk group” for getting involved in terrorism; creating the legal concept of

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<sup>19</sup> The Concept was adopted by presidential decree on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, 2017 (N 500): <http://carmonpvl.kz/ru/article/koncepciya-gosudarstvennoy-politiki-v-religioznoy-sfere-respubliki-kazahstan>

<sup>20</sup> Decree On Measures to Further Improve the Public Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 6/29/18: [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal\\_acts/decrees/o-merah-po-dalneishemu-sovershenstvovaniyu-sistemy-gosudarstvennogo-upravleniya-respubliki-kazahstan-2](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-merah-po-dalneishemu-sovershenstvovaniyu-sistemy-gosudarstvennogo-upravleniya-respubliki-kazahstan-2)

<sup>21</sup> See <https://qogam.gov.kz/ru/content/religioz> for an overview of the Ministry’s position of religious affairs.

“destructive religious movements” which are “a conglomeration of religious views, ideas and teachings representing a threat to the protected rights and freedoms of an individual capable of weakening and/or destroying the moral foundations, spiritual and cultural values and traditions” without stating what authority make that decision; giving the Social Harmony Committee (formerly the Religious Affairs Committee) the power to determine “signs showing adherence to destructive religious movements, including external attributes and items of clothing”; prohibiting state officials from creating or being members of religious organizations; and creating new restrictions on religious dress and ceremonies like weddings, among many other restrictions (Corley 2018c). The Religious Affairs Minister, Nurlan Yermekbayev, claimed one of the primary targets of the “destructive” designation were “Pseudo-Salafist” groups (Glushkova and Najibullah 2018). However, in part due to the threat of sanctions from the United States and in part due to internal disagreement about the strictness of the law, the government withdrew the bill from further consideration, with the promise to revisit the legislative structure concerning religion in 2020 (Toguzbayev 2019).

### Symbols

Kazakhstan has a low level of state involvement when it comes to symbols. More so than any of the other Central Asian states, it has opted not to utilize religious symbols. The Kazakh flag, emblem, motto, and anthem do not include any Islamic references.

Kazakh currency has included religious symbolism in the form of the Hodja Ahmed Yassavi mausoleum<sup>22</sup>, which has appeared on numerous denominations used from 1993 through 2003. However, new series of banknotes introduced in 2006 and 2011-2017 do not include religious symbolism, with the exception of a commemorative 1,000 tenge banknote issued in 2011 to commemorate Kazakhstan’s Presidency of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).<sup>23</sup> Neither the 1993 nor the 1995 Kazakh constitution favors any religion or references God, and

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<sup>22</sup> The Hodja Ahmed Yassavi mausoleum serves as a shrine and the burial place of a number of important figures from the Kazakh Khanate and acts as a place of pilgrimage for Kazakh Muslims. It was constructed on the order of Timur on top of the existing grave of Hodja Ahmed Yassavi, who was a prominent Sufi mystic and poet who founded the Yasawi Sufi order (Korzumbayeva 2014).

<sup>23</sup> See [http://bf.kz/en/catalog/baiterek-series-banknotes\\_922/](http://bf.kz/en/catalog/baiterek-series-banknotes_922/) and <http://bf.kz/en/catalog/1000-tenge-commemorative-banknote--devoted-to-the-republic-of-kazakhstans-chairmanship-in-the-organisation-of-the-islamic-conference->

national oaths of office include no reference to religion.<sup>24</sup> The president of Kazakhstan has always been sworn in on the constitution rather than the Qur'an, with no associated prayer or religious symbolism (Qazaqstan Tarihy 2015; Akorda.kz 2019). Eid al-Fitr (Orozo-Ait) and Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Ait) are not recognized as state holidays by article 3 of the Law on Holidays<sup>25</sup>, though article 84 of the labor code does now provide for time off work during Kurban-Ait.<sup>2627</sup>

As early as the 1990s, the Mufti and Archbishop were included at many state functions, often seated with the President (U.S. Department of State 2001). However, other less prominent religious leaders have since also been incorporated into state functions, highlighting the state's multi-confessional stance.

Nazarbayev has shown symbolic reverence to Islam through his appearances and actions but has taken care to not overly favor a single religious tradition. For example, in 1994, Nazarbayev made his first post-independence trip to Mecca. However, on the same trip, he visited Pope John Paul at the Vatican (Schaeffer 2010).

### Rhetoric

President Nazarbayev has never utilized significant religious rhetoric. When Nazarbayev does speak about Islam, he does so without drawing on specific doctrine. Since independence, his references to religion are most frequently aimed at emphasizing the multi-confessional nature of Kazakhstani identity, highlighting Kazakhstan's role as an economic and political leader in the Muslim world, and warning about the dangers of radicalization into violent extremism. Often, when he does talk about the threat of religious extremism, he does so without specifically referencing Islam. As one research observed in an analysis of all of Nazarbayev's major speeches since 1997, "Islam and its derivatives were mentioned 163 times, but almost never in connection with Kazakhstan being an Islamic or Muslim country" (Omelicheva 2016, 150).

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<sup>24</sup> See section 13 Article 76 in the 1993 constitution

([https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F\\_%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8\\_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%85%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD\\_1993\\_%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0](https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%85%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD_1993_%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0)), and section 3 article 42 in the 1995 constitution ([https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kazakhstan\\_2017#s265](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kazakhstan_2017#s265)).

<sup>25</sup> Law On Holidays of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <https://zakon.uchet.kz/rus/docs/Z010000267>

<sup>26</sup> Labor Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Article 84: [https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=38910832#pos=1231;-32](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=38910832#pos=1231;-32)

<sup>27</sup> See <http://defacto.kz/content/prazdnichnye-dni-v-respublike-kazakhstan> for an overview of state-recognized holidays in Kazakhstan.

To illustrate this point, I analyzed the religious content of each of Nazarbayev's annual addresses to the nation, from 1997-2018. The President did not mention Islam by name a single time during these addresses between 1997 and 2005. Instead, when he did speak about religion, he spoke generally about the multi-confessional, secular nature of Kazakhstan, or highlighting the threat of religious extremism without relating the threat to Islam. In 2006, Nazarbayev mentioned Islam by name once, but only in the context of ensuring equality among and respect for all "traditional religions" while maintaining a secular state, as well as strengthening relations with other countries in the Muslim world. He 2011 is the next year that Nazarbayev mentions Islam in his annual address. Again, however, he does not utilize religious rhetoric, instead mentioning that Kazakhstan will be assuming the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a position which it will use to strengthen relations between the Muslim and Western world.

The closest Nazarbayev gets to using religious rhetoric is in his address in December of 2012, when he claims that "We are proud of being a part of the Muslim Ummah. It belongs to our traditions." However, he goes on to say that Kazakhstan has its own secular traditions, and that a religious culture must be fostered that is "relevant to the traditions and cultural norms of our country... [that] prepares our people to live in the 21st century, not in the middle ages." He then criticizes religious extremism as against "true faith in God" and in contradiction to the "Hanafi madhhab, held to by believers of Kazakhstan". He closes this section of the speech with a warning that the fight against religious extremism "should not be used as a witch hunt or to be used to fight religion".<sup>28</sup>

In the mid to late 2010s, state involvement in religious rhetoric outside of Nazarbayev's annual addresses reflected the same priorities that regulation and symbols addressed during the same period. On one hand, Nazarbayev's rhetoric around religion shifted to focus on Kazakhstan's role as a leader in bridging the gap between Muslim states and the West, and on its role in chairing the OIC (Omeliicheva 2016, 151). The focus on this rhetoric was not on the content of Muslim identity, but instead aimed at emphasizing that, in Nazarbayev's words, "Kazakhstan remains a strong supporter of further strengthening and development of the Islamic world" (AKIpress 2014b).

On the occasion of Muslim holidays, Nazarbayev did use some religious rhetoric, praising the role of Islam in "uniting the people, Muslims themselves and the ethnic Kazakh people", and purifying "a human being's spiritual world by teaching the good conduct and humanity left to us as a

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state)

legacy from our ancestors to help each other in difficult situations, unity, to unite around a state, to love one's Motherland, to be loyal to one's religion, not to steal and not to cause sufferings to each other" (BBC 2000b). As Mariya Omelicheva points out, these speeches tended to focus on developing a notion of "true", cultural, apolitical Islam that is peaceful and exists in harmony with the other religions of Kazakhstan. This Islam, or the "forefathers' Islam", is presented as compatible with existing Kazakh traditions (Omelicheva 2016, 150).

### *Kyrgyzstan*

Kyrgyzstan's involvement in religion can be divided into four periods. After independence and through 1995, Kyrgyzstan maintained a hands-off approach to religious identity, abstaining from significant involvement through regulation, symbols, and rhetoric. In the mid 1990s through 2004, the government began involving itself in religion by creating and expanding the responsibilities of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, without widespread repression. In the period from 2005-2009, the government began involving itself in religion through greater repression and subsidy, while still abstaining from any significant increases in rhetoric or symbols. Finally, from 2010 through the present, the state has increased its involvement in regulation, symbols, and rhetoric.

During the first 15 years of independence under Akayev, the state did not engage in significant rhetoric, regulation, or use of religious symbols. During the Bakiyev period, from 2005-2010, in part in response to regional trends towards securitization of religion and the prominence of religious political groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, the government began to focus on Islam using regulation. The regulation during this period gave the government greater powers to monitor and crack down on religion, while at the same time began to define and subsidize what the state deemed "traditional" Islam.

From the time since Atambayev took power in 2010 and onwards, however, state involvement in religion has increased on an annual basis. This has occurred primarily via regulation and symbols. The government not only began passing laws that gave them greater capacity to repress what they deemed undesirable religious activity, but also began engaging in greater amounts of religious subsidy and rhetoric. Religious symbols also were put into the national spotlight during this period, with debates over appropriate religious dress being elevated to the national stage, prayer rooms being built in parliament, a reference to God being added to the oath of office, and state officials participating in mosque openings and other religious events.

### Regulation as Repression and Subsidy

During the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan maintained a hands-off approach to involvement in religion. The first major law regulating religion the 1991 “Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations”, guaranteed that all citizens could “freely and independently determine his attitudes toward religion...and to express and disseminate convictions associated with religious attitudes” (Article 1).<sup>29</sup> Consistent with similar laws in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the law bans religious political parties, but does allow religious organizations to participate in political life so long as they are not violating the constitution (Article 3). The law also guarantees the state will not interfere with the activities of religious organizations, while simultaneously outlawing fiscal subsidies from the state to religious organizations (Article 5). The law also establishes a lenient registration process, establishes a right of both citizens and religious organizations to hold religious ceremonies and worship on religious property, pilgrimage sites, cemeteries, and most notably, private homes. The right to conduct religious rites in public places is also established, provides these gatherings obey the other laws on meetings, rallies, and demonstrations (Article 15). The law goes on to grant more religious rights rather than restricting religion, including the right of religious organizations to produce, export, and import religious materials (Article 16), and to maintain foreign connections with religious organizations and to travel abroad for religious purposes or religious education (Article 18).

The 1993 Constitution was largely consistent with this initial law.<sup>30</sup> It established Kyrgyzstan as a secular state (Article 1), guaranteed separation of religion and state and banned religious political parties (Article 8), ensured freedom from discrimination over religious affiliation (Article 15), and guaranteed freedom of religion (Article 16).

In the mid-1990s, the state continued to build its regulatory capacity, but did not significantly increase subsidies for or repression of religion. A 1995 government resolution, “On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere”, was issued in response to “a sharp increase in activity not only of denominations (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism), but also some religious organizations...who aim to gain sympathy and trust of wide sections of the population of Kyrgyzstan, as well as pursue far-reaching political goals”. The resolution focuses on the threat of “non-traditional” religious groups and lays the

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<sup>29</sup> 1991 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/891/10?cl=ru-ru>.

<sup>30</sup> 1993 Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1/10?cl=ru-ru>



groundwork for government regulatory capacity to involve itself in religion, marking a shift towards greater involvement in encouraging a “Kyrgyz” Islam and repressing other forms of religion.<sup>31</sup>

The following year, in 1996, the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), which to this day is the primary government body tasked with overseeing the state’s involvement in religion, was established.<sup>32</sup> Over the next few years, their policy-making and regulatory role would be established and expanded, including developing regulations on issues such as administering the hajj, and taking over registration responsibilities for religious groups, and gaining authority over domestic and foreign religious education, including the right to deny visas at their discretion.<sup>33</sup> In 1998, the full scope of the SCRA’s involvement in religion was established by the 1998 “Resolution On the Concept Of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Development and Implementation of State Policy in the Sphere of Religions”.<sup>34</sup> Its primary tasks would include monitoring religious groups for compliance, developing and implementing existing and new policy in relation to religion, developing and implementing projects to strengthen the spiritual and moral foundations of society, coordinating efforts related to religion between government agencies, providing assistance to religious groups and acting as an intermediary between religious groups and state bodies, and keeping the government informed on religious issues and activities in Kyrgyzstan.

After the Tulip Revolution and under President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, regulatory involvement in religion shifted towards securitization of Islam. As Forum 18, a human rights organization focused on religion in the post-Soviet space put it, “When Kurmanbek Bakiev took power in 2005, all registered and unregistered religious communities were mainly able to function freely” (Bayram 2014).

However, this would quickly change under the Bakiyev regime. In 2005, Bakiyev’s first year in office, he signed the “Law on Preventing Extremist Activity”.<sup>35</sup> This law adopted an extremely broad definition of extremism that included activities aimed at change of the constitutional order;

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<sup>31</sup> 1995 Resolution On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere (N 345): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/36439>

<sup>32</sup> 1996 Resolution on the State Commission for Religious Affairs Under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (N 219): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/35249/10?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>33</sup> See the 1997 Resolution On the Implementation of “On the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the tasks of the authorities on the formation of state policy in the religious sphere”(N 20):

<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/34095> and the 1996 Decree On Measures to Implement the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic on Freedom of Conscience and Religion (N 319):

<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/46629>

<sup>34</sup> (N 441): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/98691?cl=ru-ru>.

<sup>35</sup> 2005 Law on Preventing Extremist Activity (N 150): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1748/10?cl=ru-ru>

undermining security; seizing power; creating illegal militias; implementing terrorism; inciting racial, national, or religious discord; causing riots or vandalism based on hatred or hostility; promoting exclusiveness, superiority, or inferiority of citizens based on religion, social racial, national, religious or linguistic affiliation, etc. Not only were these vaguely defined activities considered extremism, but so too was public speech or publications calling for these activities and financing of these activities. Scholars have argued that this law opened the door to significant repression, particularly against non-violent Islamic groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (Omelicheva 2007, 383).

Most notable during the Bakiyev years, the December 2008 “Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations” marked a turning point towards greater state involvement in religion, and in particular greater state repression.<sup>36</sup> This law introduced new state repression of religion as well as stricter versions of existing regulations. For example, the new law introduced harsh registration requirements including having two hundred members compared to the previous requirement of 10 (Article 8) and instituted more direct control over religious literature including SCRA rights to approve or censor literature and a ban on the distribution of religious materials in public (Article 22).

The shift towards greater involvement in religion continued under the Atambayev administration, with a particular attention paid to the risk of religious radicalization of Uzbek youth (Olcott 2014, 7).

The 2010 Constitution, adopted shortly after the 2010 revolution, made some subtle changes to constitutional protections for religion.<sup>37</sup> In Article 4, a provision was added that forbids activities that are “aimed at forced change of the constitutional setup, undermining national security, incitement of social, racial, inter-national, inter-ethnic and religious hatred”, without actually defining what religious hatred is. A ban on expression of ideas that propagate “religious hatred” as expressed by individuals or the press is also placed in Article 31. Finally, the new constitution added provisions forbidding the “coercion” of religious beliefs (Article 20), a measure that could be construed as aimed at proselytizing and other forms of preaching. Article 20 also gave the government the power to curtail human and civil rights in the name of “protecting national security, public order, health and morale of the population as well as rights and freedoms of other persons”.

A number of measures were passed in the years following the new constitution that made it clear that the regime was interested in religion as a national-security issue, and that as part of the

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<sup>36</sup> 2008 Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations (N 282): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202498/10?cl=ru-ru>.

<sup>37</sup> 2010 Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, without amendments: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kyrgyz\\_Republic\\_2010.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kyrgyz_Republic_2010.pdf)

effort to combat potential radicalization into violent extremism, the state would define and support traditional, “Kyrgyz” Islam, while cracking down on other, foreign forms. In practice, this often means inequitable repression of Uzbek Muslims using “extremist ideology” as a justification.

In 2012, the National Security Concept was adopted.<sup>38</sup> This new strategy contained elements that were highly problematic for religious freedom, including equating radicalization with Islamization, treating extremism as interchangeable with terrorism, and failing to adequately distinguish between non-violent extremism and violent extremism. As a result, non-violent groups including Salafis, Tablighi Jamaat, and Hizb ut-Tahrir found themselves open to increased repression (Galdini 2015). Religious leaders who the regime saw as critical or threatening were also subject to repression.

Following this pattern of prioritizing religious extremism, a number of government policies were passed in quick succession to increase the state’s capacity to enforce extremism laws. In December of 2012, the SCRA issued an order (N 116) that required religious organizations to report their activities both domestically and in interaction with foreign entities, which subsequently allowed the SCRA to make greater use of Article 27 of the 2008 Law on Religion to suspend religious organizations found to be non-compliant.<sup>39</sup> In 2013, the government “National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the Period 2013-2017” defined optimizing state-religious relations and combatting radicalization associated with poor education as one of the state’s main priorities (Section 3.2).<sup>40</sup> Amendments were subsequently made to the criminal code that increased penalties for crimes relating to extremism and expanded the scope of what was considered extremism further.<sup>41</sup>

During the period in the mid-2010s, enforcement of extremism and religion laws was widespread, with interpretation of many vaguely defined charges left at the discretion of authorities. For example, in an interview with a lawyer representing clients in the Osh region conducted by a journalist in fall of 2015, the lawyer claimed he had received 20 cases brought up on extremism charges alone, suggesting that most but not all cases were brought against Uzbeks, and that an increasing number were being brought against women. Extremism charges have been used by

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<sup>38</sup> 2012 Concept on National Security in the Kyrgyz Republic (passed by Decree N 120): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/61367?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>39</sup> For details, see <http://www.osce.org/odhr/187536?download=true>.

<sup>40</sup> Approved by Presidential Decree (N 11): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/61542/10?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>41</sup> 2016 Law On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts in the Sphere of Countering Terrorism and Extremism (N 162): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111441/30?cl=ru-ru>

Kyrgyz authorities to disproportionately target the southern Uzbek minority population since the 2010 ethnic violence. The lawyer claimed that in most cases, charges were related to possession of extremist literature, but the literature found was not on the official list of prohibited materials. Despite this, his firm has not managed to get a single acquittal in one of these cases (Galdini 2015).

Religious charges often provided authorities during this period with an excuse for crackdowns that allowed them to legitimize their actions without providing other ample evidence or explanation. On July 17, 2015, I was travelling down Gorky Street in Central Bishkek when I heard a loud series of popping noises. A group of men in full combat gear I would later discover were members of the Alpha special forces came out from behind cover and yelled at me to turn my bike around and run away. I then heard a grenade go off and realized the popping I had been hearing was a gunfight.

Six men were killed by the security forces, who GKNB security policy representatives claimed “were all Islamic State members” who had planned an attack on the Central Square during end of Ramadan prayers and another at a Russian air base (Solovyov 2015). In the coming days, no substantial evidence was presented by the government; little evidence was presented to back up the official version of events, despite that the raid had the appearance of an operation to capture fugitives (Galdini 2015). In the critical days immediately following the raid, no public court proceedings were held, and the only substantial piece of physical evidence that was presented was an IS flag purported to have been found in the building (Eurasianet 2015b).

Outside of developing the legal framework pertaining to extremism, the government during this period defined broader goals for its involvement in other aspects of religious life, including defining the beliefs and behaviors it would subsidize. The 2014 “Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere in 2014-2020” was adopted to officially reorient the government’s policy trajectory and goals regarding religious life.<sup>42</sup> As one Kyrgyz analyst put it, the Concept was developed in response to “the threat of loss of national identity under the influence of foreign ideologies; the threat of an ideological split in Kyrgyz society; the treat of politicization of religion...[and] the success of...ISIL and active involvement of immigrants from Kyrgyzstan in this organization” among others (Esenamanova 2015).

The document identifies religious threats to “public order and the security of the state” including “registration, organization of hajj, proselytism, information security, religious education,

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<sup>42</sup> “Concept” approved by Decree N 203: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/68294?cl=ru-ru>

manifestation of religious extremism, and others” (Section 2.1). It then establishes goals for improving state involvement in the religious sphere, which includes strategies for improving regulatory compliance, improving state interactions with religious groups at the national level, improving local level engagement, establishing a counter-ideology campaign, improving secular-religious education and religious education, and increasing suppression of and research on religious extremism. An implementation plan is also included, and initially 22.4 million soms of government funds as well as international donor money was set aside for implementation (Aslanova 2016, 1).

The Concept also, however, subsidizes the Hanafi madhab as the “traditional” Kyrgyz Islam. This serves a nation-building as well as a political purpose. The Hanafi madhab is portrayed as liberal, tolerant, apolitical, and open to the incorporation of pre-Islamic Central Asian rituals and traditions. As the Concept puts it, the Hanafi madhhab, “which is followed by the majority of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, has historically proved the ability to tolerate, good neighborliness, and mutual respect in the context of ethnic and religious diversity”. Perhaps most importantly to the government, it “has an ideological basis for developing a partnership with the state... [which] allowed traditional Islam to coexist without obvious conflict with the state during the Soviet era” (Section 2.1).

This moderate, “traditional” Islam was directly provided fiscal subsidy in 2014 with the creation of the *Yiman* (faith) fund by presidential decree, which gave the president himself powers over the fund as its founder.<sup>43</sup> Thus far, the fund has contributed to religious activity including projects to support writers and poets, distribution platforms for moderate religious information, and clergy training programs. In 2016 alone these training programs reached 2295 imams with a 12 day training programs, covering 1200 with scholarships. The Fund is also used for the production of films, books, and other meetings and events related to “traditional” Islamic practice (Aslanova 2016, 2).<sup>44</sup>

In 2015, as part of an effort to ensure imams were well educated and subscribed to state-approved doctrine, extensive programs of education for imams and tests to certify imams, imam-khatibs, and staff of religious schools began. 2,500 imams participated in the first round of exams, but only 800 passed (Nazarov 2017).

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<sup>43</sup> 2014 Presidential Order (N 11): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/211075>

<sup>44</sup> See <http://ru.iyman.kg/> for current work of the fund and the fund’s charter.

In 2017, the government adopted the “Program on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2017-2022”.<sup>45</sup> The first of its kind in Kyrgyzstan, the Program calls for research on the drivers of radicalization into violent extremism to develop more effective policy that is in compliance with human rights norms. Organized criminal groups and penitentiary institutions are identified as potential vectors for radicalization, and expansion of research, enforcement, and preventative work is proposed.

More amendments to the 2008 religion law were drafted by the SCRA and considered in 2017. These included full censorship of all religious literature, bans on door-to-door sharing of religious beliefs, and an increase in the number of citizens living in one place before an application for a religious community will be accepted from 200 to 500, and a requirement for the state to register their religious study abroad with the state. These amendments, however, were not adopted, and the most recent amendment to the religion law is still from 2012.

It should be noted that since independence, the state has put few barriers on mosque construction, and has in many instances helped facilitate the expansion of religious infrastructure. Based on SCRA statistics, between 1990 and 2014, Kyrgyzstan went from having 39 mosques operating to 2,362 mosques, 81 Islamic schools, and 68 Muslim centers, foundations, and associations, all under the purview of the Muftiate (Galdini 2015). Though the government does not directly finance the construction of new mosques, the SCRA does approve mosque construction, and has a close working relationship with the Muftiate that allows it to ensure mosques are staffed with clergy that will support state-sanctioned doctrine and engage in religious education as counter-ideology to extremism (Kamalov 2016; Zarif and Muhammadiy 2015).

### Symbols

During the 1990s, the state did not heavily involve itself in the use of religious symbols. The nation anthem, adopted in 1992, contains no explicit references to Islam, though it does refer to the land as holy or sacred. The flag and coat of arms contain no religious imagery. The initial banknotes issued in 1993 contained no religious symbols, instead focusing on the Kyrgyz eagle and imagery related to the national hero, Manas.

The second series of Kyrgyz Som banknotes, issued in 1994, did include religious symbolism in the form the Uzgen Minaret on the 50 som note. The minaret has appeared on every iteration of

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<sup>45</sup> Passed by 2017 Resolution (N 394): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/100104>

the 50 som note since, but no other banknote or coin has included religious symbolism, eschewing Islamic symbols in favor of natural and artistic icons, as well as Manas.

Oaths of office in Kyrgyzstan do contain references to religion. Under current constitutional law, amended in 2011, includes the phrase "...I swear before God".<sup>46</sup> Prior to this, under the 2007 constitution and 1993 constitution, the oath of office contained no references to religion, though it did refer to the "sacred fatherland" until a 2006 amendment removed the word "sacred".<sup>47</sup>

In 1992, Kyrgyzstan swiftly recognized Orozo Ait, Kurman Ait, and Christmas as national holidays, replacing the Socialist Republic law that had been passed the prior year excluding the religious holidays.<sup>48,49</sup> The recognition of these religious holidays would also be recognized in the labor code in 1997 (Article 166).<sup>50</sup>

The government has involved itself in the use of religious symbols in other more subtle ways. For example, despite formal separations of religion and state, the government built a prayer room in parliament in 2011. 25 members of parliament requested a second larger prayer room be added, which was approved in June of 2013. In 2014, the new Islamic prayer room—funded by the Saudi charity Assembly of Muslim Youth—was opened (Toktonaliev 2014).

Multiple presidents have privately relied on Islamic symbols to bolster their credibility. For example, President Bakiyev, in the run-up to the 2009 election, contributed funds to the construction of a new Central Mosque in Bishkek, and used his political power to solve issues related to land allocation for the Central Mosque in 2006 (BBC 2006a; Namatbayeva and Volkov 2009). During the same election, other candidates took similar symbolic actions to draw on Islam for legitimacy, including Nurlan Motuyev organizing the Islamic "Real Muslims Union", Temir Sariyev donating funds for the construction of a new mosque, and Almazbek Atambayev speaking out to defend Muslims who were imprisoned for "mass disorder" when they celebrated Orozo Ait in public and clashes with authorities (Khamidov 2013; Namatbayeva and Volkov 2009).

However, politicians using religion is not limited to the campaign trail in Kyrgyzstan. National leaders such as Atambayev and Jeenbekov participate in mass public prayers on holidays such as Kurman Ait (AKIpress 2016; Kabar News Agency 2018). Almazbek Atambayev has recently

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<sup>46</sup> Constitutional Law on Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 58: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203244/40?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>47</sup> 1993 Kyrgyz Constitution, Article 45: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1>

<sup>48</sup> 1992 Law on Holidays (N 852-XII): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/801/10?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>49</sup> 1991 Kyrgyz Socialist Republic Law on Holidays (N 430-XII): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/205094/10?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>50</sup> 1997 Labor Code (N 70): <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/570/10?cl=ru-ru>

been publicly involved in religious affairs, bringing attention to the connection between nation and religion. For example, the recently completed Martyr's Mosque in Bishkek, which was built to commemorate the victims of the 2010 revolution, was sponsored by Atambayev. He attended the opening of the mosque in April of 2019, and attended prayers with 4,000 other Muslims (AKIpress 2019a, 2019b).

In recent years, the Kyrgyz government has also used *anti-religious* visual symbols to send signals about what they deem to be appropriate and inappropriate national religious identity. For example, in 2016, the Kyrgyz presidential administration financed the construction of billboards across the country that depicted women in traditional Kyrgyz dress, juxtaposed by women wearing burqas, with the caption “My poor people, where are we headed?!” This campaign divided Bishkek, with demonstrations in support of the hijab drawing hundreds of participants on one side, and nearly 70% of respondents to an online poll showing support for the banners on the other (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017).

**FIGURE IV.1: Presidential administration funded billboard, Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek**



Source: Radio Free Europe, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-islam-hijab-women/27888178.html>

### Rhetoric

Use of religious rhetoric has varied among presidents of Kyrgyzstan, who each adopted a unique degree and form of discourse surrounding Islam. Askar Akayev, the first president, would reference Islam as part of national identity and emphasize that religious extremism posed no threat



to Kyrgyzstan, but did not directly use Islamic doctrine to justify policies or national ideology, nor did he identify “good” or “bad” Islamic practices. Akayev was open about the fact that he is an atheist.<sup>51</sup> Bakiyev, despite being from the more Islamized South, did not use religious rhetoric. He did, however, highlight religious extremism as a problem facing Kyrgyzstan, and used this threat to make calls for greater state involvement in religion. Atambayev, unlike his predecessors, directly used religious rhetoric, attempting to construct a “traditional, Hanafi” Islam in opposition to non-state sanctioned forms, which he labeled as foreign and dangerous. While at the time of writing, it is still early in Jeenbekov’s presidency, it appears he is adopting the same type of religious rhetoric seen during the Akayev years.

The first president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, did not typically use religious motifs or language in his speeches or writings. However, during the initial independence process, he did draw on religious rhetoric. For example, during the constitution drafting process in 1992, Akayev addressed the parliament stating that “”It is necessary to keep in the constitution references to the moral value of Islam and no one needs any convincing that in place of a secular state we shall build an Islamic state...The ancient teaching concentrates the best traditions of the peoples of the East, appealing to unity and peace among the people, it will promote moral purification.” (BBC 1992).

However, shortly after independence, Akayev’s rhetoric mellowed. He argued that Islam served as an important element of the growing Kyrgyz national identity, but did not use religious rhetoric himself. His stance can be summed up by an excerpt from a speech he gave in August of 1993 to the International Press Club in Moscow, expounding on his national ideology: “In order to preserve and safeguard the mental immunity of the Kyrgyz nation – I think it a positive factor... the adherence of a certain proportion of the population to the moral values of Islam and other religions. My standpoint regarding Islam is confined to the notion that Islam is an element of the Kyrgyz culture, an intrinsic component of our history and way of life. At the same time, I am a steadfast opponent of religious extremism of any brand, including Islamic fundamentalism” (Akayev 1993).

During this early period, it was common for Akayev to downplay the threat of religious extremism in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. After his speech, when taking questions and asked about the Tajik Civil War, Akayev responded that, “Initially, I would agree with those politicians who

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in a January 2000 interview aired on Russian radio about Vladimir Putin being made chairman of the CIS Council of Heads of State, Akayev claimed that “...personally I am an atheist, my upbringing was in the Russian school...The people of Kyrgyzstan only advocate liberal trends and we are very glad that precisely because of this – after all we have about 1,000,000 Orthodox Christians in Kyrgyzstan – there is today complete harmony and complete mutual understanding between the religious confessions” (BBC 2000a).

claimed that the influence of the Islamic fundamentalism prevailed. It was true. But now it is a thing of the past. Now it's clan and regional interests that prevail" (Akayev 1993). This pattern is seen throughout the 1990s. During a 1999 speech during a meeting with the Mufti to celebrate Eid al-Adha, Akayev claimed that, "Fortunately, there is no extremism in Kyrgyzstan, what we hear about in many other countries. Today, the media of many countries worry that [extremism] calls [people] to conflicts and even, as you see, to wars and bloodshed. We are happy that during the years of independence we have only had mutual understanding and support from our Muslim religion and from all confessions for strengthening accord and unity between people" (BBC 1999).

While he did not draw on religious rhetoric during this period, nor did he attack Islam. In general, his rhetoric relating to religion was tolerant, and in one interview in June of 1999 he went so far as to say that the term "Wahhabism" was not negative, and instead "signified a striving for pureness of faith" (Rotar 2004a). This set him apart from the rest of Central Asian leaders, who had been using the "Wahhabi" as a blanket term to describe religious undesirables who practice independently from state-sponsored Islam. However, after the 1999 attacks in Kyrgyzstan carried out by the IMU, such positive rhetoric towards Wahhabism stopped. For example, during a radio interview in 2000, Akayev claimed that "...for centuries and to this day the Kyrgyz have always advocated liberal Islam. The Kyrgyz, as a nomadic people, have exclusively advocated liberal Islam and they have never advocated Orthodox Islam like Wahhabism and fundamentalism and other trends. So the people of Kyrgyzstan reject, and I personally, as the country's president...reject Wahhabism" (BBC 2000a).

Even so, as late as the last year of his rule, Akayev did not blame Islam for the region's political problems. When speaking on Kyrgyz TV in 2004 about the publication of his fourth book, "Thinking of the Future with Optimism: Speculation on Foreign Policy and Philosophic Reasoning", he explained that his book argues that "There has been a lot of criticism of Islam and Muslims over the past decade. An equals sign has even been drawn between Islam and terrorism as sources of terrorism. We of course cannot agree with this. We Kyrgyz people live on blessed soil where all the world religions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism – co-existed in peace and promoted development and prosperity a thousand years ago" (BBC 2004).

This strategy of rhetoric—recognition of the importance of Islam without himself using its doctrine or deriving arguments from the faith, and denying any threat to the status-quo from Islam—is perhaps best summed up by a passage from Akayev's 1994 book, *Kyrgyzstan on the Way to Progress and Democracy*: "Undoubtedly, Islam is a constituent part of Kyrgyz nation, culture, our

history and our lifestyle. I personally respect Islamic values deeply, just like the values of any other religion. My heart has long responded to the motto of the first settlers who founded the USA: “If God does not rule us, tyrants will do that”. Yet, I have always been and I am a staunch and consistent opponent of any religious extremism, Islamic or other fundamentalisms. I declare here with full responsibility that Islamic fundamentalists who acknowledge religious leadership rather than government rule have no chance to succeed in Kyrgyzstan. This is so for many different reasons. Historically Islam couldn’t penetrate deep into the wide masses and it didn’t manage to distort our people’s self-identification and tear it apart from national self-consciousness” (Akayev 1995, 21–22)

During Bakiyev’s rule, from 2005 until 2010, a new strategy of rhetoric related to religion emerged. After the Tulip Revolution and during a televised debate leading up to the July 10, 2005 Presidential Election, Bakiyev emphasized that “Today, religious extremism poses a serious threat in the whole world. Anyone who underrates it is making a grave mistake. Therefore, one should distinctly see [the line] between the religion, Islam, and extremism. As regards protecting the people, the state must protect its citizens against various kinds of extremism and against various kinds of violence. This is the state’s responsibility” (BBC 2005b). This statement set the tone as to what Bakiyev would say about religion; his discourse would be focused on emphasizing the danger religious extremism posed for Kyrgyzstan, and presenting a case for greater state involvement in religion. He would not, however, directly use religious rhetoric himself, nor would he define through his speeches and interviews what Kyrgyz Islam “should” look like.

Unlike Akayev, Bakiyev highlighted entrenched Islamic extremism in Kyrgyzstan, and emphasized the need to develop a moderate counter-ideology through both religious and government mechanisms, without directly defining what form this ideology would take. A month after the Tulip Revolution, during an interview, Bakiyev emphasized that “there are Islamic extremist] hotbeds in Kyrgyzstan...Sometimes, unfortunately, Islam and the Qur’an are interpreted in different ways, especially by poorly educated people. But work with such people should be done not only by the special services but also by highly educated spiritual people” (BBC 2005a). The groundwork for a strategy of not only direct state involvement in religion, but also the state working with spiritual authorities, is clear during this early period. The following year, during a publicized meeting with the Mufti, Bakiyev urged the Muftiate to do more work indoctrinating the public against extremism, and to emphasize that true Islam is not related to religious extremism. (BBC 2006a).

As late as the last months of his presidency, rhetoric concerning the desire to increase the state's role in Islam persisted. In a speech to the Congress of Accord in March of 2010, Bakiyev argued that “The fear of extremism is preventing the state from seeing the real situation, for instance, in Islam. Islamic communities preach and often support negative views about the state's role and interaction with it. I think that we should move towards a real policy of interacting with religious organizations in the country. Because regardless of our religious beliefs we all live in one country” (BBC 2006b).

After the 2010 revolution, President Almazbek Atambayev, a self-proclaimed Muslim himself, adopted a rhetorical strategy that emphasizes “traditional, Hanafi” Islam, while warning against all other interpretations. In many ways, this was reflective of Uzbekistan's rhetorical strategy throughout its history and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan's strategy of warning against foreign Islam in the 2010s. For Atambayev, Islam was both an essentially component to Kyrgyz national identity, and also a unique threat to state-sanctioned notions of what it meant to be Kyrgyz. To him, it was both a source of pride for the Kyrgyz people and a core component of their national identity, and also a blemish that was harming society and had the potential to weaken common national identity. As a result of these views, he both used religious rhetoric to prop up his preferred interpretation of “enlightened Islam”, and anti-religious rhetoric to attack “un-Kyrgyz”, “foreign” religious expression. These two strategies were often intertwined, forming a single discourse.

Atambayev did, unlike his predecessors, utilize religious rhetoric to legitimize his policies and views. For example, during a road blockage protest in 2014, Atambayev tried to use religious rhetoric to shame the protestors into ceasing their actions. During a speech, he argued that, “The people blocking the road in Alay district in particular are Muslims. The Ramadan is coming soon, how will they fast? A genuine Muslim won't throw a stone on the road even, not to speak of blocking it. How will the people blocking the road fast? Such things are done by kafirs (disbelievers in Islam) only” (AKIpress 2014a).

Another example of use of religious rhetoric, more directly related to the construction of national identity, can be seen in the President's 2014 speech to the Defense Council about the then-draft Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere. The speech is an appeal to the nation in defense of greater state involvement in religion to protect “national uniqueness, culture, traditions and customs of the polyethnic people of Kyrgyzstan”. In the speech, Atambayev begins in Russian, speaking about the new government policy and national security. His language—and tone—then shifts from Russian to Kyrgyz, and from security issues to defining Islam's role as a component of

Kyrgyz national identity. He addresses the Kyrgyz portion of his speech to “compatriots, friends, and relatives”, rather than the defense council:

Foreseeing the fact that the situation will be complex when converting to a new religion, our Prophet Muhammad prohibited forcible conversion to Islam. The prophet also prohibited imposing traditions and customs, which could be in contradiction to national customs and cultural values of nations. In short, Islam should develop in harmony with spiritual values of nations, showing respect for them and without intruding into them... Dear friends and relatives, we are Kyrgyz nation and our religion is Islam. It means we are Muslim people. We follow Prophet Muhammad, without losing our national traditions. However, there have never been religious fanatics or fanatic believers among Kyrgyz people. It is not by chance that our forefathers chose the Hanafi school. I would like to once again note the Hanafi school's difference. Speaking in the modern language, it is tolerance... We are a democratic state. We are Muslims. We believe that Islam will always exist in the world. However, at the same time we are Kyrgyz people. We wish that Kyrgyz people and Kyrgyz language always exist in the world. Allah the Almighty supported this desire and gave Kyrgyz people their independence. Therefore we are ready to take decisive measures to protect and preserve our people, our land, our language and our national culture. Everybody should remember this! (BBC 2014a)

This excerpt of Atambayev's speech can be understood as representative of the Atambayev regime's strategy towards state involvement in religion. There is an emphasis on Islam as an essential component of national identity, but only insofar as it does not preclude or supplant other “traditional” elements of Kyrgyz identity. Hanafi Islam is favored as “tolerant” of pre-Islamic tradition, without further elaboration about what distinguishes the Hanafi madhhab from other Islamic practice. It is implied that Islamic practice outside of the Hanafi school threatens democracy, the people, the land, the Kyrgyz language, and Kyrgyz culture.

Atambayev's 2016 Orozo Ait (holiday marking the end of Ramadan) speech serves as another example of how the President wove religious rhetoric serving nationalism purposes into speeches that were, at the same time, about the threat of Islam. During the address to the nation, Atambayev emphasizes that Central Asia “once was a center of the Islamic world's development” and that “Most Kyrgyz people are Muslims. Islam gained a firm foothold in our life, and we believe that Islam will exist forever in the world.”. However, he goes on to warn that the “Prophet Muhammad prohibited converting people to Islam against their will, and the prophet also prohibited imposing traditions and rituals that could run counter to the national traditions and the cultural values of peoples who assume Islam”, contending that “We are the Kyrgyz people! We have our

own culture, our own mother tongue, our own traditions and national clothes. And they in no way contradict the fundamental principles of Islam, which is why it is quite understandable that the Kyrgyz people feel resentment and concern when alien traditions and requirements are imposed on society, especially those in clothes and even more those coming under the disguise of religious [requirements]” (Interfax News Agency 2016).

Atambayev frequently warned of the danger too much, or the wrong kind of, Islamization posed to Kyrgyz national identity. In a speech addressed to the Defense Council, he warned that “too much Islamization will lead directly to mankurtization”. Mankurtization refers to a Kyrgyz folk legend where prisoners of war were turned into unthinking slaves—mankurts—by wrapping their heads in camel skins. When the skins dried, they tightened [damaging the brains of the victims], enslaving the prisoners forever, according to the legend” (Paraszczuk 2014). Above all, as Kyrgyz national author Chingiz Aitmatov wrote, “The mankurt did not know who he had been, whence and from what tribe he had come, did not know his name, could not remember his childhood, father or mother – in short, he could not recognize himself as a human being” (Aitmatov 1983, 126). For Atambayev, Islamization could “force the Kyrgyz people to abandon their national characteristics, national dress, spiritual wealth, and national identity” (Paraszczuk 2014). In particular, he feared that “Certain Muslims are currently confusing the culture of the Arabs, Bangladeshi and Pakistani people with Islam”, resulting in attempting to craft a Kyrgyz Islam that did not include elements of these foreign cultures. Such threats were used to justify the argument that the state must increase its involvement in religion. In the same speech in which he argued that Islam is confused with foreign cultures, he argued that, “If the government does not take the religious process under its control and direct it to the right path, some forces will control the process and pose a threat to the nation’s unity and our country’s future. It is necessary to adopt decisions, which will be aimed at strengthening the unity of the people, maintaining spiritual values and national identity” (BBC 2014b).

As one example of Atambayev’s fixation on combating “foreign” Islam, the hijab was a popular target in his religious rhetoric. For example, during a meeting of the Security Council in 2014, President Almazbek Atambayev spoke about the hijab controversy in Kyrgyzstan:

To preserve the national heritage and uniqueness, it is important that they would not be replaced by other norms, including the religious ones. If we do not pay attention to that, we will gradually lose our national identity. If someone imposes the so-called Islamic clothing and hijab on us, there will be a time when those who wear traditional or comfortable contemporary clothing will be called unbelievers. In the Holy Qur’an

there is no concept about what clothing is Islamic and what is not. Islam only requires clean and neat dress.<sup>52</sup>

In this example, Atambayev is carefully constructing a particular kind of religionational fusion by directly attacking so-called “foreign” Islam and defining Kyrgyz traditional and contemporary clothing as in-line with a distinctly Kyrgyz Islam.

In a speech to students and faculty at Issyk Kul State University in 2012, the tension between drawing on religious rhetoric for building a common identity and attacking certain forms of Islam as being in opposition to national identity is on display: “We are Kyrgyz, and we have our religion and customs. We are Muslims, but we should not confuse it with our culture and science. Several times I have been addressed by teachers who asked for a permission to wear hijab while teaching kids. Kyrgyzstan history has great women who participated in battles, and never closed their faces with black veils. This is not our clothing, not our culture, and we need to understand it and not go to extremes. I am a Muslim too, but we should remember our culture and traditions. We should teach our kids Kyrgyz language from kindergarten, as in adult age it is very hard to learn it. We need it for preservation of the unity and integrity of our country” (AKIpress 2012).

This rhetoric only intensified until the end of his presidency. In 2016, in response to the controversy over the billboards, President Atambayev said at a press conference that “Women in mini-skirts do not become suicide bombers” and that it is not Islam that he has a problem with, but the “Arabization of society [and the] deprivation of the Kyrgyz nation of its language and traditions” claiming that “If you do not like Kyrgyzstan you can leave our country and go wherever you want. We can pay your travel expenses, even to Syria” (BBC 2016).

Nonetheless, Atambayev also engaged in direct religious rhetoric. During his opening statements on September 28<sup>th</sup> at the “Islam in the Modern Secular State” conference, Atambayev directly quoted the Qur’an, arguing that “There is no compulsion in religion”. He uses this quote to argue against “the lifestyle, customs, clothing and culture of Muslims of other countries” being adopted in Kyrgyzstan. The Hanafi Madhhab and Sufi traditions are treated as native to Kyrgyzstan, and Atambayev emphasized that they do not clash with local traditions. He goes so far as to liken those who embrace dogmatism and “condemn the secular model of the state” as first rejecting “their

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<sup>52</sup> Translation taken from (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017, 224). Original text located at [http://www.president.kg/ru/news/4818\\_prezident\\_almazbek\\_atambaev\\_gosudarstvennoe\\_regulirovanie\\_v\\_sfere\\_religii\\_budet\\_tolko\\_usilivatsya\\_no\\_s\\_uchetom\\_osnovopolagayuschih\\_printsipov\\_svobodyi\\_sovesti\\_i\\_prav\\_cheloveka/](http://www.president.kg/ru/news/4818_prezident_almazbek_atambaev_gosudarstvennoe_regulirovanie_v_sfere_religii_budet_tolko_usilivatsya_no_s_uchetom_osnovopolagayuschih_printsipov_svobodyi_sovesti_i_prav_cheloveka/)

own traditions, language and culture”. The Qur’an and quotes of the prophet Muhammad are also used to emphasize the importance of education and non-violence (Atambayev 2017).

Since being elected President in 2017, Sooronbay Jeenbekov has emphasized the secularity of the Kyrgyz state and made calls for more regulation of religion, rarely utilizing directly religious rhetoric. In the second iteration of the international conference on “Islam in the Modern Secular State” held in Bishkek, Jeenbekov emphasized that “Modern Kyrgyzstan is a state in which religion is separated from the state. The state takes a neutral position on religious matters, does not give priority to any religion, and does not impose any religious ideology on citizens. In turn, religious organizations do not interfere in the activities of state bodies and bodies of local self-government. Moreover, the protection of everyone’s right to freedom of religion is the responsibility of the state in the sphere of religion”.

Jeenbekov does refer to Islam in positive terms, explaining that with the spread of Islam to Central Asia came cities, mosques, madrasas, libraries, architectural monuments, and “magnificent works” of Islamic scholars. He also recognizes the “Hanafi madhhab as a religion of peace, tolerance, patience, kindness, mercy and decency”, and thus calls for supporting the faith “to strengthen the unity of the people of Kyrgyzstan” (Jeenbekov 2018). The Qur’an or prophet Muhamad, however, are not referenced. Comparing these statements to Atambayev’s the previous year, there is a reduction in religious rhetoric.

Jeenbekov has referenced Islam’s contributions to Kyrgyz identity and culture in other speeches, such as a 2019 speech on the declaration of Osh as a “cultural Center of the Turkic World”, when he discusses Osh’s contributions to Islam (Jeenbekov 2019). However, thus far, it does not seem that Jeenbekov favors religious rhetoric, instead adopting a Nazarbayev-like discourse that emphasizes the religious diversity and secularity of Kyrgyzstan.

### **Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Moderate and High State Involvement in Religion**

In this section, I discuss my two cases that have adopted moderate to high levels of regulation, symbols, and rhetoric: Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, the initial years following independence were marked by moderate to high use of religious symbols, and moderate religious rhetoric. By the late 1990s, the state adopted high levels of repression as the central component of their involvement in religion, only shifting course towards greater subsidies and rhetoric and less repression in 2016 after Karimov’s death. In Tajikistan, until the 2000s the state utilized moderate repression and subsidies, low use of symbols, and moderate rhetoric. By the 2010s,



however, the state had increased its involvement in regulation and rhetoric to high levels, and also substantially increased its use of religious symbols.

### *Uzbekistan*

Quickly following independence, Uzbekistan adopted moderate to high levels of each element of state involvement in religion. During the first two years of independence (1991-1992), the state's approach was focused on subsidizing Islam and adopting its symbols and rhetoric into the nation-state. The new president, Islam Karimov, quickly elevated Islam onto the nation-state's stage, taking the oath of office on a Qur'an and referencing Islam in his inaugural speech (Standish 2016). National symbols that were adopted shortly after independence, including the flag, the national emblem, and currency all directly referenced Islam in their designs. The state adopted the slogan of "Our Islam" to begin fostering an overarching national identity (Olcott and Ziyaeva 2008, 15). Religion remains incorporated into national symbols to the present day.

The state's involvement in religion in the early 90s would be focused on the establishment of a moderate regulatory structure and the adoption of high levels of religious symbols and moderate levels of religious rhetoric. By the late 90s and into the 2000s, however, the state shifted focus away from symbolic and rhetorical involvement in religion in favor of focusing on the creation and enforcement of a national Uzbek Islam using high levels of repression. The state implemented some of the most repressive regulation towards religion in the world during this period, alongside subsidies to create a loyal cadre of clergy.<sup>53</sup> From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, it is estimated that Uzbek strategy of involvement in religion resulted in the "arrest, torture, public degradation, and incarceration in grossly inhumane conditions of an estimated 7,000 people" (Shields 2004, 1).

This repression-focused involvement in religion would continue to be reinforced and fortified until Karimov's death in 2016, at which point President Shavkat Mirziyoyev partially shifted the balance of state involvement in religious regulation from repression to subsidies and resumed utilizing moderate religious rhetoric. It remains to be seen whether the downward trend away from repressive involvement and shift towards other forms of involvement in religion continues.

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<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of how the state's strategy of involvement in religion divides religious leaders within Islam into a cadre of loyal clergy who rely on the state's patronage, and independent Islamic leaders, supported by society, who provide "the general population sanctuary from authoritarian rule in their mosques and communities, [and] are allies for those who seek political reform in Uzbekistan", see (McGlinchey 2006, 124).

## Regulation as Repression and Subsidy

In Uzbekistan, repression and subsidy co-exist at high levels, with the regime subsidizing certain forms of Islam while also repressing independent manifestations of Islam. However, in the first years of independence in the early 1990s, the state strategy of supporting “official” Islam and repressing any parallel expressions of religion had not yet fully emerged. Instead, regulatory involvement in religion was primarily focused on subsidizing the religious revival while carefully monitoring and preventing any political expressions of Islam, which the regime viewed as an oppositional threat.

During this early period from 1990-1997, regulations were primarily aimed at fostering a secular society and preventing political expression of religion. The first significant law regulating religion was the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.<sup>54</sup> This law, relative to what was to come, was aimed less at securitizing and criminalizing Islam and more at establishing a truly secular state. Even in this early phase, however, the law contained a few strict provisions, such as banning religious political parties and donations from religious organizations to political parties (Article 5) and forbidding all private religious education (Article 9).<sup>55</sup> Registration was mandatory, but lenient, only requiring 10 adult signatories (Article 13).

The Constitution, adopted in December of 1992, reflected this early strategy towards state involvement in religion.<sup>56</sup> The Constitution banned religious discrimination (Article 18), granted a right to profess any religion (Article 31), guaranteed that religious associations would be separate from the state, equal before the law, and that the state would not interfere in their activity (Article 61). The Constitution did, however, ban religious political parties, as well as public associations that advocate “religious hostility”, without defining what religious hostility is (Article 57).

During this period, the Uzbek government was actively subsidizing Islam by contributing to the maintenance of shrines. Government funds have been used to restore shrines related to the Naqshbandi Sufi order, elevating Naqshbandiyya teachings “as representative of Uzbek ‘Muslimness’ and an antidote to Islamic extremism and terror”(Louw 2007, 104). In 1991, the Uzbek authorities reopened the Naqshbandi Mausoleum—which had been used to store fertilizer during the Soviet period—and constructed a memorial complex on the site. A representative of the MBU was quoted

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<sup>54</sup> 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations: <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/65025?ONDATE=02.07.1991>

<sup>55</sup> The 1992 Constitution in Article 57 (<http://lex.uz/ru/docs/35869?ONDATE=08.12.1992>) and the 1996 Law on Political Parties in Article 3 (<http://lex.uz/ru/docs/57033>) reiterates the ban on religious political parties.

<sup>56</sup> 1992 Constitution of Uzbekistan: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uzbekistan\\_1992.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uzbekistan_1992.pdf)

as saying, “I myself am a Sufi believer of the Naqshbandi order, and so I can declare with complete confidence that today Sufi believers do not experience any pressure from the Uzbek authorities. In the Soviet era Sufi believers were certainly persecuted by the KGB...but today, praise be to Allah, things are different, and Bukhara’s central street (formerly Lenin Street) now bears the name of Bagauddin Naqshbandi (Rotar 2004b).

A New York Times article, published in October of 1997, aptly summarizes the Karimov regime’s regulative involvement in religion during the first 6 years of independence:

President Karimov, though determined to prevent fundamentalism from taking hold, has sought to conciliate and co-opt the Muslim leadership rather than repress it. Always seeking to balance competing forces, he speaks warmly about Islam despite the fact that for years he served an officially atheistic system (Kinzer 1997).

In the late 1990s, however, the honeymoon period of low-to-moderate repression alongside fiscal and institutional subsidies for Islam would end. In 1998, Karimov’s views on repression were reflected during an April meeting with the OSCE Chairman Bronislav Geremek. Karimov stressed that Islamic fundamentalism was the most important threat to stability in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia, with the potential to destabilizing Tajikistan, or create a theocratic regime. Thus, he argued, the West should understand the necessity of using repression against Muslims (Goble 1998).

Uzbekistan’s involvement in religion would drastically expand during this period. This was primarily through extensive repression of Islam generally becoming the norm, rather than more limited repression targeting public political manifestations of religion. The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations that replaced the 1991 law severely increased restrictions on basic religious practice.<sup>57</sup> The law was essentially a series of amendments to the 1991 law that reduced “freedom to manifest religious convictions, freedom to disseminate religious ideas, and freedom to assemble for religious purposes” (Beckwith 2000, 1014). This includes banning minors from being involved in religious organizations (Article 3), equivocating religion to a national security issue (Article 3 and 5); banning all kinds of missionary activity and proselytism (article 5); criminalizing vaguely defined religious “destabilizing” ideas (Article 5); banning religious “social movements” while leaving the definition of “social movements” up to the government (Article 5); establishing strict registration requirements such as requiring a minimum of 100 signatories and criminalizing unregistered religious activity (Article 8 and 11); maintaining the ban on private

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<sup>57</sup> 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations: <http://lex.uz/docs/65089?ONDATE=15.05.1998>

religious instruction (Article 7 and 9), which combined with the strict registration requirements meant all religious education was under absolute state control; restricting the wearing of “religious attire” by non-clergy in public places, enabling repression for wearing beards and headscarves (Article 14); restricting legal locations for worship, religious rites, and ceremonies (Article 14); granting extensive government censorship powers over religious publications (Article 18); and severely limiting the ability of religious organizations to disseminate any religious literature by requiring 800 signatories from at least 8 registered religious associations from 8 different territorial entities (Article 8 and 19).<sup>58</sup>

The law was followed by amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes, reflecting the turn towards harsher repression. For example, the punishment for involving minors in religious organizations in Article 145 of the Criminal Code was set at fifty to seventy-five times the monthly minimum wage, two-three years correctional labor, or up to three years imprisonment.<sup>59</sup> The 1998 Administrative Code includes punishments of 5-10 times the monthly minimum wage or arrest for 15 days for wearing religious attire in public places (Article 184) or providing religious instruction in private homes (Article 241).<sup>60</sup>

The last two years of the 90s included other legislation that drastically increased the state’s ability to dictate the content of specific religious practices and to surveil citizens looking for deviations from the state-sanctioned Islam. An April 1998 presidential decree established an intergovernmental body to identify illegal religious activities.<sup>61</sup> The following year the “Mahalla Law” and “Posbon Law” ordered local self-governing bodies to ‘take measures to stop the activity of non-registered religious organizations, to ensure observance of the rights of citizens for religious liberty,... [and] to consider other issues related to the observance of the legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations’ (Article 12) and created “Posbons”, state employees who act as ‘morality police’, providing surveillance on the local population to maintain the ‘social and moral environment’ of the mahalla (Bogner, Shields, and Struthers 2003, 11).<sup>62,63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Beckwith 2000 for a comprehensive overview of the 1998 law.

<sup>59</sup> 1998 Law on Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan (N 621-I): <http://lex.uz/docs/36433?ONDATE=30.05.1998#36879>

<sup>60</sup> Administrative Liability Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan: <http://lex.uz/docs/97661>

<sup>61</sup> 1998 Decree on the Establishment of the Interdepartmental Coordination Commission on the Study of the Law of the Activity of Religious Communities, Currents, and Groups (N VII-1989): [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact\\_id=845207](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=845207)

<sup>62</sup> 1998 Law on Institutions of Self-Governance (N 758-I), also known as the “Mahalla Law”: [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact\\_id=86238](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=86238)

<sup>63</sup> 1998 Resolution On the ‘Neighborhood Guardians’ Public Organizations Statute’ (N 180), also known as the “Posbon Law”: [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact\\_id=622966](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=622966)

During this period, subsidies for a national, politically inert Islam continued. Fifty million government soms were dedicated to the International Fund of Imam al-Bukhari by presidential decree in November of 1998, mere months after the repressive comprehensive religion law was passed. This money was earmarked to develop the Imam al-Bukhari memorial as a place of pilgrimage and to organize pilgrimages; to honor, conduct research on, and promote the legacy of Bukhari and disseminate his teachings in a way that fosters a “spirit of national pride and patriotism...and national moral traditions”; to raise “the spiritual and educational attainment of our people...fostering a sense of national pride...love for the motherland...and effectively using the spiritual heritage of Imam al-Bukhari...to strengthen devotion to eastern ethics”; to publish religio-historical books and documents in Uzbek, including an annotated Qur’an and collections of hadiths; and other religious goals.<sup>64</sup>

It should be noted, however, that this subsidy did not include genuine support beyond a superficial level designed to combat practices the regime viewed as threatening. For example, in the early 2000s, members of the subsidized Naqshbandi order were forbidden from building a “khakana”, a monastery for wandering Sufis, by the authorities. As a result, Sufis were forced to study and worship in their private apartment, an illegal practice. The National Security Service monitored these private meetings, warning Sufis they are illegal. The authorities during this period treated the entire “murid” system of Sufi learning as a possible terrorist threat, and detained numerous sheiks for questioning. All this occurred while the state was outwardly promoting its support for Sufism (Rotar 2004b).

By 2000, the government strategy of using regulation to consolidate a national, “Uzbek” form of Islam was in full effect. The MBU, in March of 2000, adopted the program “On the Defense of our Sacred Religion from Fundamentalism and Various Extremist Currents” (Muqaddas dinimizni himoyasi, aqidaparastlik va turli ekstremistik oqimlarga qarshi kurash dasturi), which officially established Hanafi dogma as binding and required all imams to work against non-Hanafi religious expression (Khalid 2003, 590, 2015). The same year, the government gave the MBU the power to regulate and oversee licensing and activities of *bibi otuns*, female spiritual leaders who play a critical role in daily spiritual life. The regulation stipulates that not only must these women obtain licenses from the MBU, but also that their activity will be carried out conforming to ‘Uzbek’ Islam, promoting only beliefs that conform with national tradition in general and the Hanafi madhab in

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<sup>64</sup> 1998 Decree on Support of the International Fund of Imam al-Bukhari (N 2110): <http://lex.uz/docs/276315>

particular (Gamza and Jones 2019). The women are also tasked with “promoting a healthy lifestyle among women by explaining that religious extremism and fanaticism are incompatible with the religion of Islam”, discouraging large weddings in accordance with “national tradition”, and to support fatwas of the state-controlled MBU.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the rest of the 2000s and 2010s, until Karimov’s death in 2016, the state involvement included both intensive repression and subsidy of religion. During the 2000s and early 2010s, the legal framework repressing and subsidizing religion would not see significant change, but more laws would be passed intensifying repression and increasing penalties for practicing unsanctioned, “foreign” forms of Islam. Numerous amendments would be made to the criminal and administrative codes drastically increasing—in some cases more than tripling—fines and incarceration time for religious crimes, such as for violating laws on religious ceremonies, producing and distributing religious literature, and promoting religious hatred.<sup>66</sup> Regulations were also established during this period to give the government greater control over private religious practice, such as over the celebration of life-cycle events, obtaining religious literature, and accessing websites with religious content. This regulation also expanded into holidays in the public sphere. In 2015, the Education Ministry warned that parents would face a fine of roughly \$750, or 15 months’ salary at minimum wage, if their children were caught inside a mosque during special Eid celebrations or regular prayer services (RFE/RL’s Uzbek Service 2015).

In early to mid 2010s, the state increasingly involved itself in religious repression by strengthening its capacity to monitor and intervene in religious practice. For example, a 2014 law empowered the Ministry of Internal Affairs and local self-governing bodies to identify individuals who might be “involved in banned religious and extremist organizations and take action against them”, and to actively “[suppress] banned or unregistered religious organizations” (Gamza and Jones 2019).<sup>67</sup>

Subsidy, targeted on propagating apolitical, “Uzbek” Islam, did continue through this period. For example, in 2008 Karimov enacted a resolution that established a fund to preserve and restore shrines related to a number of specific religious figures, as well as to fund religious education and

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<sup>65</sup> 2000 Regulation on Issuance of Licenses to Otuns (N 978) can be found here, but is only available in Uzbek: <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/769051>

<sup>66</sup> Examples of these amendments include [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?actForm=1&lact\\_id=946866&ONDATE=30.12.2005%2000#947243](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?actForm=1&lact_id=946866&ONDATE=30.12.2005%2000#947243) and [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?actForm=1&lact\\_id=1018706&ONDATE=23.06.2006%2000#1018766](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?actForm=1&lact_id=1018706&ONDATE=23.06.2006%2000#1018766)

<sup>67</sup> 2014 Law on the Prevention of Criminal Offenses (N 371): [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?guid=91&lact\\_id=2387359](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?guid=91&lact_id=2387359)

“deeply instill into the hearts and minds of...young people...the valuable heritage of saints and intellectuals who have made these places into sacred places of memorial and worship”.<sup>68</sup> As during other periods, the purpose of these subsidies were to encourage national “Uzbek” Islam that was easily controlled and politically inert.

Since Mirziyoyev assumed power after Karimov’s death in 2016, however, Uzbekistan has begun reducing religious repression, while continuing to subsidize their preferred interpretation of Islam. Shortly after Mirziyoyev took office, a series of regulations were passed designed, in part, to promote a particular, nationalistic religious narrative to prevent extremism. These policies emphasized the need to indoctrinate youth against extremist ideas, to promote patriotism and national values as a bulwark against extremism, and to improve the capacity for preventative law enforcement (Gamza and Jones 2019).<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the most notable step in this reduction was the President’s January 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 firing of the head of the National Security Service (SNB), Rustam Inoyatov, a close Karimov ally who had run the SNB for almost 23 years and was responsible for the blacklisting of 17,000 individuals as “extremists”, grouping devout Muslims together with Islamists. Mirziyoyev has referred to Inoyatov’s SNB as a “mad dog” that is “exceeding its authority...[committing] atrocities [including torture]”. He has invoked the Stalinist Great Terror in condemning his security agency, claiming to an audience of local activists in Bukhara in February 18 that “It wasn’t like this even in 1937” (Ashurov 2018).

Since the dismissal of Inoyatov, Mirziyoyev removed 16,000 names from the extremist blacklist, which included children and relatives of imprisoned religious believers, many of whom were not even aware they were included on the list (Synovitz 2018a; USCIRF 2018, 3). Organizations monitoring religious rights, including the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, have been allowed to send delegations into the country for the first time in over a decade (USCIRF 2018, 2). Over 1,000 prisoners being held for religious crimes have been released, and 13 new Muslim religious organizations have been granted registration (Catherine 2018). Religious practices that were once banned and could lead to suspicion and arrest, such as all-night prayers during Ramadan, are being allowed (Nishanov 2017).

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<sup>68</sup> 2008 Resolution on the Organization of the Activity of the Charitable Fund on the Preservation and Improvement of Holy Places of Muslims (N IIII-938): <http://lex.uz/docs/1514649>

<sup>69</sup> [http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?guid=112&lact\\_id=3159825](http://lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?guid=112&lact_id=3159825), <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/3165011>, <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/3175734>

In March of 2018, in response to a UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief report criticizing the “extreme surveillance” of religious practice, falsified terrorism charges, and the repressive nature of the 1998 religion law, the Uzbek government adopted a plan to implement the UN recommendations on religious freedom (HRW 2018). The existence of the report was a substantial indication of a shift in Uzbekistan’s regulatory framework, as the UN Special Rapporteur, Ahmed Shaheed, was the first special rapporteur invited into the country since 2002. The government roadmap, adopted in 2018 and finalized by joint resolution of the Legislative Chamber and Senate on January 18, 2019, includes a nine-step plan for addressing the UN criticisms, their implementation mechanisms, timelines (all of which are to be completed in 2019), and agencies of responsibility. The plan, which will be given “broad media coverage”, includes international conferences on religious tolerance and religious education, the drafting of a new concept on interfaith tolerance, the development and implementation of training seminars for government officials on complying with legislation on freedom of religion, the translation of OSCE documents on freedom of religion into Uzbek and their publication, and conducting focus groups and surveys with small religious groups among others.<sup>70</sup>

Mirziyoyev’s reforms in the sphere of religion are not limited to repression; the state has also decidedly turned towards greater subsidies. As Annette Bohr, a Chatham House analyst puts it, Mirziyoyev “is attempting to upgrade the role of moderate Islam and the face of moderate Islam”, leveraging the state’s involvement in religion to do so (Synovitz 2018a).

This shift towards greater subsidies, that generally support Muslim beliefs and values rather than selectively subsidizing religionational symbols, can be seen in the controversy surrounding the airing and subsequent banning of the Turkish soap opera, “Endless Love”, in Uzbekistan. The soap opera, produced since 2015 and which has high ratings throughout much of the Middle East and Afghanistan, began airing in Uzbekistan in August 2017. The program covers themes such as adultery, sex out of wedlock, murder, suicide, and has an overarching theme that love triumphs over arranged marriages. Since the program’s premier in Uzbekistan, it has garnered negative attention from both moderate and radical Muslims, with radical Islamist website Azon.uz publishing five articles in one month condemning the program as sinful, and the state-run Muslim Spiritual Directorate condemned the program as entertainment “under the sway of Western influence”. On February 14, 2018, it was reported that Prime Minister Abdullah Aripov has ordered an investigation

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<sup>70</sup> Joint Ruling on the Road Map for the Implementation of Proposals and Recommendations in the Sphere of Freedom of Religion and Belief: <http://lex.uz/docs/4259093>



of the show, and by the end of that week, the twice-daily broadcasts on “Endless Love” on the private channel Zo’r TV had been banned by the state (Synovitz 2018a).

There are numerous other examples of Mirziyoyev’s subsidy of Islam. On November 7, 2017, Mirziyoyev ordered government halal standards be developed and implemented.<sup>71</sup> This is a significant gesture, given that, according to Nurulloh Muhammad Raufkhon, an exiled Uzbek writer who recently returned to Uzbekistan, that “Previously, we were banned from using the word ‘halal’. I know because I used to work at ... a religious magazine .... Halal restaurants were closed down. The word ‘halal’ was removed from product labels” (Mamatkulov 2017).

This fits into a broader program of attracting Muslim tourism into the country, and a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the State Committee for the Development of Tourism, the Committee for Religious Affairs, and the Turkish Office for Religious Affairs, to encourage “ziyosat tourism” or “pilgrimage tourism” and raise the popularity of pilgrimages to Uzbekistan to participate in religious events (Sputnik 2018b). Another element of this strategy is the introduction of “Muslim hospitality” ratings, which indicate the quality of services provide to tourists on pilgrimage (Ivanushkina 2019). This strategy is already paying dividends, and as of 2019 Crescent Rating and Mastercard rated Uzbekistan among the top-ten countries for ziyosat tourism among Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, a fact the government has proudly publicized (Isaev 2019; Press Service of the State Committee of Tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2019).

As part of this Muslim tourism push, the authorities have ordered that at least 10 percent of hotel provide Qur’ans in their rooms, that 10 percent of hotel rooms include prayer mats, and that 30 percent of rooms include signs of the Qibla (the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca for the purposes of prayer) (Anvar 2017). The state, in 2018, also ordered the construction of “mini-mosques” alongside roads to facilitate the five daily prayers and meet the needs of tourists, with 22 being constructed in Tashkent (RFE/RL’s Uzbek Service 2018). Additionally, the first prayer room for Muslims in the Islam Karimov International Airport in Tashkent was opened in 2017 (Fergana News Agency 2017).

The MBU has also lobbied Mirziyoyev for leniency in allowing Muslim women to wear headscarves, and to introduce religious studies into Uzbek schools (Radio Ozodlik 2017). On the first point, headscarf bans remain in effect and eight religious bloggers were detained for criticizing

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<sup>71</sup> Presidential Regulations On additional measures to support domestic exporters of fruits and vegetables, grapes, melons and gourds, legumes, as well as dried vegetables and fruits, Article 6: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/1211>

the banning of the hijab as part of a school uniform by government decree in 2018 (Putz 2018). On the second point, however, the religious lobby has had some success. For example, in May of 2017 the Mir-I Arab madrassa, the oldest in Uzbekistan and the only madrassa allowed to operate during the Soviet period, had its status upgraded to an institute of higher learning from a secondary school, putting it on par with only the Islamic Institute in Tashkent. It offers two-year undergraduate degrees and three year graduate courses in Islamic disciplines, and is open to both Uzbek citizens and foreigners, and is the first strictly religious college in the country (The Islamic Institute in Tashkent provides non-religious courses) (Eurasianet 2018). In January of 2019, Mirziyoyev himself helped oversee the establishment of the School of Hadith Science in Samarkand, which will offer five-year programs studying Islamic jurisprudence, Qur’anic exegesis, and foreign-language learning to students (Press Service of the President of Uzbekistan 2019). Finally, in April of 2018 the Tashkent Islamic University was redubbed the International Islamic Academy, emphasizing that it admits students from abroad (Eurasianet 2019).<sup>72</sup>

This willingness of the state to not only step back its repressive policies, but also to institutionally support Muslim practice and morals, has not gone unnoticed by religious leaders and believers. For example, in the November of 2017, Imams across Uzbekistan, including in Tashkent, Andijan, and Feghana, emboldened by Mirziyoyev’s reforms and support for Islam, began using loudspeakers to amplify the Muslim call to prayer. The practice had not been widely seen since the Andijan massacre in 2015, which the government blamed on Muslim extremists. After the massacre, Karimov cracked down on the amplification of the call to prayer with an unofficial ban. At an October 2017 meeting with the Muftiate attended by imams from across the country, many petitioned the MBU to allow the revival of the amplified adhan, arguing that it would reduce sinfulness. There were no reports of clerics being prosecuted for breaking the ban. Public reception was mixed, with one commenter on Facebook responding that “It is great, the azan is an integral part of our history. This way we will not forget it, I love this president,”, with another responding to the post, “I am not against the call to prayer, but I am not inspired by the rest. We’re not sliding into an Islamic state this way, are we?” (Eurasianet 2017). Another young man, interviewed outside of one of the mosques amplifying the adhan from its minaret, said “People should hear that it’s prayer time. That’s what Muslim life is about” (Mamatkulov 2017).

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<sup>72</sup> Presidential Decree on measures for radical improvement of the religious and educational sphere: <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/3686277>

This broad perception that repression is decreasing suggests that the population should be receiving a revised signal from the state concerning religious identity since 2016, leading to a reduction of the deleterious effect of repression on RNF.

### Symbols

Unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the Uzbek regime chose to infuse national symbols with religious content quickly after independence. This infusion of religious symbols into physical representations of the nation has continued throughout through Karimov's rule and into Mirzoyoyev's presidency.

While the Uzbek anthem and motto (Kuch Adolatdadir!, or Strength in Justice) do not include references to religion, most other major national symbols adopted by the state incorporate religious iconography to some degree.

The Uzbek flag for example, which was adopted in 1991,<sup>73</sup> includes a green stripe, which the Uzbek government officially claimed symbolizes "...nature, new life, and fertility in many Muslim-majority states" (Kadyrov, Askarov, and Ahmedov 1991, 2). The flag also includes the crescent and star symbol, commonly associated with the Ottoman Empire and the broader Muslim world.

The national emblem, adopted in 1992,<sup>74</sup> contains not only the religious symbolism from the flag, but is also surmounted by the star of Rub el Hizb, a symbol associated with the division of the Qur'an into sixty Hizbs, further divided into four parts notated by the Rub el Hizb as a way of facilitating recitation. Within the Rub el Hizb on the emblem is the star and crescent from the flag. Also in 1992, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha were enshrined as national holidays.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, Uzbek currency draws heavily on Islam in its design and symbols. The first series of banknotes, issued in 1993, all included the Sher-Dor Madrasah at the Registran on the reverse, with the coat of arms on the obverse, which includes the star and crescent symbol. The second and current series, first issued in 1994, featured the Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum<sup>76</sup> on the 3 so'm note, the Shah-i-Zinda complex<sup>77</sup> on the 25 so'm note, the three

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<sup>73</sup> Law on the State Flag of the Republic of Uzbekistan: <http://www.lex.uz/acts/57181>

<sup>74</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on The State Emblem of the Republic of Uzbekistan (No. 616-XII): <http://www.lex.uz/acts/17771>

<sup>75</sup> See 1992 Decree N 669-XII (<http://lex.uz/ru/docs/102288>) and 1992 Decree N 368 (<http://lex.uz/ru/docs/239372?>)

<sup>76</sup>The Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum is said to be the site where the biblical Job made a well by striking the ground with his staff.

<sup>77</sup> The Shah-i-Zinda necropolis includes a number of religious structures and is by legend said to be the burial place of Kusam ibn Abbas, a cousin of the prophet Muhammad who is said to have been martyred while preaching Islam in 7<sup>th</sup> century Samarkand.

Madrasahs of the Registan on the 50 so'm note, and traditional Islamic interlace patterns on the obverse of the 5, 10, 25, 50, and 100 so'm notes. The 200 so'm note introduced in 1997 also included a lion and sun mosaic from the Sherdor Madrasah at the Registan.

It should be noted, however, that since 2012 smaller denominations have been being phased out and replaced by coins that, with the exception of the tiger mosaic on the 200 so'm coin introduced in 2018, do not include religious symbols save the crescent moon and star on the emblem. As of early 2019, only the 50 so'm note displaying the three Madrasahs of the Registan and the 200 so'm note displaying the tiger mosaic remain in circulation, with the other banknotes with religious symbols having been withdrawn in 2012, and by mid-2020 all banknotes with religious symbolism on them will have been withdrawn (Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2018).

Notably, taking the oath of office for the first time in 1991, President Islam Karimov chose to be sworn in on the Qur'an. President Mirziyoyev continued this national tradition when he was sworn in on both the Constitution and a copy of the Qur'an in 2016 (Yeni Şafak 2016). Another example of recent state use of religious symbols can be seen in the recent required oath-taking ceremony administered to police in December of 2018. As part of a national presidential decree aimed at reducing corruption, all police in Yukorichirchik, a district near Tashkent, were required to swear on the Qur'an that they would "not take bribes" or "engage in extortion". The chief imam from the district was called in to help lead the ceremony. On social media, Uzbeks commented on the oath-ceremony saying "that the country's police and the Qur'an were like entities from different universes during the 26 years the late President...ruled Uzbekistan" (Synovitz 2018b).

The Uzbek state has used religious symbols in other ways less directly tied to the physical reproduction and representation of the nation. For example, despite his history of brutal control over religion, immediately after Karimov's death the state-controlled Council of Ulema announced that one of Tashkent's oldest mosque would be renamed after the late president (RFE/RL 2016). Karimov's daughter publicly announced the decision on social media, and said that, "The rebirth of the Islom Ota Mosque is a truly historic event, which, we hope, will contribute to preserving the religious and spiritual values of our people... I hope that the Islom Ota Mosque will continue to serve as an important venue for spiritual growth and education, contributing to the true values of Islam, such as peace, mercy, compassion and helping people in need" (UzDaily 2016). Karimov himself, rather than being buried in a secular setting, had a religious funeral administered in Registan square by the Mufti to all-male mourners. His body was then was then buried at the Hazrati Hizir mosque in Samarkand, one of the oldest Muslim structures in Samarkand and a UNESCO

monument (Jahon Ramzo Travel 2011; BBC News 2016).

### Rhetoric

Shortly after independence, the government adopted a program of religious rhetoric in an attempt to create overarching national identity, bolstered by local identities, with Islam at its center. “Our [national] Islam” was a government slogan, used to draw early legitimacy from religion in the construction of state-sanctioned national identity (Olcott and Ziyeva 2008, 15; Sattarov 2017, 6). Karimov himself recognized that he needed to draw on Islam to some extent for political legitimacy, and thus not only took the oath of office on the Qur’an, but also made a pilgrimage to Mecca as one of his first post-independent trips, though was careful to do so outside of hajj season so as not to send too strong of a signal (Kinzer 1997). He spoke to the press about how he and his family follow Muslim dietary laws and how he planned to return nationalized property to Islamic organizations in order to support religious education for children (Olcott 2012a, 199; Rotar 1992, 3).

Much of Karimov’s religious rhetoric can be found in his collected works that constitute his “Ideology of National Independence”, which have been required reading in Uzbek schools. Spirituality and enlightenment (Ma’naviyat v Ma’rifat) are a recurrent theme in these works, which attempt to separate these concepts from independent Islam and fill the “space left by the disappearance of Marxism-Leninism, and thus to prevent competing ideational projects—chiefly the Islamic project—from taking root in Uzbek society” (Sattarov 2017, 2).

For example, in Karimov’s 1992 book, “Uzbekistan: The Road of Independence and Progress”, in a section on the “spiritual and moral” foundations of Uzbekistan, Karimov venerates Islamic figures such as Imam Al-Bukhari and At-Termezi as “people of profound spirituality” whose “personalities have been preserved in the hearts and minds of our people” and who serve as a component of the collective memory of the nation (Karimov 1992, 63). However, this spiritual component of the nation is secularized; Islam is not mentioned at all in this section, and spirituality is said to appear “when man feels himself to be an integral part of the nation and devotes his life and work to his people” (62-63), which derives from the motherland itself.

By the mid to late 1990s, Karimov’s use of religious rhetoric was clearly focused on neutering Islam’s political potential and fostering a politically inert national Islam as the one, “true” Uzbek Islam. In his book, “Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century,” Karimov devotes a chapter to the religious extremism and fundamentalism. He points out that, during the nation building process, Islam plays dual roles: 1) its cultural values, “its traditions and its huge spiritual heritage greatly contribute not only to the historical evolution of our region, but also to the

qualitative shaping of its new image”, and 2) “as an instrument in the political struggle for control and influence over the political mind of the masses, Islam is able to play the role of a banner under which forces are united that do not pursue definite program objectives, but are guided by only one goal – that is the struggle for power” (Karimov 1997, 24–25). Karimov engages religious rhetoric in the chapter, recognizing Islam as “the religion of our ancestors” that can serve as the sometimes “sole means of preserving and transferring universal and spiritual values from generation to generation” (20). However, most of the chapter is spent warning of the destructive potential of religion as a locus of political mobilization, and in particular Wahhabism. He sets out “to make clear the difference between the spiritual values of religion and certain ambitions – political and other aggressive goals – which are far from religious, which certain forces try to make us achieve using slogans, inter alia the Islamic revival” (20). Ironically, he also warns against the usage of Soviet-style religious repression in response to this threat, pointing out that “thousands of mosques and hundreds of madrasahs...were destroyed...[and] religion was deliberately exploited as a weapon in the ideological struggle...where Islamic education was banned...[leading to flourishing] superstitions, sometimes reactionary” (23).

Karimov continued to deploy religious rhetoric that emphasized the humanistic, selflessness, and tolerance that the “right” form of Islam teaches, tempered by attacks on independent forms of Islam, throughout the remainder of his life. In his decrees recognizing Muslim holidays, he would declare the holidays “an eternal tradition of our people”, recognize “role and importance of this day in our spiritual life”, emphasizing the importance of kindness the holiday represents.<sup>78</sup> Declaring the holiday a national holiday was a matter of “preserv[ing] and strengthen[ing] national and spiritual values”, and in later years, Karimov ordered that funds be used to facilitate celebration at a high-level “in accordance with the national values of our people”, and ordered state media to “widely cover events related to the celebration.”<sup>79</sup>

During the same mid to late period, however, Karimov was not afraid of referring to extremism in his speeches in stark, violent terms. In a live radio broadcast speech to parliament, Karimov said that Islamic extremists “must be shot in the head. If necessary, I’ll shoot them myself”. His religious rhetoric during this period was predicated on the idea that the “wrong” kind of religion must be stopped by any means necessary (Khalid 2003, 587).

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<sup>78</sup> 2004 and 2005 Resolution On the Celebration of Kurban-Ait (N 42 and 14): <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/1687777> and <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/-419446>

<sup>79</sup> 2013 and 2014 Resolutions On the Celebration of Kurban-Ait (N 2046 and 2238): <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/2247911> And <http://lex.uz/ru/docs/2525573>

Mirziyoyev's speeches incorporate religious rhetoric more regularly than Karimov's did during most of his tenure, and are also less critical of Islam. Since Mirziyoyev took power in 2016, educational institutions have progressively stopped teaching Karimov's works (Sattarov 2017, 7). Mirziyoyev frequently endorses Islam as a core component of Uzbekistani identity in his rhetoric, referring to the faith as "sacred" and speaking of the "promotion of sacred Islamic values". Islamic values and history is presented as "the focus of our ancestral values" and "stored and reproduced in the genetic code" of the Uzbek people, worthy of preservation, study, and transmission from generation to generation (Mirziyoyev 2016).

Mirziyoyev has also used religious rhetoric to reorient Uzbekistan's relationship with Islam while on the international stage. In a 2017 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Mirziyoyev highlighted that presenting the humanism of Islam to the world is a national goal, that Uzbekistan's "sacred religion" is a "focal point of primordial values", and that Imam Bukhari, a national symbol of Uzbekistan, was "the author of the second most important book in Islam after the Qur'an – "Sahih al-Bukhari." He goes on to emphasize that the Imam Bukhari International Research Center in Samarkand is being constructed to preserve and spread this Uzbekistani Islamic heritage (Mirziyoyev 2017c).

Mirziyoyev also emphasizes the importance of introducing youth to Uzbekistan's Islamic heritage in his speeches. When he speaks about the Imam Bukhari International Research Center, he frequently emphasizes the importance of exposing youth to the "humanistic element of enlightened Islam" and to "instill a sense of pride in our rich [Islamic] history and cultural heritage (Mirziyoyev 2017d, 2017a). In another speech to the Supreme Assembly, Mirziyoyev emphasizes the importance of the new schools [that] have been created for the study of Hadith, Islamic law, Sufism and other areas" at the "memorial complexes of our great thinkers" under his tenure (Mirziyoyev 2017b).

While Mirziyoyev does still frequently warn of the dangers of religious extremism, his rhetoric on this issue is softer than Karimov's and even grants some legitimacy to the grievances of former extremists. For example, in his 2018 International Women's Day speech, Mirziyoyev notes that "in order to improve the spiritual and moral atmosphere in our society, we changed our attitude towards those who, having stumbled, unknowingly came under the influence of religious extremist movements. We turned to these people, listened to their concerns, and it gives its results. Thousands of such citizens returned to normal today" (Mirziyoyev 2018). In his 2019 Women's Day speech, when talking about the mistakes of the past, Mirziyoyev discusses rehabilitation assistance being

provided to over 3,000 previously blacklisted for suspected involvement with religious extremist organizations (Mirziyoyev 2019).

Finally, while religious education has begun to be subsidized under the Mirziyoyev regime as discussed earlier in this chapter, and Karimov's secular ideology is being replaced, the content of this new religious education is still carefully dictated by the state to maintain an "Uzbek" Islam (Cornell and Zenn 2018, 33–34). The program to improve religious education, dubbed "Enlightenment Against Ignorance", is first and foremost aimed at "preserving religious and national values" (Eurasianet 2019).

### *Tajikistan*

During and immediately after the Civil War in the late 1990s, Tajikistan utilized only low to moderate levels of regulation, symbols, and rhetoric. However, since the 2000s, Tajikistan has undergone the greatest shift in state involvement in religion, ranging from low subsidies and repression—including allowing Central Asia's only legal religious political party to operate—to absolute cooptation and control of Islam by the regime through regulation, with clergy becoming fully subsidized as state employees and independent expression outside of the purview of the state being harshly repressed. During this same period, the state has intensified religious rhetoric. Rahmon uses references to specific religious doctrine to justify his policies and embellish his speeches, engages in public performative displays of his piety, and the state has fully coopted religious education to control the curriculum. The state has also intensified its use of religious symbols, imbuing the construction of religious infrastructure in Dushanbe with nationalistic significance and declaring 2009 as the "Year of the Great Imam".

#### Regulation as Repression and Subsidy

Before and during the Civil War period, and after the civil war into the mid-2000s, religious regulation in Tajikistan was tolerant of Islam, and largely in line with the 1994 Constitution. The first significant legislation on religion, the 1993 Resolution on the Registration of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tajikistan" officially recognized the Muftiate as the successor to SADUM, and granted the organization the exclusive right to administer fatwas "strictly according to the order of Islam".<sup>80</sup> The resolution also give the Muftiate decision-making powers over religious practices such as pursuing Islamic education abroad, but also created a hierarchy

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<sup>80</sup> N 420: [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=30579233](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30579233)



requiring the Muftiate to forward their decisions to the appropriate state body responsible for religious affairs for final approval (Gamza and Jones 2019).

The 1994 Constitution did not devote much attention to religion beyond establishing a separation of church and state (Article 8) and enshrining free choice and practice of religion (Article 26). A month after the constitution was passed, the primary religion law that would establish the character of the state's involvement in religion until the mid-2000s.<sup>81</sup> The law, relative to what was to come in the mid-2000s onward, limited the state's power to interfere in religious affairs, while still establishing a regulatory body that would be given greater power to control and repress in the future. The law "guaranteed freedom of conscience, established separation of church and state, and gave religious groups the right to participate in public life equal to other public associations while forbidding religious organizations from participating in politics. It also established registration procedures; non-taxable donations to religious organizations; broad rights for conducting religious ceremonies and rituals; the ability to acquire, use, and create religious literature; and rights to maintain foreign religious contacts, study religion abroad, and invite foreign missionaries to Tajikistan in consultation with the state. Article 29 of the law established the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), which was given broad responsibility for enforcement and designated as the state advisory body on religion" (Gamza and Jones 2019, 10).

When the Civil War concluded in 1997, the state quickly moved to assert control over religion, while still complying with the peace agreement, which stated that United Tajik Opposition political parties, which included the IRPT, be legalized and given 30% of positions in the executive branch.<sup>82</sup> To comply with the peace agreement, a law was passed and the constitution was amended (Article 28) to permit religious political parties.<sup>83,84</sup>

Despite being bound by the peace agreement, the government still acted to limit political expressions of religion during the early 2000s. The regime quickly dissolved the Muftiate, which had sided with the opposition during the Civil War, and transferred its powers to the new Council of Ulema, which was placed under much stricter state control (Karagiannis 2010, 19). In 2004, a Council of Ulema fatwa banned women from mosques. This fatwa was issued despite opposition

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<sup>81</sup> 1995 Law on Religion and Religious Organizations (N 120): <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Tajikistan/religion3.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> For details of the peace agreement, see: [https://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2010\\_15Key%20elements%20of%20the%20Tajikstan%20peace%20agreement\\_2001\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2010_15Key%20elements%20of%20the%20Tajikstan%20peace%20agreement_2001_ENG.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> 1999 Law on Political Parties (N 680): [http://base.mmk.tj/view\\_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=58](http://base.mmk.tj/view_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=58)

<sup>84</sup> Tajik Constitution as of 2000, with 1999 amendments italicized: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ac6b50910.pdf>

from the IRPT (Aliev and Sindelar 2004). The rationale behind the judgement was ostensibly that there was a lack of separate space for women and men to pray, though some argued it was a government action aimed at reducing the prominent role women play in banned political Islamic groups such as Hizb-ut Tahrir (Bakhtiyor 2014). Rahmon himself spoke out to warn women against disobeying the fatwa (Pannier 2004).

During the early-mid 2000s, there was little change regarding regulation of religion. The shift towards greater assertion of the regime over religious activity occurred beginning in 2006. As part of an executive reshuffling after the 2006 presidential election aimed at cleansing executive agencies of members of the political opposition, the SCRA was dissolved and its powers were given to the Ministry of Culture (Jan Tomek 2018; Hélène Thibault 2018, 119). Following this action, the state began drafting and implementing policy that supported traditional Islam while putting pressure on forms of Islam the state deemed foreign or non-conformist (Olcott 2012b, 39).

The groundwork to create this politically safe national Islam was established through two major laws in the late 2000s. First, in 2007 a law was passed that “...aims to protect the true values of national culture and respect for folk customs...” by giving the state regulatory power over “traditions, rites, and celebrations”.<sup>85</sup> The law is justified as “promot[ing] poverty reduction and prevent[ing] unnecessary expenses”, but in practice, the powers it gives the government can be used to limit the scope and scale of rites and celebrations associated with Islam, limiting the number of people permitted at these events and thus preventing potential mobilization. More fundamentally, the law signifies the state’s incursion into private religious practice, allowing it to directly influence the character and content of “traditional” practice. Notably, the law gave authorities regulatory powers over *bibi-otuns*, or female spiritual leaders who play an important role in Tajik religious life. The women, who are perceived by the state as potential vectors of radicalization, are closely monitored by the authorities down to the *jamoat* (municipality) and mahalla level, where lists of the women are maintained, women are pushed to serve as informants to the authorities, and many of their rituals and traditions have been banned on the grounds of being used to organize “radical groups” (Cieślewska 2016, 517).

The second major law that established the state’s regulatory involvement in religion was the 2009 “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations”, which replaced the 1994

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<sup>85</sup> Law On Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Rituals in the Republic of Tajikistan (N 272): [http://base.mmkt.tj/view\\_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174&language=ru](http://base.mmkt.tj/view_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174&language=ru)

Religion Law.<sup>86</sup> This law, “tightened registration requirements; regulated the creation and possession of religious literature;<sup>87</sup> limited the number and location of new mosques; restricted religious services and rituals to designated places of worship, holy places, cemeteries, and private homes; stiffened restrictions on religious education; and added constraints on religious political influence. This draconian law signaled a fundamental shift in the government’s regulatory strategy toward the creation of a state-sanctioned Islam that could be more easily controlled. The law not only declared Islam as a ‘traditional religion’ of Tajikistan, but recognized the Hanafi madhab as playing a ‘special role in the development of national culture and spiritual life of the people of Tajikistan’ (preamble). Further, it gave the state a direct role in the selection of imam-khatibs and imams (Article 11), who were already effectively state employees” (Gamza and Jones 2019, 29–30).<sup>88</sup>

Following this action, and with the purge of opposition leaders from executive bodies completed, the state reconstituted the SCRA in 2010.<sup>89</sup> This time, however, the body was given much greater authority and a substantial agenda. They were tasked not only with enforcing existing regulations and drafting new ones, but also with surveilling religious groups, organizing and approving pilgrimages, and overseeing the approval and selection of clergy. Today, the SCRA dictates dress code for imams and imam-khatibs,<sup>90</sup> writes their sermons, and administers their pay (Putz 2016).

With the legislative framework to repress and subsidize Islam set in the late 2000s, the regime shifted its attention to religious education. Between 2003 and 2010, the number of madrasas in the country was reduced from twenty-one to ten, and between 2010 and 2011, half of the ten remaining registered madrasas were closed. Beginning in May of 2010, the Interior Ministry instituted “Operation Madrassa”, a program aimed at shutting down illegal private religious instruction that occurs during the summer school holiday. Many madrassas were shut down and students and teachers arrested (RFE/RL 2010a). In particular, individuals providing instruction on the Qur’an and the fundamentals of Islam from their private homes were targeted, and in one case a woman teaching only four student Qur’an lessons in her home was arrested in charged (Bayram and

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<sup>86</sup> N 272: [http://base.mmk.tj/view\\_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174](http://base.mmk.tj/view_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=174)

<sup>87</sup> The guidelines for both registration and religious literature are established by the September 2009 resolution, ‘On the Approval of the Procedure for Conducting State Religious Expertise Examinations’ (No. 389).

<sup>88</sup> Imam-khatibs, for example, receive a government salary of the equivalent of 160-300 US dollars monthly (Zhovtis, Kabak, and Khaidarova 2015).

<sup>89</sup> 2010 Law on the Committee for Religious Affairs Under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (N 226): [http://base.spinform.ru/show\\_doc.fwx?rgn=31332](http://base.spinform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=31332)

<sup>90</sup> The dress code, in place since 2014, includes a “grey satin shirt, trousers, a turban, and a long powder-blue robe highlighted by traditional white embroidery on the cuffs, lapels, and front trim” (Asia-Plus 2018a).

Corley 2010). In 2013, five of the six remaining madrasas open at the time were closed, leaving only the Abu Hanifa Madrasa In Dushanbe, a government-run Madrasa, the only legal source of Islamic education in Tajikistan (Hélène Thibault 2018, 107).

This crackdown on the availability of religious instruction was also reflected in formal policy. Perhaps most notably, a 2011 law banned children under the age of 18 from attending mosques, effectively eliminating a primary source of religious education for youth.<sup>91</sup> The crackdown also extended to young adults, and in December of 2011 a government resolution was passed that gave the state powers to strictly limit foreign religious education.<sup>92</sup> During the same period in the early 2010s, the civil and administrative codes were updated to drastically increase the penalties for crimes related to unregistered religious instruction, production of religious literature, participating in ‘religious extremist study groups’, broadly defined as including ideas that cause the “humiliation of national dignity”. New penalties were introduced for crimes such as obtaining religious education abroad without following proper procedures, for teaching religious materials to minors, and for establishing foreign relations as a religious organization.<sup>93</sup>

The crackdown on religious education was felt by students even prior to the formal adoption of these new laws. Just before the school year began in August of 2010, Rahmon issued a speech via state television, compelling parents with children studying in foreign madrassas to bring their children home because, “Most of them will become extremists and terrorists, because those schools don’t only teach religion”. He suggested instead that they study in government-run religious schools. During the same period, the Education Ministry announced that students returning from abroad would be enrolled in a “rehabilitation” program, without giving further details (Najibullah 2010). In the months after this announcement, the SCRA began compiling a database of the thousands of students studying religion abroad, and authorities began harassing parents of these students at home, attempting to coerce them into recalling their children to Tajikistan, promising that if they return they would not be prosecuted (RFE/RL 2010b). Yet, the following year, in Khatlon Province alone 22 criminal cases were opened against students who returned home from studying religion abroad

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<sup>91</sup> 2011 Law on Parental Responsibility for the Training and Education of Children (N 762): [http://base.mmk.tj/view\\_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=257](http://base.mmk.tj/view_sanadhoview.php?showdetail=&sanadID=257)

<sup>92</sup> 2011 Resolution on Approving the Procedure for Acquiring Religious Education Abroad for Citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan (N 662): [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=37027781](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=37027781)

<sup>93</sup> 2012 Law on Introducing Changes and Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Tajikistan (N 843): [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=31235735](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31235735). Also see Administrative Code, Articles 474-2, 474-3, and 474-4 ([https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=30414710](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30414710))

(RFE/RL 2011). This would culminate in a law being passed in November of 2017 that banned individuals from serving as imams if they have received any training abroad (AsiaNews.it 2018).

With education under strict government control, the state strategy regarding religious regulation in the mid-2010s shifted towards the creation and reproduction of a “traditional”, “native” Islam. To accomplish this, the regime needed to be the sole political authority claiming legitimacy from religion, and thus a major aspect of this transition was the marginalization, persecution, and eventual criminalization and exile of the IRPT.<sup>94</sup>

In a coordinated campaign on June 18<sup>th</sup>, dozens of videos were posted online with the subjects resigning from the IRPT, and in many cases praising Rahmon’s party and policies. The party claimed the videos were recorded and posted under pressure from authorities (Najibullah 2015b). On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the IRPT’s main office in Dushanbe was shut down. The government claimed the closure was due to a private building dispute, but the IRPT claimed that the shutdown was politically motivated by the government to prevent the party congress from electing new leaders on September 11<sup>th</sup> (RFE/RL’s Tajik Service 2015c). Four days later, on August 28, the Tajik government announced that because the IRPT did not have enough members to qualify as a registered political party, they must cease all activities by September 7<sup>th</sup>, closing their 58 branches across Tajikistan, not holding their scheduled party congress, and shutting down their temporary headquarters in a home in Dushanbe, which was deemed illegal (RFE/RL’s Tajik Service 2015b). On September 4<sup>th</sup>, violence broke out in and around Dushanbe, first with gunmen raiding a police station, and later in the day between the attackers and security forces at the Defense Ministry Building near the Dushanbe International Airport. The attack was blamed on General Abduhalim Nazarzoda, and a large-scale manhunt resulted in the death of the attackers on September 14<sup>th</sup>. The IRPT claimed no connection to Nazarzoda, claiming the attack was related to internal conflict within security agencies (Najibullah 2015a). On September 16<sup>th</sup>, the first deputy chairman of the party was arrested when boarding a flight to Almaty in Dushanbe’s airport, without any justification being given at the time. He was held at a detention center of the State Committee for National Security (RFE/RL’s Tajik Service 2015a). By September 27<sup>th</sup>, the Prosecutor General opened charged the leadership of the IRPT with the creation of a criminal community, and on September 28<sup>th</sup> the Supreme Court banned the IRPT by designating it a terrorist organization, effectively connecting the organization to the violence earlier in the month (Chevtayeva 2015). On May 22,

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<sup>94</sup> For an overview of the rise and fall of the IRPT, see: <https://www.occrp.org/en/moneyby marriage/the-death-of-tajikistans-islamic-renaissance>

2016, as part of a package of constitutional amendments, religious political parties were banned (Article 8).<sup>95</sup> Since the banning, the IRPT leadership remains in exile abroad, and suspected members, their families, and even their lawyers have endured arrests, torture, and killings (Najibullah 2018).

Enforcement of repressive policy and monitoring of religious behavior in the post-2014 period has been widespread, and has not been limited to political expressions of Islam. More so than any other Central Asian state, Tajikistan has repressed certain forms of religious dress and physical manifestations of religiosity. Beards, seen by the government as indicators of “foreign” and “extremist” Islam, have been a major target. In 2009, the Education Ministry issued rules forbidding men under the age of fifty from wearing a beard, and only allowing beards for men over 50 if they are “tidy...of no more than three centimeters”. The rules were justified as being “in line with the mentality and customs of our people” (AsiaNews.it 2009). In 2011, Tajik soccer player Parviz Tursunov was forbidden from playing in the national championship game when he did not shorten his beard. In 2014 in Khatlon province alone, nearly 13,000 men were detained, ID’d, fingerprinted, and forcibly had their beards shaved. As of 2019, the Tajik government began denying passports to men under the age of 60 with beards (Holikzod, Olimov, and Baumgartner 2019).

The hijab has also been a favorite target of the regime. The government explicitly began targeting Islamic dress in 2007, when the Education Ministry issued rules banning the hijab from schools (Eurasianet 2015a). In Khatlan in 2014, 1,773 women and girls were made by law enforcement to remove the headwear, 162 shops and stalls were shut down that were selling the hijab, and 89 hijab-wearing “prostitutes” were arrested (Pannier 2016). The government has claimed that women wearing the hijab are prostitutes trying “to drive up their prices” (Eurasianet 2015a). In August of 2017, the State Committee for Women’s Affairs, working with the SCRA and Interior Ministry, implemented a campaign to “promote national dress”. In practice, this meant authorities rounded up over 8,000 women in Dushanbe in early August, separated them from their children, forced them to remove their headscarves, showed them how to “properly” wear them, warned them to only wear “national clothing”, and recorded the whole process with photographs and video to intimidate the women (Synovitz 2017).

Other examples of this monitoring and enforcement can be seen in the treatment of mosques. In 2016, over 70 mosques in Dushanbe were told by the capital’s city administration they

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<sup>95</sup> Constitution of Tajikistan with 2016 Amendments: <http://www.president.tj/ru/taxonomy/term/5/112>

had to install surveillance cameras and metal detectors at their own expense, in order to “guarantee security and order while preventing the emergence of undesirable trends” (AFP 2016; Putz 2016). In 2017, the SCRA claimed they shut down over 2000 mosques operating without a permit, converting them into tearooms, barber shops, cultural centers, medical clinics, and kindergartens (AsiaNews.it 2018).

In 2017, Tajikistan took complete control over the training of legal imams by banning individuals who had received foreign training from serving as an imam or imam-khatib. Existing imams who had received any foreign training without government approval were ordered to be replaced by more “suitable” individuals (AsiaNews.it 2017).

Mandatory attestations have also been used to control imam-khatibs, and to dictate the knowledge of Islam that they must have. The practice was introduced by the SCRA and Council of Ulema in 2002 (Blua 2002). Since then, it has been used as a tool to control imams sporadically, such as in 2007, when four imams were removed from their positions at daily prayer mosques in Dushanbe for failing the test (U.S. Department of State 2009). More recently, in late 2017 and early 2018, dozens of the 265 imam-khatibs serving in Tajikistan were removed from their posts for failing an attestation (Asia-Plus 2018a).

Subsidies have continued in Tajikistan throughout the period of increasing repression. For example, As part of the effort to garner legitimacy from Islam as well as to encourage a politically quietist form of the religion, the Tajik government has—with help from Iran—renovated Ali Hamadani’s shrine and constructed a museum dedicated to the Sufi mystic (Morrissey 2015). In January of 2018, the government implemented a ban on the import of non-halal meat into the country (Sputnik 2018a). The government also continues to pay clergy salary, a practice that has been in effect since 2014, and that the government claims is done at the request of imam-khatibs (Asia-Plus 2018a).

Symbols

The national symbols that Tajikistan officially adopted in the aftermath of independence did not draw on religion.<sup>96</sup> The first president, Nabyev, refused to be sworn in on the Qur'an, in contrast to Karimov in neighboring Uzbekistan (Akbarzadeh 1996, 1111). The flag, adopted in 1992, did include green stripes, frequently associated with Islam in other contexts. However, according to the Resolution on the State Flag of the Republic of Tajikistan, passed on November 24, 1992, the stripes were meant to represent the “inviolate union of workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia” with the workers represented by red, the intelligentsia by white, and the peasants by green respectively. According to the “People’s Newspaper”, a publication of the Tajik government, the green also represents nature’s bounty through the color of germinating wheatgrass, as well as Nowruz, the Persian New Year (Abdulhayrovich 2017). Rahmon himself, during a speech given on television for Flag Day in 2010, has stated that the green represents “prosperity, pride and eternity”.<sup>97</sup>

It should be noted that the original legislation regulating the display of the flag, passed in 1993, stipulated that it must be displayed on specific types of public buildings during holidays including Ramadan and Eid al-Adha.<sup>98</sup> The Law on State Symbols of the Republic of Tajikistan, replaced the above legislation in 2011, does not include language regarding specific religious holidays, but does still require that the flag be displayed in particular public spaces during holidays.<sup>99</sup>

The national anthem adopted in 1994, “Surudi Mili”, does not mention God or draw on any specifically religious language, and the national emblem, adopted the same year, is simply a modification of the existing Emblem of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, with no religious iconography added, save arguably the presence of the green stripe from the flag.

Tajik currency includes only minor religious symbolism. The short-lived Tajik Ruble, introduced in 1995 and replaced by the Somoni in 2000, did not include any religious symbolism, with every banknote containing an image of the Supreme Assembly. The Tajik Somoni, introduced in 2000, includes only minor religious symbolism. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, a Sufi scholar and poet,

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<sup>96</sup> While it is difficult to speak of a functioning “state” during the Civil War period, for context it is useful to discuss the role of religious symbols during the conflict. Despite Islamization not being a central issue in the war, during the civil war period both sides utilized Islamic symbols. Both the IRP and the regime-loyal secular intelligentsia drew on Muslim modernism from the Jadid era to construct national identity, with the IRP finding influence in the Indian Muslim poet Iqbal, using his poetry as an anthem of opposition (Khalid 2007, 151–152). The incumbent elites also drew on Islam before and during the war. For example, in the time leading up to the first presidential election, the regime’s propaganda against the opposition candidate, Davlat Khudonazarov, accused him as being an unbeliever and a ‘Badakhshoni Kafir’ (Akbarzadeh 1996, 1111).

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.president.tj/ru/node/2304>

<sup>98</sup> Правила применения Положения о Государственном флаге Республики Таджикистан и порядке изготовления этого флага от 6 августа 1993 года № 385 ([http://www.adlia.tj/show\\_doc.fwx?Rgn=10080](http://www.adlia.tj/show_doc.fwx?Rgn=10080)).

<sup>99</sup> Закон Республики Таджикистана о Государственных символах Республики Таджикиста. Article 5, section 4.



appears on the obverse of the 10 somoni note, while his tomb (a site of pilgrimage today) and one of his poems appears on the reverse side.

In September 2008, less than a year before the repressive 2009 Religion Law would be passed marking the government's complete reorientation towards pushing out any independent expression of Islam and subsidizing a state-sanctioned national Islam, President Rahmon declared 2009 "The Year of Imam Azam". Imam Azam, or the "Great Imam", refers to Abu Hanifa, the founder and namesake of the Hanafi Madhhab.

The following year, in 2010, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) declared Dushanbe the capital of Islamic culture in Asia. Rahmon proudly accepted the endorsement, saying at the dedication ceremony that the designation of the capital of Tajikistan as a capital of Islamic culture is "a significant event not only for residents of Dushanbe, but for all the people of the republic" (islam.in.ua 2010).

In 2015, there was a public campaign to proclaim Rahmon's wife the "leader of Muslim women in Tajikistan", with comparisons being made between Azizamoh Rahmon and the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha (Pannier 2016). Abdullo Muhaqqiq, an expert on religious affairs, published an article on the state news agency website calling for the state designation, arguing that she deserves the title as the first woman from Central Asia to pray inside the Kaaba, and noting that her husband, President Rahmon, who had recently been officially declared "leader of the nation", was "Like Cyrus the Great" because "has challenged forces of extremism and terrorism and called on society to counter them" (Asia-Plus 2016).

The Tajik state has also used religious symbols in less overtly nationalistic ways. For example, Rahmon has personally and directly overseen the construction of the new Dushanbe Central Cathedral Mosque since 2011 and will open it in August of 2019, symbolically imbuing the project with national significance through his involvement. The mosque began construction a month after the world's largest flagpole was raised in Dushanbe. In a publicity stunt in October of 2011, Rahmon helped break ground on the site by operating an excavator. The state has emphasized that the mosque will be the largest in Central Asia, able to accommodate 120,000 worshipers, or 12 times the number of the second largest mosque in Central Asia, located in Turkmenistan (Asia-Plus 2018b). Qatar is paying for 70 percent of the 100 million dollar project, while Tajikistan has raised the remaining 30 million dollars (Najibullah 2011).

Rhetoric

Emomali Rahmon, more so than other Central Asian leader save President Niyazov of Turkmenistan, has directly engaged in religious rhetoric by invoking particular precepts of Islam to justify his policies, to bolster his national ideology, and to garner legitimacy from a religious citizenry.

Before and during the Civil War period, Rahmon referenced religion as a form of identity that was auxiliary to Tajik national identity, arguing that the Tajik nation formed in spite of Islam, rather than in part because of Islam. In this early rhetoric, Rahmon focuses on the Samanids—a dynasty from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century used by Tajik nationalists as a precursor to the Tajiks—developing a distinct identity in which Ismail Somoni, the emir of the Samanid Empire, allowed “the wise implementation, through the state apparatus, of the spiritual standards of Islam and their fusion with the Aryan heritage” while remaining “unfailingly faithful...to the elements of Aryan statehood”.<sup>100</sup> During this period, the Samanid era and the Aryan myth formed the central component of his nation-building discourse.

During the period immediately following the Civil War, Rahmon invoked Islam in his official rhetoric, but in a less frequent and less specific manner than he would in later years, referencing the contributions of Islam to Tajikistani society in broad terms. For example, in his first Eid Fitr speech following the Civil War in 1998, he claimed that “I am convinced that Islamic culture and education can help in strengthening national self-awareness and national unity... Islamic civilization, without condemning self-consciousness, declares all the faithful brothers and proclaims that between them there should never be hatred and enmity” (Rahmon 1998b). He made efforts to defend the role of Islam as part of contemporary national identity, while also attacking its presence as part of political life, such as in his 1998 Women’s Day speech, when he argued that “In the Samanid era... Islamic traditions did not hinder [women’s] enjoyment of their rights and freedoms.... It should be emphasized that the Islamic political regime, the creation of which is supported by certain groups in Tajikistan, will infringe upon the rights and freedoms of women and girls. However, I am fully confident that women do not want this” (Rahmon 1998a). Nonetheless, at this juncture, Rahmon did not directly draw on Islamic doctrine in his rhetoric, only mentioning Islam in passing as a lower-level component of national identity, instead favoring references to the

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<sup>100</sup> Quote from Rakhmonov, “Tadzhikskaya gosudarstvennost’: ot samadinov do rubezha XXI veka,” *Narodnaya gazeta*, 10 September 1999, 1. Translated in (Laruelle 2007, 54).

Arian myth and Zoroastrianism “as the main element of opposition to the Islamist political and national project” (Laruelle 2007, 65).

By the mid-2000s, Rahmon’s religious rhetoric was more explicit, directly referencing Islamic doctrine in many of his speeches. In 2004, during an address to the nation Rahmon emphasized the importance of obeying the fatwas banning women from mosques (Hélène Thibault 2018, 135) In a speech on National Unity Day, to emphasize the need to develop education, Rahmon references the Hadiths, pointing out that “the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (Hollowed be your name!) instructs Muslims, including women, to have a constant desire for knowledge. Let’s think about his words: “Whoever requires knowledge, God guarantees his daily bread.” The Prophet also taught: “Learn from the cradle to the grave!”. In the same speech, Rahmon is a source of moral and cultural values, and that “Islam is essentially flawless” and as such “to equate Islam and terrorism is a deep mistake, as well as attempts to link it with the evil realities of today’s life” (Rahmon 2006b). Later the same year, during his Eid Kurbon speech, Rahmon quotes an Hadith on spiritual generosity, and emphasizes the important of making the Hajj as one of the Five Pillars, pointing out his government removed restrictions on pilgrims for that year (Rahmon 2006a).

This religious rhetoric that draws directly on Islamic doctrine is most often used to justify particular policies regarding state involvement in religion, as well as to garner support from Muslim citizens. In his 2007 televised speech to commemorate the beginning of Ramadan, Rahmon quotes Sura Al-Baqara 185 to emphasize the importance of Ramadan, and then quotes elsewhere in the Qur’an to emphasize the importance of combatting greed. He uses this Qur’anic text to justify the recently passed “Law on streamlining traditions, celebrations and rites in the Republic of Tajikistan”, which gave the government regulatory powers over religious celebrations, ostensibly as part of a poverty reduction effort (Rahmon 2007).

Another example can be found in his justification of policies cracking down of Islam in the mid-2010s. During his Mother’s Day speech in 2015, in an argument against youth traveling to Syria to join ISIS, Rahmon quotes a part of Surah An-Nisa 4:93—“But whomever kills a believer intentionally – his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally...”. He then asks whether or not the mothers of these foreign fighters realize that hell awaits their children, and that the majority of the people against whom they are fighting are also Muslims.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> <http://president.tj/ru/node/8400>

Rahmon's religious rhetoric, like that of Uzbek President Karimov and Kyrgyz President Atambayev, has favored the Hanafi Madhhab, but distinct from either of his counterparts, Rahmon draws directly on Hanafi doctrine and history. In his 2009 book, "The Great Imam and Dialogue of National Civilizations and The Great Imam and National Identity", Rahmon focuses on the importance of Islam and the Hanafi Madhhab to defining Tajik national identity (Rahmonov 2009). The book claims the Great Imam (Abu Hanifa) as a national figure, referring to him as "the outstanding son of the Tajik people" (p. 88). Rahmon argues that in the early years of independence, an "incorrect balance between religious and national values was lost...[due to the fact that] the position of the rich culture and religious legacy of the Tajik nation's outstanding figures in Islamic culture and civilization was not taken into consideration", specifically blaming "political parties and movements" (p. 83). The book discusses various suras of the Qur'an and hadiths, and extols the scientific, cultural, and moral contributions of Islam, and specifically the "tolerance" of the Hanafi Madhhab. The Hanafi Madhhab itself is elevated to the level of a national tradition and a source of national unity when Rahmon claims that "We pay attention to the Hanafi madhhab, first of all, because it is precisely by means of that very madhhab, as a cultural phenomenon, we will be able to give a direct orientation to national self-cognizance and take religious tolerance towards cultural identity of other peoples dwelling in Tajikistan as a basis of the strategy of the national unity" (pp. 91-92). The mosque itself is treated not only as a place of worship, but also as a location for contributing "to the formation of self-cognizance in people" through sermons that focus on "national culture...patriotism, propagation of national and Islamic values", and Rahmon suggests that libraries should be added to mosques that propagate these cultural values (p. 93). R

The second part of the book provides a history of Abu Hanifa, emphasizing that he belonged to the Tajik nobility of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that he serves as a core component of the "spiritual heritage of our ancestors" (p. 99). Perhaps most reflective of the state's goals with its involvement in religion, in a section on Abu Hanifa's virtuous character, Rahmon notes that Hanifa instructed "Respect the ruler and do not tell lies before him. Be open-handed. Don't be afraid of telling the truth even if a king himself is standing in front of you" (p. 100). Abu Hanifa is presented as a champion of the Tajik language, and thus contributing to "the strengthening of self-conscious and development of the Tajik people's culture and civilization", with the Hanafi madhhab's teaching "strengthening [Tajik] unity and cohesion, and hindering the development of radical and extremist movements, organizations and trends" (p. 105).

Another way Rahmon has involved himself in the rhetoric of religion is through public displays of religiosity. For example, Rahmon has travelled to Mecca to perform the Umrah on four occasions, in 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2016, being allowed to enter the Kaaba in 2005 and 2016. Each trip has been heavily publicized, with photos and videos of Rahmon in a robe performing rituals with his family being heavily distributed in Tajik media, and with Rahmon himself referencing his trips in his speeches. Detailed information about Rahmon's observance has been posted on the official presidential website, which notes that he prayed for the prosperity of Tajikistan and its people by the Kaaba.<sup>102</sup>

The visual messaging behind this rhetoric in 2016 stands in stark contrast to other rhetoric and corresponding regulatory policies being enforced during the same period. For example, in public images of his trip, Rahmon is seen with his wife and daughters wearing hijabs, while less than a month prior he had broadcast remarks against women wearing the hijab,<sup>103</sup> and in 2015, during his Mother's Day Speech on March 8<sup>th</sup>, Rahmon argued that hijabs were not traditional to Tajikistan and that the "propagation of alien clothing...has become alarming". He argues that this "black" clothing has a "negative impact on the strength...of national culture", suggest that women are attempting to go to the funerals of strangers to promote their ideology, and that they distribute this clothing to promote ideas of a "new extremist trend". He then calls on government bodies including the Council of Ulemas to stop the spread of such foreign culture and clothing.<sup>104</sup> In justifying these policies, Rahmon has been quoted saying, "The Almighty is known by the mind and worshipped in his heart, not by the garment, satr, hijab, turban and beard" (Torfeh 2017).

The state has also expressed religious rhetoric through religious curriculum, but these efforts were short lived. In 2009, the government instated a mandatory new course for all schoolchildren, "Knowledge of Islam." However, after backlash that top religious leaders were not consulted in the development of the curriculum, the course was replaced by a course called 'History of the Tajik People' (Hélène Thibault 2018, 106)

### **Religion, Nation, and Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: A Review of Existing Data**

In this section, I explore whether religionational fusion in each country over time follows the expected general pattern created by each state's evolving kind and degree of involvement in religion.

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<sup>102</sup> <http://www.president.tj/en/node/10554>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyBFXIWz8bc>

<sup>104</sup> <http://president.tj/ru/node/8400>

I rely on existing cross-national data on concepts related to religionational fusion, such as how extensively individuals desire to see their religious preferences reflected in the administration of the nation-state. Given the limitations of these data, I begin by discussing and justifying proxy indicators of religionational fusion. I then show that, based on these indicators, religionational fusion shifts over time alongside shifts in state involvement in religion in ways that are consistent with my theory.

#### *Data and Justification of Proxy Indicators*

With the exception of questions asked in a Pew survey in Kazakhstan in 2016 and my original survey in Kyrgyzstan in 2018, there are few direct indicators of religionational fusion at a mass level in Central Asia. However, while outside of these two exceptions there may not be mass surveys gauging the connection between religious and national identity, there are a number of surveys that measure attitudes related to religionational fusion, including beliefs about the role religious identity should play in the administration of the state, attitudes towards members of minority religious groups, religiosity, and feelings of national attachment. These projects include surveys conducted by Nancy Lubin and the U.S. Institute of Peace in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1993 (1994, 1995), by the Office of Research of the United States Information Agency in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in 1992 and 1993 (Dobson 1994, 1995), by the International Crisis Group in 2003 (2003), by Cholpon Chotaeva in 2005 (2005), by the Asia Barometer project in all four countries in 2005 (Inoguchi and et al. 2005), by Pew Research Center in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 2011 (2013), by Yaccov Ro'I and Alon Wainer in all four countries in 2009 and again in Uzbekistan in 2015 (2009, 2016), by the U.S. Department of State in 2011 (Nolle and Faranda 2011), by Junisbai et al in 2007 and 2012 in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (2018), by Rouslan Jalil in 2011 in Kyrgyzstan (2017), and by the World Values Survey in all four countries during various waves (Inglehart et al. 2014).<sup>105</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1 (see page 7), there is a documented relationship between religionational identity and political attitudes. While attitudes towards the influence of religion are imperfect proxies for religionational fusion, they nonetheless can serve as a weak test of my theory, which suggests that higher levels of subsidy, rhetoric and use of symbols will be associated with higher levels of religionational fusion, while higher levels of repression will be associated with lower

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<sup>105</sup> I owe special thanks to Yaccov Ro'I and Alon Wainer for sharing data from their 2015 survey in Uzbekistan, David Nolle and Regina Faranda for sharing their Department of State survey in Kyrgyzstan from 2011, and Rouslan Jalil for sharing his 2011 survey in Kyrgyzstan.

levels of religionational fusion. For an overview of how this applies to the Central Asian cases, see Table IV.3.

**TABLE IV.3: State involvement in religion & religionational fusion: expected effects**

	State Involvement in Religion	Theoretical Expectations
Kazakhstan	<p>Regulation: Low after independence, with a moderate increase in repression from 2005-2011.</p> <p>Symbols: Low without significant change</p> <p>Rhetoric: Low without significant change</p>	<p>Low religionational fusion throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, decreasing further after 2005.</p>
Kyrgyzstan	<p>Regulation: Low after independence, increasing to moderate repression from 2005-2008, with repression and subsidy increasing further from 2008 onwards.</p> <p>Symbols: Low increasing towards moderate after 2010</p> <p>Rhetoric: Low increasing to moderate after 2010, then decreasing towards low after 2017</p>	<p>Low religionational fusion until the late 2000s. As subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric increase in the 2010s, religionational fusion will also increase. This is partially offset by the negative effect of increasing religious repression.</p>
Tajikistan	<p>Regulation: Moderate repression and subsidy, increasing to high repression and subsidy between 2005 and 2015</p> <p>Symbols: Moderate without significant change</p> <p>Rhetoric: Moderate from independence until mid-2000s, then increasing to high</p>	<p>Moderate religionational fusion that remains relatively consistent in the post-war period. An increase might be expected in the mid 2000s through the mid 2010s, but much of this effect may be offset by increases to very high levels of repression.</p>
Uzbekistan	<p>Regulation: Repression and subsidy moderate in the early 1990s. Repression increases to high in the late 1990s. In 2016, repression decreases towards moderate and subsidy increases towards high</p> <p>Symbols: High without significant change</p> <p>Rhetoric: Moderate immediately after independence. Decreased towards low in the late 1990s through 2016. Increased to moderate under Mirziyoyev after 2016</p>	<p>Shortly after independence, high religionational fusion expected due to the early adoption of Islamic symbols into the national canon, as well as substantial early use of religious rhetoric. Decreased use of religious rhetoric and extremely high levels of repression in the 2000s through 2016 would be expected to reduce religionational fusion, with an increase occurring as repression is reduced and subsidies and rhetoric increase after 2016</p>

### *Religious and National Identity in Central Asia*

While each state starts from a similar baseline of low levels of religionational identity and proxy indicators of religionational fusion, over time each country's mass beliefs deviate from one another. In contexts where repression is high, we expect lower levels of religionational fusion, while in contexts where repression is lower but subsidies, symbols and/or rhetoric is high, we would expect higher levels of religionational fusion.

In the early 1990s, there are few mass surveys conducted in Central Asia on the topic of religion and identity. The little data we do have, however, suggests similar baselines for views related to religionational fusion. For example, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1992-1993, only 22% of Kazakhs, 31% of Kyrgyz, and 37% of Uzbeks respectively completely agreed that Islam should play a larger role in their country than it was currently playing (Dobson 1994, 21). When asked what the best kind of state was for solving Uzbekistan's and Kazakhstan's problems, fewer than one-eighth of Uzbekistani respondents selected an Islamic state, and in Kazakhstan, less than 2% of respondents favored an Islamic state. Even among those respondents, religious characteristics among leadership were not regarded as important; 17% of those who supported an Islamic state in Uzbekistan believed it was important for a politician they would vote for to be Muslim, compared to characteristics like honesty and decency (68%) experience in leading (49%), defending the poor (24%), understanding the people (23%), and bringing law and order (19%) all being seen as more important (Lubin 1995, 15). This is reflective of the Soviet strategy of involvement in religion, which was highly repressive with low subsidies, low rhetoric, and low symbols.

Shortly after independence and into the 2000s, each state began to deviate in its strategy of involvement in religion. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in the 1990s, and 2000s, low levels of state involvement in religion in each dimension would suggest that religionational fusion would be low. The limited proxies we have for measuring religionational fusion during this period suggest that this is the case.

Focus groups in Kyrgyzstan suggested that a majority of citizens did not want Islam influencing the laws of the land, with concerns being expressed that "It's dangerous when religion delves into politics" and that "We must be raised with beliefs, but we can't live the way they do in Iran! I can't put on the veil tomorrow!". The idea of an Islamic republic was rejected due to the country's ethnic and religious diversity, and the potential of religious laws to increase inequality between men and women (Dobson 1995, 22).



During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there is very little publicly available survey data on religious identity and attitudes available from the region. In 2003, the World Values Survey was administered in Kyrgyzstan. Results suggest that in the early 2000s, desire for religious influence in politics was still lower than it would be in the 2010s. For example, 68% of Kyrgyzstanis agreed that religious leaders should not influence how people vote, while only 44% believed it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office. Most notably, 67% of respondents agreed that religious leaders should not influence government, while only 16% disagreed (Inglehart et al. 2014).

In a 2003, the International Crisis Group conducted surveys in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan that included questions pertaining to religiopolitical attitudes. Results during this period, as expected, suggest a higher desire for religious influence in political life in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan than in Kyrgyzstan. For example, 36% of Uzbekistani respondents said at least some form of sharia should be incorporated into the legal system, compared to 43% of Tajikistani respondents and only 27% of Kyrgyzstani respondents (International Crisis Group 2003, 14).

The 2005 AsiaBarometer, unlike many other surveys conducted in the region, contains variables that allow me to roughly measure primacy (Inoguchi and et al. 2005). The survey asks a series of questions regarding whether religion is more important than other forms of identity, including ethnicity, region, language, class, and nationality. I add these items together to create an index ranging from 0-5, and present the mean values for Muslims as well as the percent of Muslims that do not rank religion as more important than any other form of identity.

**TABLE IV.4: Indicator of religionational primacy in Central Asia<sup>106</sup>**

	Mean Muslim Score	Percent Scoring 0
Kazakhstan	.3	76%
Kyrgyzstan	.95	44%
Tajikistan	1.21	50%
Uzbekistan	1.17	44%

As expected, Kazakhstani Muslims score the lowest on this indicator of primacy, with 76% not choosing religion as more important than any other forms of identity, and a mean value of .3. Kyrgyzstan, which in 2005 had not yet experienced the increase in state involvement in religion, also scores low on primacy, with a mean value of .95.

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<sup>106</sup> Source: (Inoguchi and et al. 2005)

While only 44% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims did not view their religion as more important than any other forms of identity, very few respondents relative to those in other countries believed that religion was more important than more than one other form of identity, driving the mean down. Tajikistan, which during this period had a high level of religious rhetoric, high religious subsidies, moderate religious symbols, and moderate repression, expectedly had the highest level of primacy, with a mean of 1.21, and only half of respondents not prioritizing religion over other forms of identity.

Uzbekistan has a mean of 1.17, but 60% of Muslim respondents did not prioritize religion over any other forms of identity. This could be explained by an extremely high level of repression, which was at its peak during this period, reducing religionational fusion. The survey was conducted 4 months after the Andijan unrest, an event in which the authorities fired on protestors, killing hundreds and possibly over a thousand. The government blamed Islamists for the incident. The high level of repression that came in the aftermath of this event likely had a countervailing effect on religionational fusion against the subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric the state was also utilizing. The high percentage of respondents not prioritizing religion over any other form of identity could also be a result of fear-induced preference falsification. Meanwhile, those willing to admit they prioritize religion over any form of identity are more likely to honestly express their preferences and list more than one identity they view as less important than religion. For example, Uzbekistan had the highest number of respondents prioritizing religion over all other forms of identity, at 10%.

Interestingly, a 2007 survey showed that Kazakh Muslims exhibited the highest level of Islamic solidarity, with Uzbek Muslims exhibiting the lowest level of this solidarity. 44% of Kazakh Muslims, 36% of Kyrgyz Muslims, 34% of Tajik Muslims, and 20% of Uzbek Muslims claimed that they supported in the idea of international Islamic solidarity, with Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq given as examples (Ro'i and Wainer 2009, 306). These results are not necessarily inconsistent with my expectations; the idea of international Islamic solidarity, rather than solidarity with co-nationals, may be at odds with religionational fusion. Additionally, Nazarbayev's rhetoric surrounding religion focused on Kazakhstan's role as a leader in the Islamic world, and this result may reflect that particular strategy. Additionally, as Ro'i and Wainer suggest, it may simply be that the question was perceived as politically laden and thus respondent hid their true preferences (Ro'i and Wainer 2009, 305).

By the late 2000s, the number of people in Central Asia affiliating with Islam had drastically increased, though knowledge of Islam and ritual observance seemed to have remained constant, and

in some cases, even decreased. Disparities in distributions of religious affiliations across age cohorts had also decreased, with professed belief increasing for all age groups. Interestingly, however, while ritual belief and knowledge increased somewhat in Kazakhstan between the early 1990s and 2007, it decreased in Uzbekistan. For example, in 1993, only 44% of Uzbekistani Muslims claimed they did not pray at all, compared to roughly two-thirds in 2007. Similarly, over the same 14 year period, those that claimed not to fast in Uzbekistan increased from 35% to 47%, while it decreased from 75% to 51% in Kazakhstan (Lubin and Joldasov 2009, 12–14). This may suggest that the high levels of religious repression in Uzbekistan in the 2000s were having an effect on the expression of religious identity in Uzbekistan, while religious practice remained relatively unimpeded in Kazakhstan.

The 2011 Pew World's Muslims survey does not include any direct indicators of religionational fusion but does include a number of questions about the role of religion in the administration of the state, which may be used as a proxy for religionational fusion. Unfortunately, some of these questions were not asked in Uzbekistan, likely due to sensitivity. Nonetheless, comparison between the other countries is informative.

For example, on the issue of Sharia, 10% of Kazakhstani Muslims favor making Sharia the law of the land, compared to 35% in Kyrgyzstan and 27% in Tajikistan. This marks a considerable shift from results in the 2000s, but considered in context, these results are not surprising. In 2011, when the survey was conducted, state involvement in religion in Kazakhstan was low, while in Tajikistan, use of rhetoric, symbols, and subsidies were high, while repression beginning to rise from moderate to high. In Kyrgyzstan, regulation had been increasing from low to moderate since 2008, and religious symbols and rhetoric were increasingly being used by the state since 2010, which would be expected to mark a turning point towards greater religionational fusion.

Other indicators of desire for greater involvement of religion in administering the nation-state follow the same pattern. 24, 46, and 27 percent of respondents believe that religious leaders should have some influence or a large influence in political matters in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan respectively. Even on the issue of Islamic political parties, something only Tajik respondents would have experience with, the pattern holds: 9% of Kazakhstani Muslims, 35% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims, and 28% of Tajikistani Muslims believe that Islamic political parties perform better than other political parties. These results are supported by another survey carried out in Kyrgyzstan in the same year, in which 40% of Muslims responded that religious political parties should be allowed to participate in elections (Nolle and Faranda 2011).

Other surveys conducted in Kyrgyzstan during this period suggest that factors related to religiosity in the post-2008 period were quickly increasing. For example, between 2007 and 2012, the percentage of Muslims who believed that it was very important that “good government should implement only Shari’a law” increased from 7% to 10%. Religiosity was also quickly increasing during this period, with the number of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan claiming to attend religious services and pray to God daily outside of religious services increasing from 15% and 36% to 33% and 58% respectively. Interestingly, while religiosity in Kazakhstan over this same period decreased (the percent attending religious services at least once a week decreased from 15 to 12 and the percent praying daily outside of services decreased from 23 to 18), those who believe it is very important that “good government should implement only Shari’a law” increased, from 5% to 13% (Junisbai, Junisbai, and Zhussupov 2018, 46). In 2011, 65% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims surveyed responded that Islam should play a fairly small, fairly large, or very large role in the political life of Kyrgyzstan, and 45% responded that some sphere or all spheres should be governed by religious laws (Nolle and Faranda 2011).

In Uzbekistan in the mid-2010s, there exist few large surveys on religious identity due to the taboo nature of Islam and government crackdowns on foreign research. However, in the summer of 2015, Yaccov Ro’i and Alon Wainer conducted a survey of 203 individuals in Uzbekistan, 200 of which considered themselves Muslims.<sup>107</sup> Their difficulty in conducting the survey speaks volumes about the increased intensity of religious repression in Uzbekistan during this period. In 2007, when conducting a similar survey in Uzbekistan, no respondents refused the interview outright, instead opting to avoid answering sensitive questions. In 2015, many refused, and those that did accept tended to be more educated, and perhaps may have been more willing to participate given that their views coincided with the regime’s preferences (Ro’i and Wainer 2016, 147–148).

When asked what element of their collective identity respondents considered themselves first of all, given the options of “An inhabitant of my native region, my ethnic group, Muslim, and a citizen of Uzbekistan”, only 12% responded that they considered themselves Muslim first. As a collective identity transcending Uzbekistan that builds solidarity, Islam was shown to be weak; when given the choice between working identical jobs abroad in a Muslim or non-Muslim country, 63% opted for the job in the non-Muslim country. When asked about who they would choose to help given the means, and given the options of the people of Yemen, the civilian population of Iraq, or

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<sup>107</sup> The authors generously shared their data with me making this analysis possible.

the civilian population in the conflict zone between Russia and Ukraine, not a single respondent selected the people of Yemen or Iraq. A similar question was asked about helping either Palestinians living in Gaza, Iraqi civilians, or Uzbeks living in Southern Kyrgyzstan, and not a single respondent selected Palestinians or Iraqi civilians. This suggests that Islam is not a strongly binding aspect of people's collective identity, or perhaps that the idea of Islamic solidarity has been internalized by Uzbekistanis as subversive (Ro'i and Wainer 2016, 157).

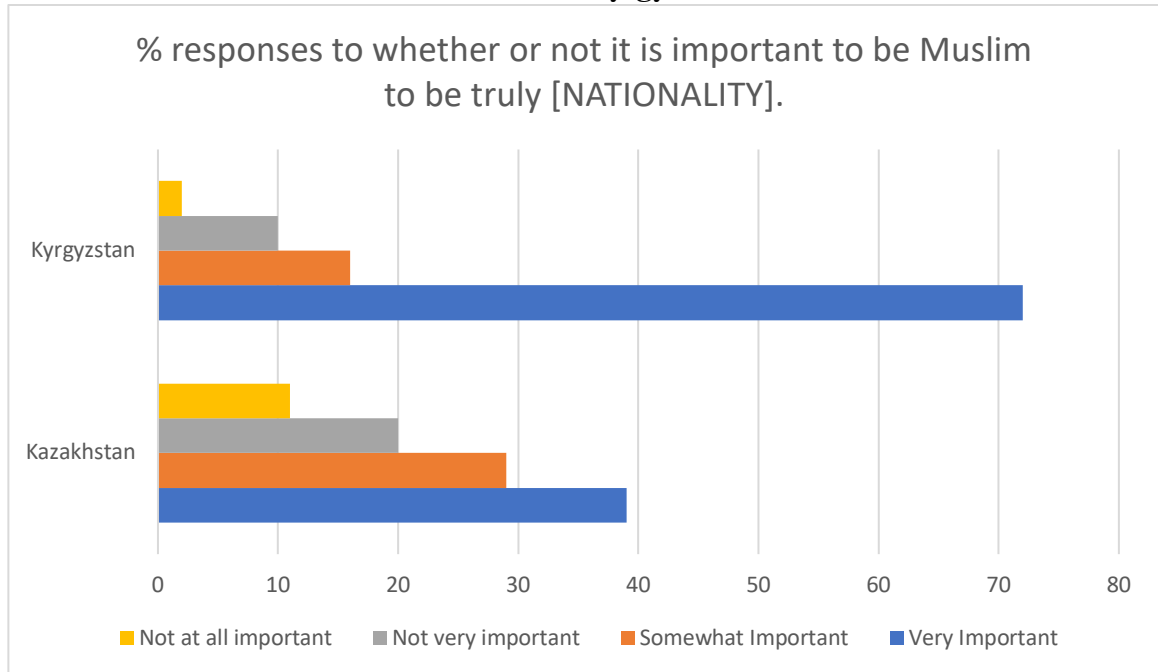
Interestingly, Uzbek respondents were open about desiring greater state involvement in religious subsidies and rhetoric. For example, 71% of respondents think there should be some amount of religious education provided in public schools, which goes against the state policy at the time which only allowed religious education in a select few religious schools.

Unlike Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, there exists direct indicators of religionational fusion on a mass level in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the mid-to-late 2010s. Based on Kyrgyzstan's involvement in religion, we would expect high levels of religionational fusion in the mid to late 2010s relative to previous periods, due to increases in subsidies and the state beginning to utilize religious rhetoric and symbols. Given the lower level of state involvement in religion through subsidy, symbols, and rhetoric in Kazakhstan in the 2010s relative to Kyrgyzstan, we would expect religionational fusion among Muslims to be lower in Kazakhstan than Kyrgyzstan. The evidence suggests that this is the case.

In 2016, Pew Research Center administered a survey in Kazakhstan on religion, national identity, and politics (2017). The survey included the question, "Some people say that the following things are important for being truly Kazakhstani. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?". Being a Muslim was among the characteristics asked about. A similar question was asked in Kyrgyzstan in 2018/2019 on my original survey.

The results on these surveys suggest that religionational fusion in the 2010s is substantially higher among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan than Muslims in Kazakhstan. For example, only 39% of Kazakhstani Muslims responded that being a Muslim is very important for being Kazakhstani, compared to 72% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims. This suggests that imbrication is significantly higher in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan.

**FIGURE IV.2: Imbrication in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan<sup>108</sup>**



This difference between degrees of religionational fusion across countries persists even when controlling for religiosity. For example, if we limit the sample to Muslims who attend mosque less than once per week, we find that 35% of respondents in Kazakhstan believe that it is “very important” to be Muslim to be truly Kazakhstani, compared to 69% of respondents in this subpopulation in Kyrgyzstan believing it is very important to be Muslim to be truly Kyrgyzstani. Religiosity alone cannot explain the difference in religionational fusion between these two countries.

Other proxy indicators for religionational fusion suggest a similar pattern. Kazakhstani Muslims desire little religious influence over politics, with only 8% responding that religious leaders should have a “large influence” in political matters. In Kyrgyzstan, 43% of Muslims believe making the hajj is a “very important” characteristic in a leader, 61% agree that it would be better if more believers occupied governmental positions, and 58% agree that it would be better for Kyrgyzstan if believers had influence over government decisions. In Kazakhstan, only 34% of Muslim respondents claim that the statement “government policies should support the spread of religious

<sup>108</sup> Kazakhstan data from (Pew Research Center 2017).

values and beliefs in our country” is closer to their position than “religion should be kept separate from government policies”.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I illustrated the wide variation in state involvement in religion observed in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, not only across cases but also across time.

In cases where subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric have increased, my theory suggests that religionational fusion should also be increasing, while in cases of heightened repression, religionational fusion is expected to decrease. I presented some evidence of rough proxies that indicate this may be the case. In Kyrgyzstan in particular, evidence suggests that religionational fusion was low until the 2010s, at which point the role religious identity plays as a component of national identity began to increase alongside use of symbols, subsidies, and rhetoric. How much of this effect is mitigated by repression, which was also increasing during this period, requires individual-level analysis, which I conduct in the subsequent chapter.

Comparing direct indicators of religionational fusion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the mid to late 2010s suggests a strong role for state involvement in religion. As my theory predicts, religionational fusion is higher in Kyrgyzstan in the late 2010s, a period when Kyrgyzstan had embraced significantly more use of religious rhetoric, religious symbols, and religious subsidies than neighboring Kazakhstan, which like Kyrgyzstan adopted greater repression but did not see increases in other forms of state involvement in religion. In Kazakhstan, as of 2016, only 39% of Muslims believed that being a Muslim was very important to being truly Kazakhstani, while 72% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims in 2018 believed that being a Muslim is very important to being truly Kyrgyzstani.<sup>109</sup>

Ultimately, however, the data deficit concerning direct measures of religionational fusion in Central Asia makes it difficult to make concrete claims about the role of state involvement in religion in influencing this identity. In the next chapter, I attempt to alleviate this deficit by presenting original survey data from my survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 and 2019. I use this data to explore the content of religionational fusion in Kyrgyzstan and test my individual hypotheses on the relationship between religionational fusion and state involvement in religion.

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<sup>109</sup> Kazakh data from 2016 Pew survey of religious and national identity.

## CHAPTER V

### State Involvement in Religion and Religionational Identity in Kyrgyzstan

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I traced the evolution of state involvement in religion in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and used proxy indicators to demonstrate that as state involvement in religion has intensified in parts of the region, so too have beliefs and attitudes changed related to religionational fusion.

A puzzle arises out of this. As discussed previously, the importance of religion as a collective identity has drastically increased in the 30 years since independence in Kyrgyzstan, while in neighboring Kazakhstan, the shift has been more modest. Today, in Kyrgyzstan, religionational fusion is experienced at high rates across men and women, ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, and even more and less pious individuals. That said, there is still great variation across individuals, even if the aggregate level of religionational fusion is high.

For example, if primacy is measured as prioritizing religious and national identity above all other forms of collective identity, the Muslim population is essentially split in half; 44% of Muslims see both their Kyrgyzstani citizenship and Muslim identity as more important than other collective identities, while 56% of Kyrgyzstanis do not. Similarly, there is substantial disagreement about the importance of religion as a criterion for citizenship; 43% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims think there should be Muslim requirement to be able to apply for citizenship, with an additional 3% believing that Orthodox Christians should also be permitted to apply. 53% believe religion should not matter, and less than 1% either did not know or refused to answer the question.

There is also substantial variation among Muslims along indicators of imbrication. 72% of Muslims believe being a Muslim is very important to being Kyrgyzstani, with 17% reporting it is somewhat important, 10% reporting not very important, and 2% reporting it is not important at all. If we limit imbrication to specific state-approved Islamic beliefs and practice, there is even more variation. For example, when asked if following the Hanafi-madhhab is an important part of being truly Kyrgyzstani—an idea that the state has been heavily promoting for years through both rhetoric



and regulation—38% reported it is very important, 23% claimed it is somewhat important, 25% responded it is not very important, and 14% responded it is not at all important.<sup>1</sup>

Even within subpopulations such as ethnic Uzbeks, there is variation in religionational fusion, though in general Uzbeks do tend to exhibit slightly higher rates of religionational fusion. 51% of Uzbeks see their religious and Kyrgyzstani identity as being more important than any other form of identification, above even their ethnic identity and at a rate 6% higher than the general Muslim population. 82% of Uzbeks view being a Muslim as very important to being truly Kyrgyzstani, while 57% of Uzbeks view the Hanafi madhhab as very important.

What explains this variation among individuals in religionational fusion in Kyrgyzstan that has arisen in Kyrgyzstan in the years since independence? I argue that the most plausible explanation is that as the state's involvement in religion has increased since the late 2000's, so too have perceptions of state involvement in religion. As a result, dependent on individuals' type and degree of exposure to the state's involvement in religion, people receive strong signals from the state regarding the connection between religious identity and the still-new and evolving Kyrgyzstani national identity. When individuals perceive negative signals about the role of religion as a component of national identity, transmitted through religious repression, their religionational fusion is reduced. At the same time, those who perceive positive signals—from state subsidies being provided to Islam, from rhetoric about what it means to be a good Muslim originating from leaders they trust, from feelings towards seeing religious symbols being used in the representation and reproduction of the nation, and from state-influenced religious education—will have increased religionational fusion.

In this chapter, I directly test my hypotheses derived from my theory that religionational fusion is directly influenced by state involvement in religion. I do this using original survey data collected in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 and 2019. First, I present an overview of the structure and content of religionational fusion in Kyrgyzstan, reviewing the existing literature and incorporating data from interviews I conducted with religious leaders, religious NGO leaders, and government regulators involved in administering and formulating religious policy in Kyrgyzstan in 2015 and from my survey results. Second, to situate the survey in its real-world context, I provide a brief overview of the role religion played in politics and public life in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 and early 2019. Finally, I provide an overview of my data, measurement, and empirical methods, and present the results of my hypothesis tests.

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<sup>1</sup> If respondents expressed confusion on this question, enumerators explained that the Hanafi madhhab is one of the four legal schools of Sunni Islam, founded by Abu Hanifa.

In sum, I find support for my hypotheses that perceptions of religious repression have a negative effect on religionational fusion, while awareness of and exposure to other forms of state involvement in religion increases the degree of religionational fusion at the individual level. These results suggest that, in the context of Kyrgyzstan, the stark shift in the political and personal importance of religion that has been observed since independence is at least in part attributable to the state's involvement in religion through regulation, symbols, and rhetoric.

### **The Content of Kyrgyzstani Religionational Fusion: To Be Kyrgyz is to be Muslim, but what does “Muslim” mean?**

Religionational identity in Kyrgyzstan, just like Islam itself, is not monolithic. In general, Islam and Kyrgyzstani identity fuse in two distinct ways. First, there is the state-sanctioned national identity, which incorporates Islam into Kyrgyzstani identity by ascribing Hanafism as a kind of religious orthodoxy framed as “traditional Kyrgyz Islam” that stands in opposition to “dangerous”, politicized, “foreign” forms of Islam that are explicitly associated by the state with extremism and terrorism. Second, there is the mass or popular form of religionational fusion. Religious orthopraxy is less important here than in the state's formulation; instead, the religious component of national identity is syncretic, drawing on pre-Islamic Central Asian traditions such as both natural and man-made shrine (*mazar*) visitation and shamanistic traditions such as consulting fortune tellers and healers (such as *baksbi*, *bubu*, and *tabib*) that are practiced alongside and as part of Islamic religious observance (Heyat 2004, 278–279).

This pattern is not new to the post-Soviet period, though the elements of what comprises state-sanctioned national identity, and the role that religion plays as part of this effort for political legitimation has changed, with the state seizing on religious identity as “an element of national assertion as well as one of the social bases of political power” while at the same time fearing Islam as a potentially destabilizing force (Hann and Pelkmans 2009; Peyrouse 2007, 245).

During the Soviet years, however, authorities allowed private religious observance and “cultural” elements of Islam, which were seen as markers of ethnic heritage, while discouraging public manifestations of religion that were marked as “incompatible” with the Islam of the “Soviet people” (Mcbrien 2006, 344). As a result of this practice of blending religious and ethnonational identity, a kind of “cultural” or “ethnic” Muslim was created, who may be secular or have low religiosity but nonetheless identify with Islam as part of their ethno-national background (Hilgers 2009; Omelicheva 2016, 148–149). Muslims throughout the region were divided into the “right

kind” of Muslim, who accepted a progressive form of Islam that was “authentic” textually sanctioned, downplayed Sufi associations and traditions such as shrine visitation, and overseen by the muftiate; and “Wahhabis,” which as early as the late Russian Empire was a term used to describe “anyone whose religious ideas did not conform to established consensus,” or who simply practiced Islam unregistered outside of the purview of the muftiate (Tasar 2017, 355–357, 372).

Though it is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that in Kyrgyzstan, not only does the state mediate the ever-evolving relationship between religious and mass national identity, but so too do religious individuals and leaders through theology. In a study of the relationship between religious and national identity, Vincent Artman observes a number of ways that Islam and Kyrgyzstani national identity are imbricated. For example, he observes how the ritual pilgrimages (*ziyarat*) to sacred places (*mazars*) infuse national identity with religious practice. The souls of many generations of ancestors are said to wait in mazars, and by reading the Qur’an at the shrine ancestors will become ingratiated to you, purifying you. By connecting individuals to the souls of their ancestors, who, in contemporary nationalist ideology in Kyrgyzstan are elevated to the status of “moral exemplars,” As Artman puts it, *ziyarat*...facilitates the performative fusion of the national and the theological” (Artman 2018, 199).

While religionational fusion is high in Kyrgyzstan, evidence suggests that the popular, syncretic form of Islam has been more internalized as a component of national identity than the Hanafi orthodoxy pushed by the state and the Muftiate. Despite 72% of Kyrgyzstani Muslims believing that being a Muslim is a very important component of being truly Kyrgyzstani, less than half—38%—believe that being a follower of the Hanafi Madhhab is a very important component of Kyrgyzstani national identity.

In fact, evidence suggests that while Islam is a core component of how most Kyrgyzstanis understand their national identity, the apolitical, secularized Islam that the state prefers has not been overwhelmingly adopted. For many, this fusion of national and explicitly Muslim identity is a necessary condition for being an accepted member of the nation. When asked whether religion should be considered in applications for citizenship and given the options of 1) a Muslim requirement for applicants, 2) a Muslim or Orthodox Christian requirement for applicants, or 3) no religious consideration in citizenship, 43% of Muslims selected option 1.

Traditional practices still factor strongly into people’s self-assessment of their religiosity. For example, when asked what factors people consider important when assessing their own religiosity,

41% claim visiting holy places such as shrines is “very important”, which is comparable to practices such as reading namaz five times per day (45%) and going to the mosque (41%).

My survey and others suggest, religious observance among Kyrgyzstani Muslims is not monolithic, and varies substantially by region, ethnic group, and other socio-economic factors. Given the variation in the forms Muslim religious identity takes, and the differences between the state’s preferred form of Islam and the ways in which Islam is popularly understood, this chapter aims not only to understand the factors contributing to religionational fusion, but also to explore the extent to which the Islam reflected in the state’s involvement in religion is or is not internalized by Kyrgyzstani Muslims.

### **Religion and Politics in Kyrgyzstan in 2018/2019**

Prior to presenting the results of the survey and doing any hypothesis testing, it is important to situate the survey within the social and political context of Kyrgyzstan in 2018. The relationship between religion and politics during this period was particularly salient during this period due to, 1) The role religion played in the presidential election in 2017<sup>2</sup>, 2) Increasing religious diversity leading to notable clashes between citizens and minority religions and the state and minority religions, 3) Ongoing tensions, in large part encouraged through the state’s involvement in religion, between “traditional” Kyrgyz Muslims and Islamic practices deemed “foreign” and often associated with Uzbeks in the South, 4) related to the prior point, fears about religious extremism stemming from Kyrgyzstani recruitment into ISIS in the previous years, with over 600 Kyrgyzstani’s estimated to have travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq, and 5) an ongoing debate about the role the state should play in both supporting and regulating Islam, rooted in notable events including the adoption of the Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere 2014-2020 and the Program on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2017-2022, national debates over Islamic dress motivated by billboards, and political debates over policies such as government mandated work breaks on Fridays to allow employees time to attend Friday prayers.

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<sup>2</sup> During the campaign, the former Grand Mufti Chubak azhy Zhalilov endorsed Sooronbay Jeenbekov due to Jeenbekov’s adherence to traditional Kyrgyz values and morality, leading to complaints from human rights activists. Candidates for president also directly appealed to Islam during the campaign, such as when candidate Temir Sariyev presented an 18<sup>th</sup> century Qur’an to the Islamic University of Kyrgyzstan.

## Measurement and Empirical Strategy

In order to test my hypotheses concerning the reductive effect of repression and additive effects of subsidies, rhetoric, and symbols on religionational fusion, I conducted an original nationally representative mass survey in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 and 2019. The survey instrument was designed to measure both religionational fusion, and perceptions of and exposure to state involvement in religion at the individual level in order to test the hypothesized mechanism. I developed the survey instrument based on insights taken from semi-structured interviews conducted in 2015 and data collected from primary government documents, news reports, and NGO reports. I also consulted existing survey questionnaires related to religious and national identity, including studies conducted by Pew and the International Social Survey Programme, as well as the World Values Survey, the Arab Barometer, the AsiaBarometer, and others. The survey went through multiple rounds of revisions after pretesting and piloting in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to ensure the clarity and validity of the questionnaire.

### *Interviews and Questionnaire Justification*

The questionnaire—and the research topic more broadly—was informed by a series of exploratory interviews I conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2015. These interviews, conducted with national and local religious leaders, religious and human rights NGO representatives, journalists covering religious issues, and representatives of the state, explored the connections between religious and national identity, the rationale behind state involvement in religion, and people’s experiences with this state involvement.

First, my interviews highlighted the importance of attempting to measure not only religionational fusion generally, but also how fully the state and Muftiate’s preferred interpretation of Islam was being incorporated into national identity. One Muftiate official told me that the Muftiate’s “project of teaching according to the...Hanafi madhhab” was what they are most proud of, and that by teaching the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan the framework of the Hanafi madhhab, “we were able to save [the people of Kyrgyzstan]”. He went on to say that the state aids in this endeavor, by providing support for the Hanafi madhhab as “our traditional religion”, in the sense that it “dates back to the past and [has] become our heritage; therefore, it is mentioned in the Concept and is given advantage”.

This position is not exclusive to the Muftiate. A lawyer representing the State Commission for Religious Affairs told me that:

The Hanafi madhhab is our people's madhhab...we have researched [it] as lawyers and found that it states that religion should be practiced while taking into account national traditions. We now have to stick to this madhhab. The state considers it right...Of all the people that live in Kyrgyzstan, whether they are Dungan or Uzbek...only the Hanafi madhhab is compatible with their traditions.

However, the efficacy of the state's efforts to promote this form of Islam was also brought into question. When asked about state support for a "Kyrgyz" Islam, the leader of a research institute devoted to religious issues suggested that "the state thinks that it supports Hanafism. It only thinks that. That's all...Many imams now say: 'Yes, we must maintain Hanafism. We must be Hanafis,' and so on, but they do not know that they have non-Hanafi views and spread non-Hanafi beliefs, and in most cases these are contradictory to Hanafism". He went on to elaborate that, "the state thinks if it will support Hanafism, all these [Salafi] trends will remain in second place. That there is no need to ban them and it is enough to support Hanafism. And how does the state support Hanafism in our country? It is not supported in any way. They [the state] released only one book! And it is only a translation, and it does not address the modern challenges. It does not explain to people what exactly Hanafism is, how to live with Hanafism, and how to be a Hanafi. It was a translation, a collection of several classic books, and this is the only book that came out to support Hanafism."

These contradictions concerning the Muftiate and state's goals, and perceptions of the effectiveness of the state's involvement in religion to accomplish these goals, suggested that the precise form religionational fusion takes as a result of the state's involvement in religion merited empirical investigation.

Second, my interviews reinforced the importance of measuring individual perceptions of state involvement in religion and controlling for factors such as ethnicity and region. During an interview with a prominent human rights lawyer representing clients in the South, I was told that when defending clients against religious extremism charges, the lawyer went to the government agencies and authorities asking for samples of extremist materials. No samples or templates were provided. This was despite formal regulations that extremist materials are supposed to be proven to be extremist in nature by the courts, and after being proven as such, listed on the Ministry of Justice website. Despite this lack of transparency, people continue to be arrested and charged under possession of extremist material laws. These arrests frequently occur, he said, because police have the discretion to open a case based on their own interpretation of materials given the lack of criteria for defining extremist materials. He suggested that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that at

every level of the justice system, there are perverse incentives to open extremism cases and achieve convictions to show documented results. On-the-ground officers are often informally given quotas for extremism charges by superiors. In particular, young people in the South are targeted for such charges. He emphasized that there has never been a single case where an individual charged with possession of extremist material has been found innocent after standing trial before a judge.

That said, accounts concerning the magnitude of state involvement in religious repression widely varied, including religious leaders expressing that the practice of Islam in Kyrgyzstan was completely unrestricted; another religious leader who complained of threats from the state if he were to attempt to publish a pamphlet he was writing; and a journalist who argued that the rhetoric concerning the Islamic threat changes, but regardless of how this threat is framed, it is consistently used to justify repression which then fuels radicalization.

One theologian who has advised the government on religious policy told me that decision making in Kyrgyzstan regarding state regulation of religion is akin to quickly extinguishing fires, with a focus on immediate problems and no future-oriented perspective for the effects it will have on religion and identity. He said that problems including an inability to execute policy quickly and efficiently, a lack of expert assessments, decisions being made on the basis of scarce evidence, and leaders with a Soviet mentality who “understand everything about religion through the secular system of the Soviet Union” lead imperfect policies and imperfect implementation. He suggested that this Soviet understanding of religion means that even when advisors and state officials consulted with religious experts and read religious texts, the resulting policy is distorted before it makes it to the president’s desk. How this state involvement in religion is understood by the general population needed further investigation.

Third, my interviews suggested that religious education was a point of agreement among religious leaders and policy makers and deserved independent examination in terms of its effects on religionational fusion. The issue of religious training and education was a constant factor in my discussions, with academics, religious leaders, and state representatives alike emphasizing the importance of standardizing and increasing religious educational opportunities to solve problems ranging from radicalization to weak religionational identity.

Finally, my interviews highlighted the state of flux that the relationship between religious and national identity in Kyrgyzstan is currently in. When asked about what Kyrgyz Islam looks like, one respondent who works for an institute focusing on religious issues told me that “Kyrgyz Islam does not exist. It has not been formed. On the contrary, Kyrgyz Islam is disappearing.... Look, let's count

how many [religious] scholars we have left, actually existing and active scholars who really form the thinking and behavior of believers. Just count. Or ask the Muftiate to count how many scholars are left. I mean scholars who are carriers of traditions, identity, you know. And we have very few scholars like that left. They are dying now”. Other respondents expressed the idea that diversity in Islamic religious practice was weakening Kyrgyzstani national identity. Still others emphasized the importance of Islam as a core component of Kyrgyzstani identity, culture, and history.

A prominent theologian and member of the Council of Ulema told me that the primary problem facing religious individuals in Kyrgyzstan today is “first and foremost...the crisis of national self-identity”. He argued that two oppositional forces were at play creating conflicting identities: on the one hand, de-secularization, caused by a disappointment in democratic processes and liberal values which are understood as secular, and on the other, re-Islamization, which is explicitly multi-national and political, and influenced by foreign forces. He claimed that:

In our [Central Asian] countries there are no other values except nationalism or Islam. Secular values failed to adapt to our society. Therefore, the problem lies in self-identity. Every person identifies himself, before it was considered that if you are Kyrgyz you have to be Muslim. However, it is changing and new identities are coming into play...identity, which has not been fully formed, is going through crisis. It is a big problem. We consider ourselves Kyrgyz, but not every Kyrgyz is Muslim... So what should unite us all? What does Kyrgyzness stand for? Is it to speak Kyrgyz? Or is it to be Muslim?

Empirically investigating how Islam factors into how Kyrgyzstanis define themselves today, and the factors that determine this self-definition, is one of the primary goals of this chapter.

#### *Dependent Variable*

To measure religionational fusion, or the degree to which religious identity influences and constitutes national identity as members of the nation perceive it, I asked respondents a series of questions capturing its two dimensions: 1) imbrication--the degree to which the content of national identity is explicitly understood as being religious--and 2) primacy--the degree of salience religious and national identity holds within an individual’s hierarchy of collective identities. Some of these questions are general to facilitate cross-national comparison—such as asking how important it is to be Muslim in order to be truly Kyrgyzstani—while others are specific to the nature of Kyrgyz religionational fusion—such as measuring the strength of the relationship between the Hanafi Madhhab and popular religionational fusion. Refer to Figure II.1 for an overview of the dimensions of religionational fusion. While I estimated models using questions serving as indicators for each of



the operational definitions presented in this figure, the primary results I discuss in this chapter use indicators for the first operational definition in each dimension.

I employ a variety of questions to measures of both imbrication and primacy to ensure the robustness of my results across measures (see Table 5.1 below for a summary). For imbrication, my primary indicator uses a question asking, “How important is being Muslim to being truly Kyrgyzstani?”, where “very important” indicates the highest level of imbrication and “not at all important” indicates the lowest level. This question is selected because, 1) it is the most direct measure of the degree to which individuals perceive their national identity as being explicitly religious, and 2) it is a common question that has been tested and utilized in dozens of countries and nearly 140 surveys, facilitating cross-national comparison in the subsequent chapter. I also use an alternative version of the question, asking whether or not following the Hanafi madhhab is important to being truly Kyrgyzstani, as a way of getting at whether or not the form religio-national fusion takes follows the state model discussed above. Alternative indicators of imbrication I use in separate models not presented here include questions about the importance of religiosity in political leadership, and a question asking if religion should be a mandatory element in applying for citizenship.

**TABLE V.1: Measures of individual religio-national fusion**

<b>Imbrication</b>	<p><u>Primary Indicator Questions</u></p> <p>How important is being Muslim to being truly Kyrgyzstani? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>How important is following the Hanafi madhhab to being truly Kyrgyzstani? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important.</p> <p><u>Secondary Indicator Questions</u></p> <p>How important is respecting the Muftiate to being truly Kyrgyzstani? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important.</p> <p>What kind of religious orientation should a person be in order to become a citizen of our country? 1) In order to become a citizen, the applicant must be a Muslim. 2) In order to become a citizen, the applicant must be a Muslim or Russian Orthodox Christian. 3) In order to become a citizen, the applicant’s religious affiliation should not matter</p> <p>How important is performing the Hajj for a political leader of Kyrgyzstan? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important.</p> <p>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 1) For Kyrgyzstan, it would be better if more believers occupied governmental positions. 2) For Kyrgyzstan, it would be better if believers had influence over government decisions.</p>
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<sup>3</sup> The full version of this question, and the following two questions, begins “There are different opinions about what qualities a citizen of Kyrgyzstan should possess. Now I will read several qualities. In your opinion, how important are these qualities in order to be considered a true Kyrgyzstani?” The question then asks about specific qualities.

<b>Primacy</b>	<p><u>Primary Indicator Question</u> From the following ways of defining yourself, which of the following do you consider yourself first of all, secondly, and so on. Rate your top five, where 1 is the most important way of defining yourself, and 5 is the least important. I am a citizen of (RESPONDENT'S CITY/TOWN), I am a Muslim, I am a (RESPONDENT'S ETHNICITY), I am a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, I am a citizen of the world, I am a member of the Muslim ummah, Other (list)</p> <p><u>Secondary Indicator Questions</u> How proud are you that you are Kyrgyzstani/Muslim? Very proud, proud, not very proud, not proud.</p> <p>How strongly do you feel unity with all Muslims/Kyrgyzstanis? Very strongly, strongly, not very strongly, not strongly</p> <p>How strongly do you feel that you should support other Kyrgyzstani/Muslim people? Very strongly, strongly, not very strongly, not strongly</p>
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To measure primacy, I ask a series of questions about which forms of identity people most closely associate with, ranking their top five preferences. As a “hard” test of primacy, I create a dichotomous variable where respondents who choose being a Muslim as their primacy identity, and national identity as their secondary identity, are coded as a 1 and all others as a 0. As a “soft” test of primacy, I code all respondents who list being a Muslim and national identity as their top two identities regardless of order as a 1. I also use two alternative indicators of primacy. To capture feelings of how well respondent’s religionational identity describes them and the feeling of a bond with both co-religionists and co-nationals, I created variables indicating if a respondent very strongly felt unity with all Muslims and Kyrgyzstanis and very strongly felt the need to support other Kyrgyzstani and Muslim people respectively. I also estimated models using a variable indicating if the respondent considered themselves very proud to be both a Muslim and a Kyrgyzstani citizen.

*Independent Variables*

State involvement in religion is expected to have an effect on RNF due to the signal individuals receive from the state concerning the “proper” role of religion in the nation-state. Thus, since it is *perceptions* that I am interested in testing in the individual-level study, rather than the legal framework or actual use of rhetoric in symbols constituting state involvement in religion, some of the questions used to measure these perceptions ask about types of state involvement in religion that the Kyrgyz state does not actually engage in.

To measure repression and subsidy, I rely on a series of questions about awareness of and exposure to government repression and subsidies. To operationalize these concepts, I create two additive indexes using a series of questions asking whether or not the respondent believes the Kyrgyz government engages in a number of repressive and subsidizing practices. Each index ranges from 0 (lowest perception of repression/subsidy, the respondent does not think the government

engages in any of the listed practices) to 8 (highest perception of repression/subsidy, the respondent believes the government engages in all of the listed practices). Each index was validated using factor analysis, which confirmed that the individual items all load onto a single factor.

To test for the robustness of my findings related to repression, I also estimate model specifications using alternative indicators of perceptions of repression based on questions that ask whether individuals in their area feel free to practice their religion, and whether or not they know of people who have shaved their beard or removed their hijab to avoid unwanted attention.

Since the effects of symbols are rhetoric are expected to occur as a result of gradual exposure over long periods of time, and given the ubiquitous nature of national symbols and national-level rhetoric leading to lack of variance across individuals, it is difficult to directly measure exposure to or awareness of these elements of state involvement in religion.

To measure awareness of state religious rhetoric—which has been commonplace in Kyrgyzstan since 2010—I ask respondents, “How often do government leaders, such as the president or prime minister, discuss what it means to be a good Muslim in Kyrgyzstan in their statements and speeches?”. Like repression and subsidy, the signal individuals receive from rhetoric is imperfectly reflective of the state’s true signal; no single individual is going to have received the complete range of religious rhetoric state leaders have utilized. Instead, what matters is the extent to which individuals believe the state is utilizing religious rhetoric, and thus how strongly they perceive the positive signal concerning the role of religion in the nation-state.

To measure feelings regarding religionational symbols, I asked respondents to rate their feelings towards national symbols containing religious elements, ranging from 1 indicating shame to 5 indicating pride.

Finally, religious education is measured using questions asking whether or not the respondent has received formal state-regulated religious education, and in cases where they have, following up with a question asking what forms this education took. While the state does regulate and influence religious education, this allows me to gauge whether individuals have received more or less formal forms of religious education to better understand how exposed they are to the state’s ascribed religionational identity.

**TABLE V.2: Measures of state involvement in religion**

Perceptions of Repression	<p><u>Primary Indicator</u>  <i>8 item additive repression index based on how many repressive policies the respondent thinks the state is implementing</i><sup>4</sup></p> <p><u>Alternative Questions</u>            In your opinion, how many people from among those whom you know well and who are Muslims feel free to express their religious beliefs in public places – for example, visiting a mosque or reading namaz?</p> <p>Have you heard about people who shaved off their beards or decided not to wear religious clothes that they would like to wear in public places, such as the hijab, in order to avoid unwanted attention?</p> <p>Have you heard about cases when people moved abroad (and not just visited places of pilgrimage) to practice their religious beliefs, because, in their opinion, they could not express their religious beliefs in their homeland?</p>
Perceptions of Subsidy	<p><u>Primary Indicator</u>  <i>8 item additive subsidy index based on how many subsidizing policies the respondent thinks the state is implementing</i><sup>5</sup></p>
Perceptions of Symbols	<p><u>Primary Indicator Question</u>            What feelings do you have when the state includes Islam in national symbols, such as currency, flag and national anthem? Use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you are feeling shame, and 5 means feeling proud.</p>
Perceptions of Rhetoric	<p><u>Primary Indicator Question</u>            How often do government leaders, such as the president or prime minister, discuss what it means to be a good Muslim of Kyrgyzstan in their statements and speeches? Very often, sometimes, rarely, or never?</p>
Religious Education	<p><u>Primary Indicator</u>  <i>Dichotomous variable indicating the respondent self-reports that they have received religious education</i></p>

*Controls for Alternative Explanations*

Religiosity is frequently measured using overly blunt indicators that fail to capture the full spectrum of beliefs and behaviors that constitute religiousness. While engaging in this debate is

<sup>4</sup> The questions comprising the index ask respondents whether or not the Kyrgyzstani government has laws or policies regulating whether women can wear the hijab in public places, controlling the content of printed religious materials produced and distributed in Kyrgyzstan, prohibiting the activity of particular Muslim religious groups in Kyrgyzstan, regulating religious holidays (with the example given of imposing a curfew during Ramadan), restricting Mosque visitation (with the example given of only allowing adults), prohibiting Qur’an study groups in private homes, regulating access to content of religious websites, and prohibiting people from receiving religious education abroad.

<sup>5</sup> The questions comprising the index ask respondents whether or not the Kyrgyzstani government has laws or policies which require public schools to teach Islam, determine the curriculum for Islamic courses that are taught in public schools (such as by requiring a specific interpretation of Islam be taught or by requiring teachers use one official textbook), providing funding for the construction of mosques, providing funding for maintaining shrines, providing public education for imams, only allowing publicly educated Imams to preach in mosques, supporting fatwas of all religious leaders in Kyrgyzstan, supporting fatwas issued only by the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan. Educational questions are included because perceptions of the state administering and supporting religious education are an example of the state favoring and supporting religion; for education to operate as rhetoric, rather than subsidies, the individual must actually receive this religious education, rather than simply perceive that it exists.

beyond the scope of this dissertation, I test model specifications using a variety of measures of religiosity, including indicators of self-assessed piety, religious knowledge, and organizational activity.

In a separate set of models, I develop two religiosity indexes based on the work of Pauline Jones. Respondents were asked to consider a number of religious behaviors and told to list how important each behavior is in their consideration of why they consider themselves religious. I construct two indexes by adding together items that represent syncretism (in the Kyrgyz context, the blending of Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs and tradition) and scripturalism.<sup>6</sup>

I also control for ethnicity. Ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan face greater enforcement of religious repression, and thus the manner in which they experience state involvement in religion, either personally or through their social networks, will be fundamentally more negative than their ethnic Kyrgyz or Russian counterparts.

I also include a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is from either Osh City or Osh Oblast. This region, where ethnic Uzbeks are most heavily concentrated, is targeted for religious repression at higher rates than the rest of the country, in part due to the region's history of ethnic violence and instability. There is evidence suggesting high levels of distrust of state authorities, due in part to this repression and perceived discrimination against practicing Muslims (Tucker 2018, 9). Further, it has been estimated that Kyrgyzstani Islamic extremist fighters in Syria and Iraq are disproportionately from the South, representing over half of the total Kyrgyzstani fighters. As many as one-third are estimated to come from Aravan, a district in Osh Oblast only representing two percent of the national population (Tucker 2018, 2).

I also include controls for socio-economic characteristics including level of education, gender, financial well-being, and rural vs. urban.

### **Statistical Tests and Data**

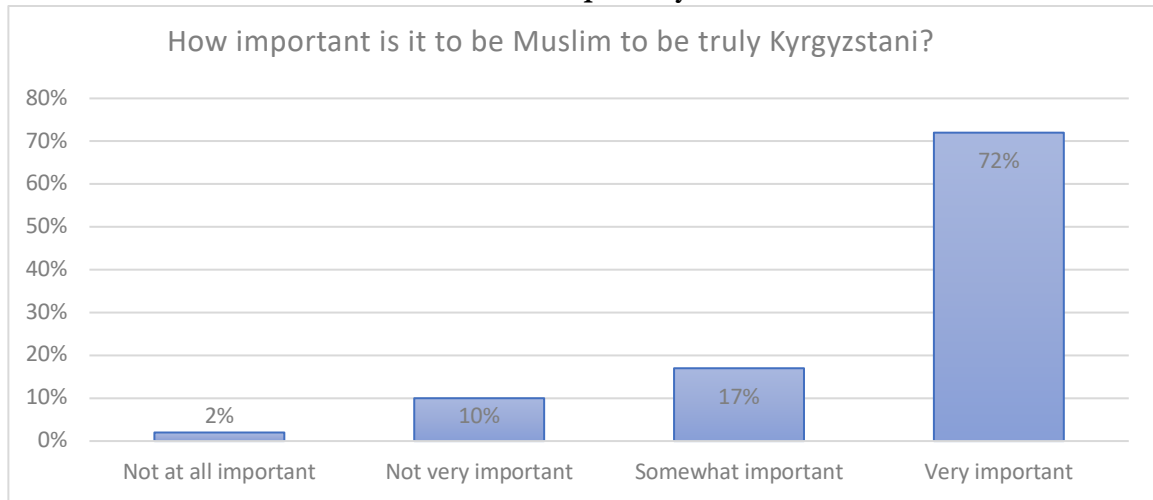
I use ordered logit to estimate my imbrication models, and standard logit specification for my primacy models. I test multiple models utilizing my various indicators of religionational fusion as the dependent variable, as well as testing the significance of alternative measures of religiosity.

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<sup>6</sup> The items were added together and then normalized to be on the same 0-1 scale, where 1 represents the highest possible value on the scale. Items loaded into the syncretism measure include visitation of holy places and prayer at home outside of namaz. Items loaded into the scripturalism measure include reading the Qur'an, fasting during Ramadan, and reading namaz five times per day. Going to mosque was not included as part of the measure since this practice is more common among men than women.

My nationally representative survey of Kyrgyzstani adult citizens was administered in late 2018 and early 2019. The sample includes 2631 respondents, 180 of which are part of an ethnic Uzbek oversample to elicit the aforementioned effects of ethnicity. My analysis is focused on the Muslim subpopulation, which constitutes 91% of the total sample, or 2,400 respondents.

**FIGURE V.1: Distribution of primary imbrication indicator**



### Findings and Analysis

In summary, I find differing degrees of support for my hypotheses, summarized in Table 5.3 below. Repression decreases religionational fusion, while subsidies, symbols, and rhetoric increase it. However, with the exception of symbols, these dimensions of state involvement in religion do not influence imbrication and primacy equally; repression and rhetoric have a strong effect on imbrication, while subsidies primarily influence primacy.

Additionally, if the type of imbrication is divided into general Muslim imbrication, and the state's preferred religious interpretation (indicated by preference for the Hanafi madhhab), the results are further complicated. For example, perceptions of state subsidies do not have an effect on general Muslim imbrication, but do appear to significantly increase specifically Hanafi imbrication. This suggests that certain aspects of state involvement in religion may be better suited for dictating the specific *content* of religionational fusion, rather than simply increasing or decreasing it.

In the remainder of this section, I review each individual hypothesis, present my evidence, and briefly interpret my results.

**TABLE V.3: Review of hypotheses and findings**

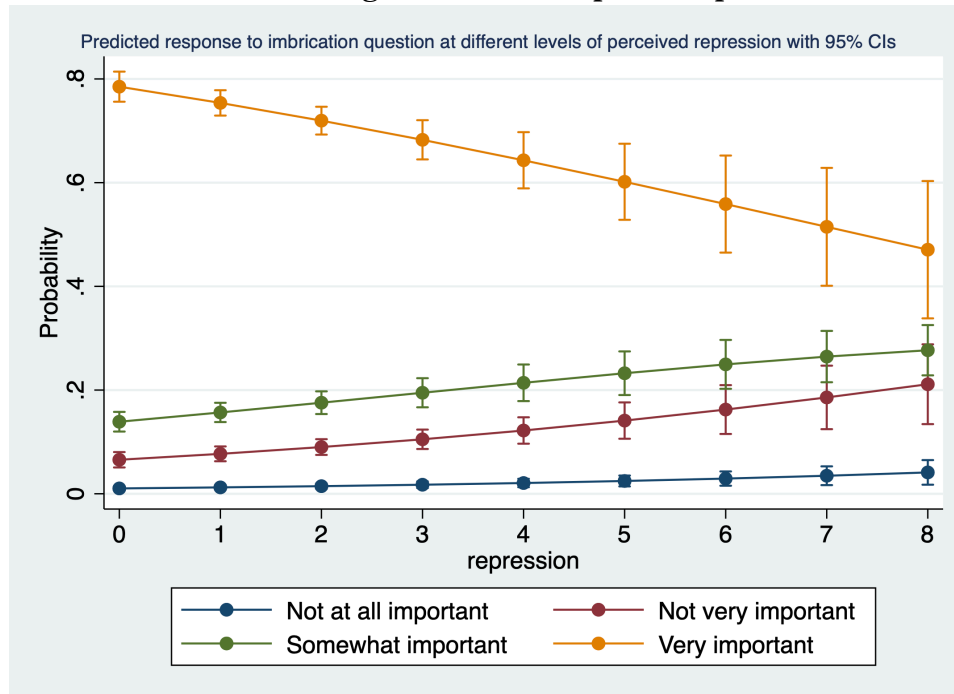
Hypothesis	Result
<i>H1. Individuals who have higher perceptions of religious repression will have lower levels of RNF.</i>	Supported. Significant negative effect on imbrication.
<i>H2. Individuals who perceive high amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of RNF.</i>	Mixed support. Significant positive effect on soft measure of primacy and on Hanafi imbrication when religiosity is measured as syncretism and scripturalism, but no other indicators of religionational fusion are affected by subsidies.
<i>H3. Higher perceptions of state use of religious symbols will increase religionational fusion</i>	Supported. Significant positive effect on imbrication and primacy. However, the direction of causality for this claim is problematic, due to question wording asking about expected reaction to state religious symbols, rather than frequency of perceiving state religious symbols.
<i>H4.1 Individuals exposed to state religious rhetoric will exhibit higher levels of religionational fusion</i>	Supported. Significant positive effect on imbrication.
<i>H4.2 Religious rhetoric will have a negative interaction with distrust of state leaders. As distrust increases, the magnitude of the effect of religious rhetoric on religionational fusion will decrease</i>	Not supported. However, trust in national leadership has an independent positive effect on Hanafi-imbrication
<i>H5. Individuals who have received religious education will have higher RNF</i>	Supported. Having received religious increases imbrication when considering the state-sanctioned form of religionational fusion (measured as Hanafi imbrication), but does not have an effect on primacy or more general fusion of Islam and national identity.
<i>H6. Individuals exposed to the more repressive Soviet era of state involvement in religion will exhibit lower levels of RNF that persists into the present.</i>	Not supported.

*H1: Individuals who perceive higher levels of religious repression will have lower levels of RNF*

I find support for the hypothesis that individuals who perceive repression as higher are more likely to exhibit lower religionational fusion. This effect remains significant and negative, regardless of whether imbrication is measured as the importance of being Muslim or following the Hanafi madhhab for being truly Kyrgyzstani.

To illustrate this effect, I present a line plot showing the marginal effect of perceptions of repression on being in one of the four categorical outcomes, holding other variables at their means and changing only the repression variable. As the figure illustrates, as perceptions of repression increase, the likelihood of being in the category signifying the highest level of imbrication decreases significantly, from a point estimate of nearly 80% down to a point estimate of less than 50%.

**FIGURE V.2: Marginal effects of repression plot**



Similar results hold if repression is measured using alternative indicators. For example, if the same model is estimated but the repression variable is replaced by a question asking if the respondent is aware of individuals who have moved abroad to practice their faith since they feel that they are unable to do so safely in their homeland, there is still a strong and statistically significant negative effect on imbrication.

For primacy, measured using my primary indicators that directly gauge the position of religion and nation in respondents' hierarchies of identity, repression does not have an effect discernable from zero. This remains true using alternative indicators of primacy, such as pride in religious and national identity, and feelings of unity and support for both co-nationals and co-religionists. This suggests that while repression may influence the content of religionational fusion, it does not influence the strength of this identity, both in absolute terms and relative to other forms of collective identification.

These results can be interpreted as suggesting that repression, based on which practices are repressed, signals to citizens which religious practices are acceptable or not (influencing imbrication), but does not influence the overall *strength* of this fused identity. In other words, if an individual perceives higher levels of religious repression, they will be less likely to view Islam as an important component of Kyrgyzstani identity based on the signal about religionational identity they receive



from the state, but the strength of their religious and national identity relative to other forms of collective identity will be unaffected.

*H2: Individuals who perceive higher amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of RNF.*

Support for the hypothesis that increased perceptions of religious subsidies will increase religionational fusion was mixed. There was no significant effect when imbrication was measured as the degree to which respondents view being Muslim as necessary to being Kyrgyzstani. There was a weakly significant positive effect on the degree to which following the Hanafi madhhab is important to being Kyrgyzstani, but only when religiosity was measured as syncretism and scripturalism. Perceptions of religious subsidies also bore insignificant results for models using alternative indicators of imbrication. This suggests that perceptions of state support for religion does not influence the degree to which religious and national identity overlap.

However, significant positive results were derived in the model estimating the effect of perceptions of subsidy on primacy in the soft primacy model, but not in the hard primacy model, with the exception of the model where religiosity was measured as syncretism and scripturalism. This suggests that state involvement in religious subsidies may have the effect of increase the importance of both religious and national identity for individuals relative to other forms of identity but does not generally elevate religious identity above national identity. Further, alternative indicators of primacy, including pride in religious and national identity and measures of unity/support were not significantly affected by perceptions of subsidies.

These results are somewhat surprising. Barring significant results from one indicator of primacy, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that subsidies have no significant effect on religionational fusion. This is not due to lack of variance in perceptions of subsidies; over half of respondents perceive the state as engaging in at least 1 subsidizing practice, and nearly 28% believe the state engages in at least half of the eight listed practices. This suggests that religious subsidies may increase the strength of religionational identity, but also that these subsidies do not influence the degree to which religion is a core component of national identity, even when these subsidies are explicitly aimed at the dominant religion, as is the case in all of the components of my subsidy index.

*H3: Individuals who perceive higher state use of religious symbols will have higher levels of RNF*

The symbols variable had a significant and positive effect on predicting the RNF of respondents, with significant positive effects estimated across all models. However, these results

must be interpreted cautiously. The symbols question does not ask how frequently or intensely respondents perceive religious symbols incorporated into national symbols; rather, it asks how respondents feel when they do see Islamic symbols incorporated into national symbols, a practice that is rare in Kyrgyzstan relative to many other Muslim majority countries including those in Central Asia, and even relative to many Christian European countries. Thus, while the results suggest that people who *believe they would* feel increased religionational pride when seeing religious symbols incorporated into national symbols tend to have higher levels of religionational fusion, causality here is muddled, and it may simply be that those who have higher levels of religionational fusion are more receptive to the *idea* of religious symbols on flags, currency, in anthems, etc.

*H4.1: Individuals who perceive higher amounts of state religious rhetoric will exhibit higher levels of RNF*

*H4.2: Individuals who distrust the president or prime minister and perceive religious rhetoric as high will have lower RNF than those who trust the national leadership*

The hypothesis that higher perceived religious rhetoric influences the degree of religionational fusion is partially supported. Rhetoric has a significant and positive effect on imbrication. However, there is not observable interactive effect on religionational fusion between trust in the President and state religious rhetoric.

When measured as trust in the Prime Minister rather than trust in the President, there is a significant positive interactive effect between rhetoric and trust for both the Muslim and Hanafi madhhab imbrication measures. This suggests that, at least in some cases, trust in state leaders does affect the *form* this religionational fusion takes. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, this means internalizing the state's narrative that it is not enough to be Muslim to be specifically Kyrgyz—in fact, many manifestations of Islam are “foreign” and anti-nation according to the state—but one must also follow the apolitical and native Hanafi madhhab.

Regarding primacy, there is no significant effect between rhetoric or rhetoric and trust and my primary measures of primacy, which considers the placement of religion and national identity in respondents' hierarchies of identity. However, when primacy is measured as the absolute strength of religionational identity (very proud to be both Muslim and Kyrgyzstani, very strongly feel unity with both Muslims and Kyrgyzstani citizens, and very strongly feel the need to support Muslims and Kyrgyzstanis), rhetoric has a significant and positive effect in each model.

*H5: Individuals who have received state influenced or controlled religious education will have higher RNF*

Having received religious education does not have a statistically significant effect on imbrication using the Muslim measure. However, religious education does have a positive effect on considering the Hanafi madhhab an important component of national identity.

The Kyrgyz government, through its influence over the Muftiate and required registration for madrassas through the SCRA, has implemented a unified madrasa curriculum approved by the Muftiate. However, upon further consideration of the Kyrgyz context, these results can be interpreted. This suggests that the standardized religious curriculum, one of the primary goals of the 2014 Concept, may have been successful in infusing specifically Hanafi Islam into national identity for those who have received this education. Further, it may suggest that state oversight over religious education prior to this may have also been effective in ensuring that the state's message about appropriate religious identity was still being channeled downward through the religious educational institution over which they have oversight.

It should be noted however that some reports suggest that the standardized religious curriculum is not followed by many madrassas, and the Ministry of Education does not have powers to directly influence or enforce religious curriculum standards (Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations 2017, 16). Second, of the roughly 5% of Muslims who reported having received a religious education, 57% responded that this education was received at least in part or in full through participation in Qur'an study groups, a form of education that tends to be less well-regulated due to its often-private nature. It is possible that students participating in such groups have increased religionational fusion due to an increase in religious knowledge, rather than indoctrination of state-sanctioned beliefs and practices channeled downward by the influence of the state.

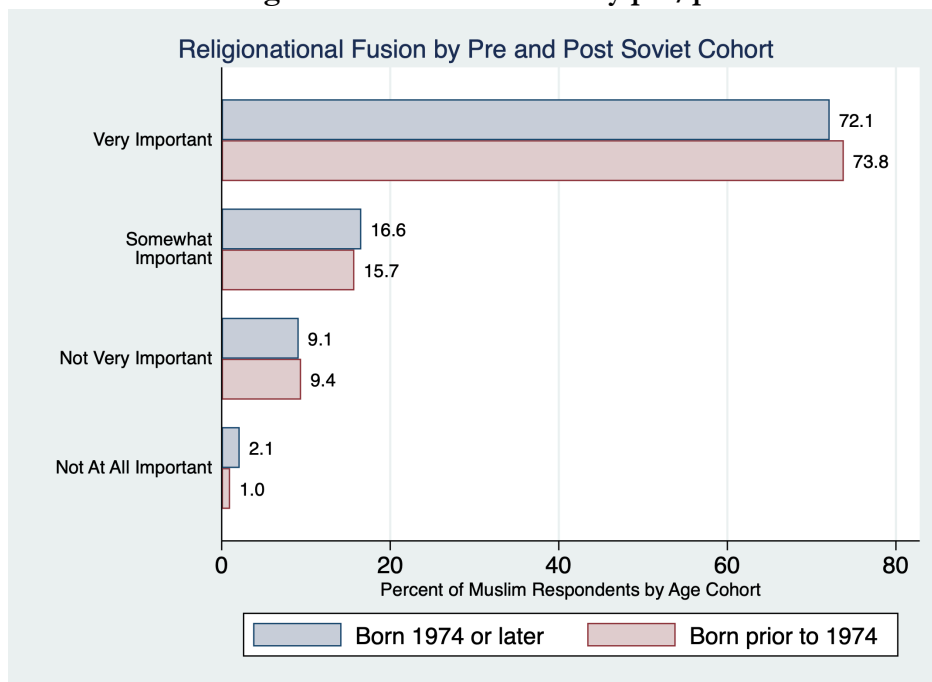
*H6: Individuals exposed to the more repressive Soviet era of state involvement in religion will exhibit lower levels of RNF that persists into the present.*

I argued that individuals who came of age during the Soviet period, due to greater exposure to state religious repression in the Kyrgyz SSR during their formative years, would have received a signal from the Soviet state about ascribed religionational identity that would have a persisting negative effect on religionational fusion. However, my data shows that pre and post-Soviet age cohort does not appear to influence religionational imbrication, suggesting that first-hand experience of Soviet-involvement in religion does not have a lingering effect on the degree of religious content of religionational fusion. This is not to say that the Soviet legacy of religious involvement did not contribute to the baseline levels of religionational fusion that existed in the 1990s, but instead

suggests that the religious component of the state’s nation-building efforts have successfully influenced both the younger and older generations.

An implication of this is that Kyrgyzstani citizens may simply not view the Soviet period as having sent any relevant signal concerning ascribed religionational fusion, since at this time the Kyrgyzstani nation-state did not exist, and the authorities transmitting this signal did not claim to speak solely for the Kyrgyzstani nation in the way that the current Kyrgyzstani regime does. This provides further justification for the selection of the Central Asian cases as representing a clean break from the Soviet past, which allows me to account for endogeneity issues.

**FIGURE V.3: Religionational imbrication by pre/post-Soviet cohort**



Alternatively, given the significance of repression in determining imbrication, this null result might instead suggest that while state involvement in religion matters, the effect simply does not persist over time, and only current or more recent perceptions of state involvement in religion influence religionational identity. In other words, people construct their religionational identity partially dependent on the signals they currently receive from the state about the relationship between religious and national identity, without significant consideration of past state involvement in religion. However, given that during the Soviet period Kyrgyzstanis were dealing with the Soviet and not the Kyrgyzstani state, further tests are merited that look at large shifts over time within a single nation-state.

**TABLE V.4: Results of ordered logit and logit models using primary DV measures**

	Imbrication (Muslim)		Imbrication (Hanafi)		Primacy (Soft)		Primacy (Hard)	
<i>State Involvement in Religion</i>								
<b>Perceived repression</b>	_-***	_-***	_*	_-**	0	0	0	0
<b>Perceived subsidy</b>	0	0	+*	0	+*	+*	+*	0
<b>Perceived rhetoric</b>	0	+***	+***	+***	0	0	0	0
<b>Trust in national leadership</b>	0	0	+*	0	0	0	0	0
Rhetoric*Trust in national leadership	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Reaction to symbols</b>	+***	+***	+***	+***	+***	+***	+***	+***
<b>Religious education</b>	0	0	0	+*	0	0	0	0
<i>Control Variables</i>								
<b>Syncretism</b> <sup>7</sup>	+***		+***		0		0	
<b>Scripturalism</b>	+***		+***		+*		+***	
<b>Self-assessed religiosity</b> <sup>8</sup>		+**		+***		0		+**
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Uzbek ethnicity</b>	0	+*	+*	+***	0	0	+**	+***
Osh region	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soviet cohort	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Household financial well-being</b>	0	+***	0	0	+*	+**	+*	+*
<b>Educational attainment</b>	0	_-***	_*	_*	0	0	0	0
<b>Rural</b>	0	0	0	+*	_*	0	0	0
<i>P-Values: *=&gt;.05, **=&gt;.01, ***=&gt;.001</i>								

*Accounting for the Role of Religiosity*

As discussed in the theory chapter, others have argued that some degree of religiosity is necessary but not sufficient for religionational fusion to take place. Given this, the role of religiosity merits further explanation, despite serving as a control in my models.

While it is conceivable that an irreligious person might see their national identity as fundamentally religious, such a person would have low primacy given their weak affiliation with the

<sup>7</sup> Models were also estimated without religiosity included to better understand how religiosity is part of the causal chain. The significant effects observed persist even when religiosity is removed from each model.

<sup>8</sup> Other indicators measuring different aspects of religiosity were tested, including frequency of mosque attendance and religious knowledge (ability to name the five pillars). Neither indicator significantly impacted the results. Religious knowledge measured as ability to name the five pillars was only significant (with a positive coefficient) for estimating Hanafi imbrication. This is unsurprising, and it suggests that scriptural religious knowledge is predictive of adopting the less syncretic, more scripturalist state conception of religionational fusion.

religious part of their identity, and might be more prone to viewing their national identity as un-imblicated by religion to better reflect their personal beliefs and resolve cognitive dissonance.

The survey data suggests that this is the case to an extent. For example, among Muslims who consider themselves not very or not at all religious, “very high” Muslim imbrication is 10% lower than those who consider themselves somewhat or very religious. However, even among this group, in absolute terms religionational fusion is high: 65% of these less-religious Muslims still claim that being a Muslim is very important to being truly Kyrgyzstani. Similar differences exist for primacy, with a 7% and 16% gap between the less religious and more religious on the soft and hard primacy measures respectively.

What is interesting, however, is looking at how these results shift when religiosity is measured as syncretism and scripturalism. Among those who score the highest level of syncretism (roughly 36% of all Muslims), 87% believe being a Muslim is very important to being truly Kyrgyzstan, 24% higher than those who do not have the highest level of syncretism. Even more interesting, 63% of those who score highly on syncretism believe that following the Hanafi madhhab is very important to being truly Kyrgyzstani, compared the 23% of those not scoring the highest level of syncretism.

Among those scoring the highest level of scripturalism (38% of Muslims), the results are similar. 86% of those scoring the highest value believe being a Muslim is very important to being truly Kyrgyzstani, compared to 63% of those who do not score the highest value. 59% believe that following the Hanafi madhhab is very important, relative to only 23% of those not scoring the highest scripturalism value.

On the hard and soft primacy measures, results are similar between scripturalists and syncretists. On the soft primacy measure, 50% of scripturalists and 50% of syncretists are coded as a 1, while on the hard primacy measure, 41% of scripturalists and 40% of syncretists are coded as a 1.

The scores on syncretism and scripturalism are distinct; among those scoring the highest levels in at least one of the two categories, 303 respondents only scored the highest value on scripturalism, 253 scored the highest level on only syncretism, and 641 respondents scored the highest level on both measures. However, if we remove respondents who have both the highest level of syncretism and scripturalism, and consider only those scoring the highest level on one of the measures, the results on all measures of religionational fusion are lower, but the differences between the fully distinct scripturalist and syncretic groups remain slight, in most cases only a percent or two.

This suggests, at least when it comes to how individuals reconcile their religious identity, it may be more important how religious an individual understands themselves to be overall, rather than what forms this religiosity takes, that matters for both how they understand their national identity as infused with religion and how important they view this identity relative to other collective identities.

### Supplementary Tests: The Internalization of State-Sanctioned Islam

In Kyrgyzstan, and Central Asia broadly, each state not only involves itself in religion, but also attempts to construct a particular form of Islam that is portrayed as “national” Islam. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this national Islam is characterized as moderate, syncretic and tolerant of pre-Islamic Central Asia tradition, based on the Hanafi madhhab, apolitical, and divorced from “foreign” Arab Islamic practice including physical expressions of piety such as wearing the hijab or young men keeping a lengthy beard. The hijab issue has been at the center of this debate, politically salient in Kyrgyzstan for years, and the target of repression and negative rhetoric from the highest levels of the government and the recent “War of the Billboards” that involved billboards being displayed criticizing Islamic dress being funded by the presidential administration, and alternative billboards being erected that criticized Western dress (see Figure V.4). In both cases, the images were underscored by the text, “My poor people, where are we going?”, suggesting that the women wearing religious clothing and western clothing represented an undesirable societal trajectory (see Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017 for a complete overview of the event).

**FIGURE V.4: Bishkek billboards<sup>9</sup>**



Given this context, to better understand the form popular religious fusion takes in Kyrgyzstan, and whether or not it is at odds with the state-sanctioned form of religious

<sup>9</sup> Photos from (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017, 218, 220)

identity, I include an embedded survey experiment aimed at examining the effect of physical manifestations of piety—specifically Western-style dress (low piety), traditional Kyrgyz dress (state-sanctioned piety, ethnic identity), and the hijab (“foreign” piety)—on perceptions of national belongingness and whether or not individuals are “good Muslims”. The control group in this experiment receives a short vignette about a young Kyrgyz woman with generally desirable characteristics: she was born in a small village, graduated from the Kyrgyz National University with a degree in economics, and she recently married and is expecting her first child. Each treatment group receives the same vignette, but also is presented one of three photos that are otherwise identical save whether the woman is wearing no head covering with her hair down signifying a Western style, wearing a headscarf tied in the traditional Kyrgyz manner (the *jooluk*), or wearing a hijab fully covering the head (see Figure V.5).

I find support for the notion that while attributed degree of religiosity is an important element of how Kyrgyzstanis understand their national and religious identity, for many people there is tension between the state’s position on expression of religiosity and national identity and their personal construction of religionational identity.

**FIGURE V.5: Western treatment/traditional treatment/hijab treatment**

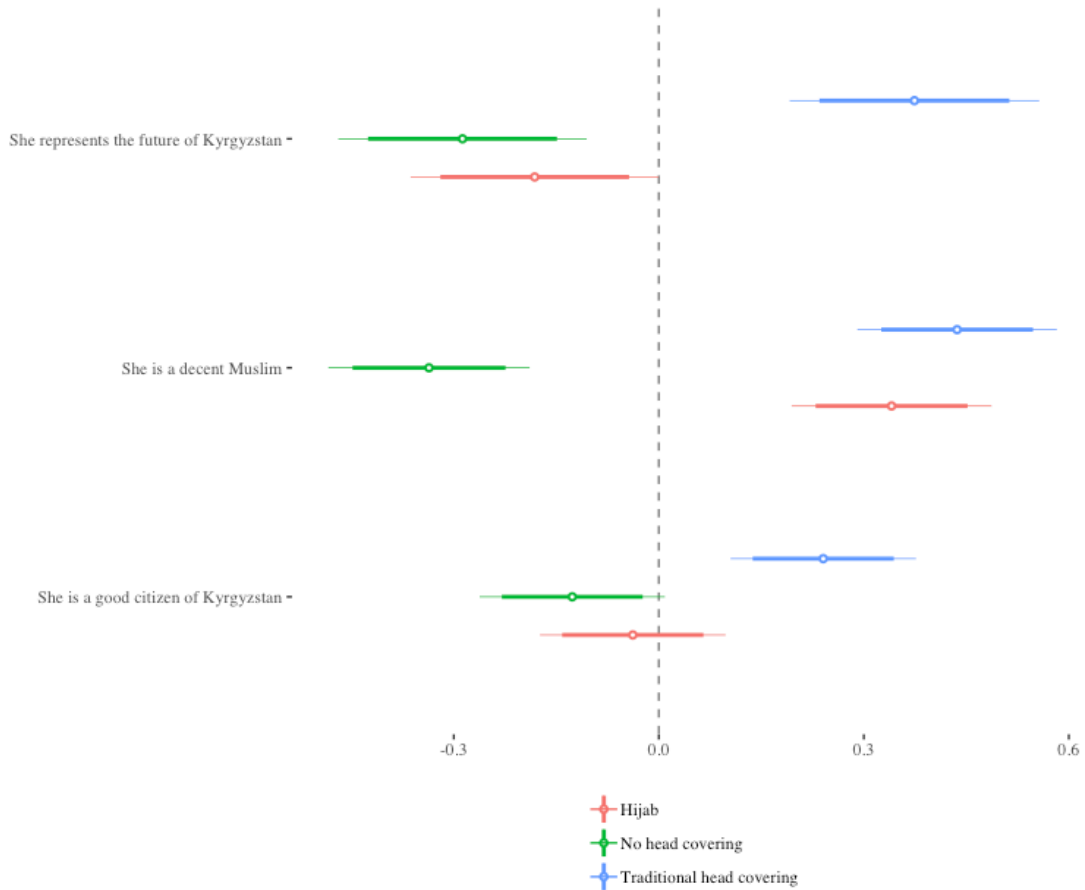


The presence of the traditional headscarf has a positive effect on people’s perceptions of whether the woman in question represents the future of Kyrgyzstan, is a good Muslim, and is a good citizen, while the lack of any head covering has a significant and negative effect on perceptions along all three measures (see Figure V.6). This suggests that the traditional form of dress has a positive effect on perceptions of national belongingness and perceptions of “good” piety, while “western-style” affectation negatively influences these perceptions. Based on these findings alone, it seems



that the counter-messaging billboards that criticized the increasing Westernization of society did capture a popular sentiment among Kyrgyzstani Muslims.

**FIGURE V.6: Differences in means between treatment arms and control group**



The hijab, however, unlike the other two treatments, has mixed effects. Controlling for other characteristics of respondents, the presence of the hijab it negatively influences the extent to which respondents perceive the woman as representing the future of Kyrgyzstan, which is in-line with the state’s narrative that such foreign expressions of Islam should be rooted out of Kyrgyzstani society.

However, despite government rhetoric to the contrary,<sup>10</sup> people receiving the hijab treatment perceive the woman as a “good Muslim” to a greater degree than any of the other treatment arms. Also interesting is the fact that whether or not the woman is perceived as an exemplar of a good Kyrgyzstani citizen is not significantly affected by whether the woman is perceived as wearing a hijab relative to the control group. This suggests that, despite government efforts to present related interpretations of Islam as un-Kyrgyzstani, this “foreign” manifestation of Islam is neither clearly associated with Kyrgyzstani nor clearly with un-Kyrgyzstani national identity.

These results, considered in the context of other results on the survey, suggest that while state involvement in religion does have an effect on religionational fusion, the effect does not necessarily occur in the precise manner the state intends, or to the extent the state might desire. This is perhaps unsurprising; even in Central Asian contexts such as Kyrgyzstan where religion is carefully regulated, piety manifests in myriad ways. Further, it cannot be assumed that the full spectrum of the state’s involvement in religion reaches the general population. While the president attacks the hijab and his rhetoric and the billboards that were constructed in urban areas, this messaging is still unlikely to directly and fully reach even a substantial minority of the population who is already otherwise tuned into political affairs. It may also simply be that a substantial portion of Kyrgyz Muslims are still uncomfortable with heavy state influence in religious affairs; when asked what degree of influence political leaders should have on religious affairs, only 23% responded “very big influence”.

Interestingly, subgroup analysis yields similar outcomes regardless of gender. For example, both women and men receiving the hijab treatment view the woman wearing the hijab as a better Muslim than those in the control group, with no significant effect elicited by the hijab on perceptions of if the woman is a good citizen of Kyrgyzstan.

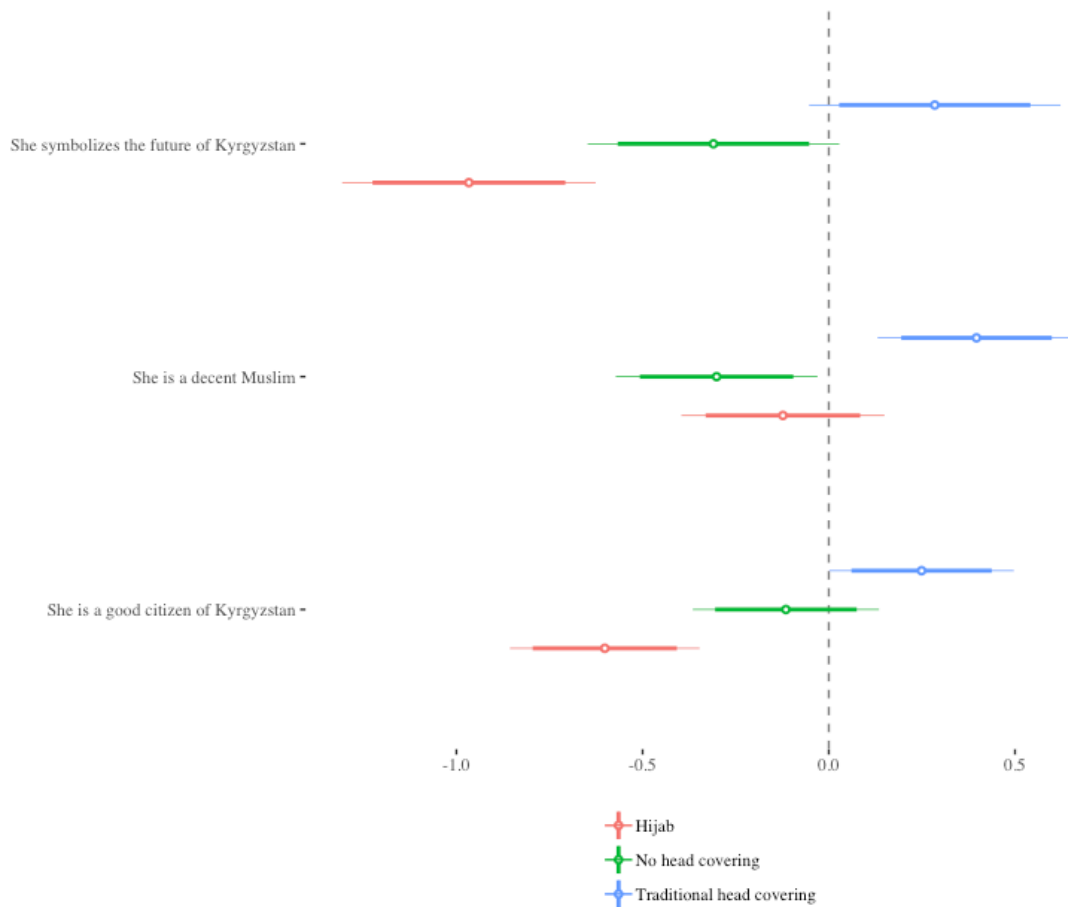
However, religiosity appears to be an important condition upon which these effects are predicated; among those Muslims who self-report that they are “not very religious” or “not at all religious”, the hijab does have a significant and negative effect on perceptions of whether the

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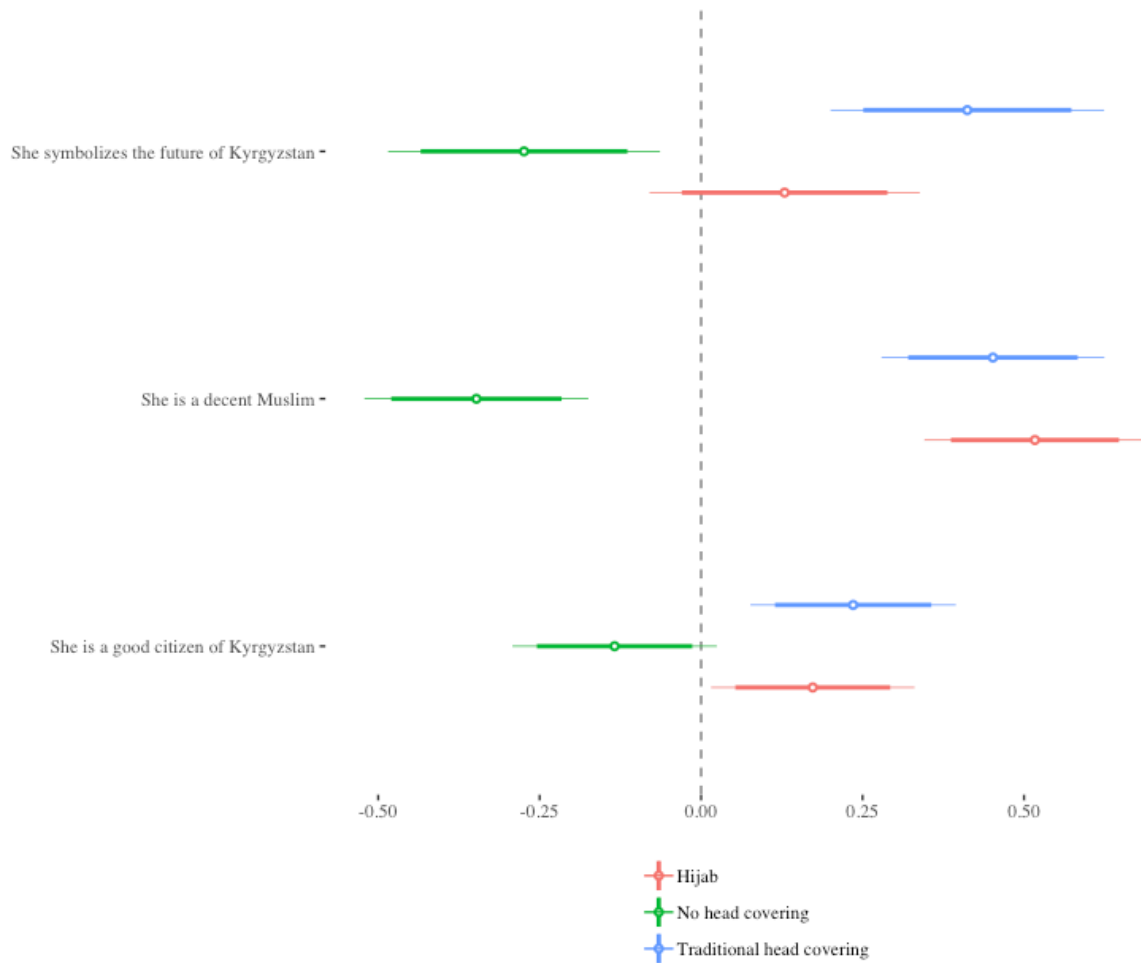
<sup>10</sup> For example, Atambayev has expressed preference for Western-style dress, arguing that “Our women have been wearing miniskirts since 1950s, and they never thought about wearing an explosive belt.” He has elsewhere argued that Islamic clothing can radicalize its wearers, saying that “Clothes also can change one's thoughts sometimes. When we were searching for prisoners who had escaped a detention center, Melis Turganbayev (the former interior minister) came to me and said that they had been eavesdropping on telephone conversations of wives and mistresses of criminals. Their wives and mistresses wore sacks on their heads and they wanted to organize bombings.” He has argued that it is not conservatism or even Islam that he has a problem with, but instead the effect such things may have on the “Arabization of society [and the] deprivation of the Kyrgyz nation of its language and traditions”, making explicit the idea that such physical manifestations of Islam are un-Kyrgyz and foreign from the government’s perspective (BBC 2016).

woman is perceived as a good citizen of Kyrgyzstan, while among those who report they are “somewhat religious” or “very religious”, there is a significant positive effect on perceptions of whether she is a good citizen (See Figure V.7 and Figure V.8). This suggests that the state’s message concerning religionational identity, if it is having an effect on perceptions of the hijab, is being internalized differently by more and less religious citizens. Among less religious Muslims, the state message that there is a gradually increasing threat of a “foreign Islam” having a deleterious effect on Kyrgyzstani identity and culture might be being detected and internalized into the way they perceive their religionational identity, while among more religious Muslims, this message is either not being received or is being ignored in favor of preexisting personal religious convictions.

**FIGURE V.7: Less pious subpopulation, differences in means between treatment arms and control group**



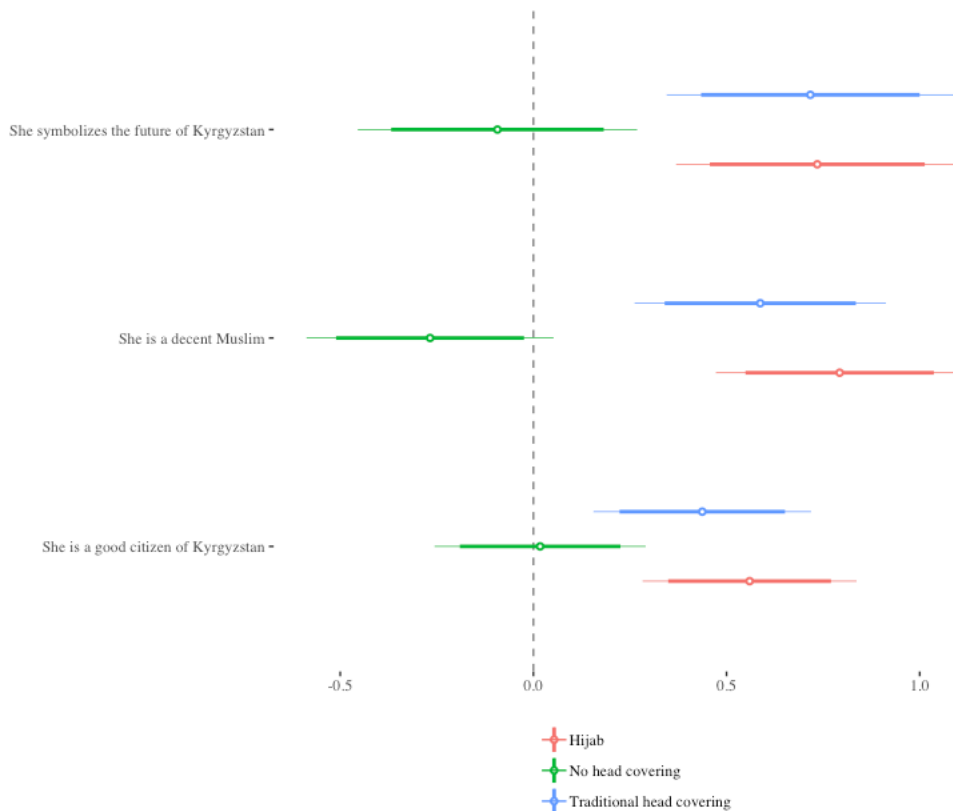
**FIGURE V.8: More pious subpopulation, differences in means between treatment arms and control group**



Further, the effect of the hijab on generating positive perceptions of citizenship and whether the subject represents the future of Kyrgyzstan are substantially more positive among Uzbeks (see Figure V.9). Unlike other groups, ethnic Uzbeks respondents do perceive the woman in the hijab as more representative of the future of Kyrgyzstan relative to the control group, as well as perceiving her as a better Muslim and a better citizen of Kyrgyzstan relative to the control. This may suggest that the government narrative concerning proper forms of religionational identity is either less internalized by Uzbeks who already feel marginalized by authorities who disproportionately target them for religious repression (and thus may be more prone to rebelling against state-ascribed identity), or that this signal is not reaching Uzbeks who are typically surrounded by more religious

communities in the South. It may also simply be that religion and religiosity plays a greater role in defining identity for Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan than for ethnic Kyrgyz Muslims.

**FIGURE V.9: Ethnic Uzbek subpopulation, differences in means between treatment arms and control group**



A few limitations of this experiment should be noted. First, while the hijab treatment did include an image of the woman wearing an Islamic headscarf, it was not a niqab and did not cover the face. These forms of head covering, as demonstrated by the billboards, are more controversial and less commonly seen in Kyrgyzstan, and thus would likely have elicited a more negative response. Further, the headscarf we chose to present to respondents was not black. Black is an explicit mark of a dangerous, foreign Islam according to the government. This would suggest that presenting a black headscarf as a treatment may have had a more negative effect on all questions relative to the colorful hijab that was used.

That said, the hijab itself, regardless of color, is still controversial, particularly in public spaces such as schools where it is associated with Hizb ut-Tahrir and religious extremism. While the

Ministry of Education denies ordering schools to ban the garment, it has recommended that they do so as part of a standardized school uniform, which schools have interpreted as an outright ban (Asanova and Mamaraimov 2019). Prominent protests have been held by women against the government policy, and in at least one case an imam filed a lawsuit against a school for forbidding his daughter from wearing the hijab (RFE/RL 2011).

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided support for the notion that state involvement in religion has a direct effect on religionational fusion, even when controlling for factors thought to determine religionational fusion such as religiosity and ethnicity.

While my theory suggested that imbrication and primacy would be affected by different aspects of state involvement in religion in the same way, the data suggests that this is not the case. While the direction of effects matched those predicted in my hypotheses, the significance varied across imbrication and primacy and each aspect of state involvement in religion. For example, perceived repression significantly reduces imbrication and has no discernable effect on primacy, while perceived subsidies significantly increase primacy but have no effect on imbrication. This suggests that while state involvement in religion broadly effects religionational fusion, some aspects of this involvement, such as repression, are more likely to influence the *form* religionational identity takes, while other aspects, such as subsidies, influence its *strength*. Use of symbols and rhetoric appear to influence both the form and strength of religionational fusion.<sup>11</sup>

Notably, while the state does appear to influence religionational fusion through its involvement in religion, the precise character of this influence does not necessarily match the state's intent. Instead, my results suggest that some strategies that the state may expect would effectively foster a particular kind of religionational identity—such as subsidizing their preferred Islamic practices—instead have little influence on influencing the character of religionational fusion. Instead, they simply strengthening religious and national identity. On the other hand, practices aimed at reducing the importance of religion as collective identity—such as repression—may have effects adverse to the state's interests, such as reducing the extent to which individuals view the doctrine the state does endorse as a component of national identity.

For reasons mentioned in the previous chapter, Kyrgyzstan serves as an excellent case for testing my theory. However, in some ways, Kyrgyzstan is an outlier case. Like the other Central

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<sup>11</sup> While rhetoric was not significant for predicting my primary measure of primacy, it was significant for all three of my alternative measures.

Asian states, Kyrgyzstani nationalism in the modern sense only arose relatively recently out of the Soviet period. Further, as a post-Soviet country, the Kyrgyzstani people have historically experienced a much higher degree of repressive state involvement in religion than many other comparable countries. Kyrgyzstan is also a relatively religiously homogenous country, with my survey suggesting that as high as 92% of Kyrgyzstanis self-identify as Muslim. While my theory is not contingent on any of these characteristics, it is pertinent to test my hypotheses outside of this singular country to ensure its generalizability in other religious contexts, in cases with lower baseline levels of state involvement in religion, and in countries where national identity is older and more completely consolidated.

There are also methodological issues with testing my hypotheses using only one country. For example, exposure to religious symbols infused into national symbols will not greatly vary across individuals or across time; when religious symbols are incorporated into a flag, anthem, currency, or state armorial, the symbols are typically resistant to change over time, and most citizens will experience similar levels of exposure to the state's signal regarding religious and national identity. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, it is clear that people have strong, positive feelings about national symbols including religious imagery, but it is difficult to make strong claims about the effects of these symbols on national identity given that since independence state use of religious symbols has remained largely static and low relative to many of countries, regardless of dominant religious orientation. Thus, in order to capture variance in this dependent variable and examine its effect on religionational fusion, it is necessary to consider cases outside of solely the Kyrgyzstani context.

In the following chapter, as a test of the generalizability of my theory, I “zoom out” to the global level, testing formulations of my hypotheses using the country-year as the unit of analysis rather than individuals. I present an original dataset including 54 countries representing Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Hindu, and East Asian religions, drawing on data collected ranging from the early 1990s through 2019.

## CHAPTER VI

### State Involvement in Religion and Religionational Fusion in Cross-National Context

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that state involvement in religion significantly impacts religionational fusion in manners consistent with my hypotheses. Repression reduces religionational fusion, while subsidy, symbols, rhetoric, and religious education each increase religionational fusion. I also find that each dimension of state involvement in religion affects different dimensions of religionational fusion, with repression and rhetoric influencing imbrication, subsidies influencing primacy, and symbols influencing both dimensions.

While Kyrgyzstan is an excellent focal case for testing these relationships given that the break from the Soviet period allows me to account for endogeneity issues, it is in many ways an outlier. As a member of the former Soviet Union, it has a lengthy and repression-heavy experience with state involvement in religion that most countries do not have. It is a hybrid regime that has experienced two violent revolutions in its short 27-year history. It has a predominant ethnic Uzbek minority that authorities often target for religious repression, and that has been a nexus of recruitment into ISIS.<sup>160</sup> It has also undergone substantial and quick shifts in state involvement in religion since the late 2000s. Finally, it is a relatively homogenous country in religious terms, with as much as 90% of the population identifying as Muslim.

My theory does not presuppose that a regime must be democratic or authoritarian for state involvement in religion to influence religionational fusion, nor is it limited in scope to explain the fusion of religion and nationalism in only Muslim contexts. In order to test how generalizable my theory is, I conduct a cross-national study that includes countries that vary in terms of the dominant religion, the degree of religious diversity, regime type, economic status, and the level of state involvement in religion. Further, a cross-national study of this nature enables me to ascertain whether the causal mechanisms explaining my significant results in the Kyrgyz case are dependent on any factors that do not vary within Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>160</sup> Of the hundreds of Kyrgyz national foreign fighters that joined ISIS and travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight, the Kyrgyz government has estimated as many as 70% are ethnic Uzbeks (Standish 2017).



Related to the concern that within a single country certain explanatory variables do not vary, some of my hypotheses are much better suited to testing at the cross-national level. Exposure to national symbols, which by their definition are ubiquitous and a part of every-day life, will likely not vary substantially within any given single country context. Further, this effect, which by and large is expected to occur at a subconscious level, will not greatly vary across individuals; if there are religious symbols on the flag, in the anthem, and on currency, any one individual is roughly as likely to be exposed to these symbols as any other. Examining the effects of symbols across national contexts that vary widely allows me to more directly test the hypothesis that high levels of religionational symbols increase religionational fusion. I argue this occurs through the mechanism of constant and almost subliminal reinforcement of religion as fundamentally imbricated in national identity.

One benefit of examining religionational fusion at the country-year level is the ability to examine the effects of country-level characteristics on religionational fusion. While perceptions of state involvement in religion vary from individual to individual, the policies themselves operate predominantly at the national level, and thus using country-years as the unit of observation allows for more variation in the degree to which the state involves itself in religion.

Ultimately, however, my theory posits that the mechanisms connecting state involvement in religion to religionational fusion operate at the individual level. That said, given that state involvement in religion is determined by national-level behaviors and policy, the effects on religionational fusion are expected to scale up to the country-level in aggregate.

In summary, I find support for my hypotheses arguing that state involvement in religious subsidies, symbols, and education have a significant positive relationship with religionational fusion. I also find that repression has a significant relationship with religionational fusion, but this relationship is positive rather than negative.

### **Data and Measurement**

For my cross-sectional and longitudinal study on the determinants of religionational fusion, I utilize a mix of original and existing data on state involvement in religion and religionational fusion. This data includes 54 countries and 139 country year observations, representing a wide range of aggregate levels of religionational fusion; state involvement in religion measured as regulation, rhetoric, subsidy, and religious education; religious traditions; regime types; regions; levels of development; and religiosity.

### Dependent Variable

To measure religionational fusion, I derive country-year aggregates using surveys conducted in 54 countries carried out by the International Social Survey Program, Pew, and my original survey in Kyrgyzstan to construct an unbalanced panel dataset. The source surveys were conducted in years ranging from 1994 through 2018, with a total of 139 country-year observations constituting the dataset. In each case, the surveys used are nationally representative, and data on fusion is taken from the dominant religion sub-population. In each country, respondents were asked how important they think religion is for being truly a member of the country's dominant nationality.<sup>161</sup> Members of the dominant religious tradition who said religion was “very” or “somewhat” important to being truly a member of the nation were coded as having high religionational fusion, and then the percentage of members of the dominant religious tradition who had high levels of religionational fusion was calculated for each country-year. The data for my dependent variable comes from surveys conducted by the International Social Survey Programme, Pew Research Center, and my original survey in Kyrgyzstan (ISSP Research Group 1998, 2012, 2015; Pew Research Center 2016, 2017, 2018). Refer to Table VI.1 for an overview of my full sample.

Given the limitations of existing data, only a measure of imbrication is possible for this cross-national study. Unlike in my study of Kyrgyzstan, which was designed explicitly to create a holistic measure religionational fusion, existing surveys on the relationship between religion and national identity are limited in their level of detail on primacy. While individual surveys do include questions that directly measure primacy, such as a question asking individuals to rank-order each of their collective identities, there are no questions that are common to all or even most of the surveys that measure this aspect of religionational fusion. Thus, I only present results for the effects of state involvement in religion on this single dimension of religionational fusion.

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<sup>161</sup> In all surveys used except my original survey in Kyrgyzstan, the question was worded as: “Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [NATIONALITY]. Others say they are not important. How important is [it] to be a [DOMINANT RELIGION/DENOMINATION]”. In Kyrgyzstan, the question was worded as: “There are different opinions about what qualities a citizen of Kyrgyzstan should possess. Now I will read several qualities. In your opinion, how important are these qualities in order to be considered a true Kyrgyzstani? To be a Muslim.”

**TABLE VI.1: Longitudinal sample**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Mean Percent Responding Religion “Very/Somewhat” to being [NATIONALITY] (Mean from All Available Years, Dominant Religion Subpopulation)</b>	<b>Dominant Religion</b>	<b>Years</b>
Armenia	89.62	Orthodox	2015
Australia	42.22	Protestant	1995, 2003, 2016
Austria	55.26	Catholic	1995, 2004, 2017
Belarus	46.84	Orthodox	2015
Belgium	30.535	Catholic	2013, 2017
Bosnia	59.31	Islamic	2015
Bulgaria	80.81	Orthodox	1995, 2003, 2015
Canada	42.67	Catholic	1995, 2004, 2016
Chile	67.06	Catholic	2003
Croatia	62.68	Catholic	2014, 2015
Czech Republic	50.85	Catholic	1995, 2003, 2013, 2015
Denmark	29.67	Protestant	2003, 2013, 2017
Estonia	30.57	Protestant	2003, 2013
Finland	32.08	Protestant	2003, 2013, 2017
France	32.78	Catholic	2003, 2013, 2016, 2017
Georgia	89.28	Orthodox	2013, 2016
Germany	42.59	Protestant	1995, 2004, 2014, 2016, 2017
Greece	81.68	Orthodox	2015, 2016
Hungary	52.56	Catholic	1995, 2003, 2013, 2015, 2016
Iceland	31.72	Protestant	2013
India	66.41	Hindu	2015
Ireland	52.51	Catholic	1995, 2003, 2012, 2017
Israel	78.17	Jewish	2003, 2014
Italy	61.81	Catholic	1995, 2016, 2017
Japan	42.18	Buddhist/Shinto	1995, 2003, 2013
Kazakhstan	68.08	Islamic	2016
Kyrgyzstan <sup>162</sup>	88.7	Islamic	2018
Latvia	31.71	Protestant	1995, 2003, 2013, 2016
Lithuania	62.12	Catholic	2013, 2015
Mexico	66.51	Catholic	2015

<sup>162</sup> Data from original survey written by Dustin Gamza and Pauline Jones.

Moldova	65.52	Orthodox	2015
Netherlands	24.54	Catholic	1995, 2004, 2016, 2017
New Zealand	42.54	Protestant	1996, 2003
Norway	26.6	Protestant	1995, 2003, 2014, 2017
Philippines	93.84	Catholic	1995, 2003, 2014
Poland	71.24	Catholic	1995, 2005, 2015, 2016
Portugal	59.66	Catholic	2004, 2014, 2017
Romania	85.01	Orthodox	2015
Russia	68.91	Orthodox	1996, 2003, 2012, 2015
Serbia	84.93	Orthodox	2015
Slovak Republic	50.07	Catholic	1996, 2004, 2013, 2017
Slovenia	38.58	Catholic	1994, 2003, 2013
South Africa <sup>163</sup>	85.57	Protestant	2003, 2013
South Korea	56.19	Buddhist and Confucian teachings	2003, 2013
Spain	43.43	Catholic	1995, 2003, 2014, 2016, 2017
Sweden	19.77	Protestant	1995, 2003, 2013, 2016, 2017
Switzerland	45.05	Catholic	2002, 2013, 2017
Taiwan	26.96	Chinese religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Yinguan Dao, and folk religion)	2003, 2013
Turkey	89.27	Islamic	2014
Ukraine	61.4	Orthodox	2015
United Kingdom	52.27	Protestant	1995, 2003, 2013, 2016, 2017
United States	70.28	Protestant	1996, 2004, 2014, 2016
Uruguay	45.03	Catholic	2004
Venezuela	87.12	Catholic	2004
<b>Total Countries: 54</b>			<b>Total Country-Year Observations: 139</b>

Since for the purposes of this study I am primarily interested in how state involvement in religion influences religionational fusion for members of the dominant religion, I identify the religious tradition in each country that holds a plurality. In cases where the religious tradition holding a plurality varies within a single country, I select the dominant religious tradition based on

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<sup>163</sup> Unlike the questions asked in every other country, in South Africa the question on imbrication was answered using a 5-item scale rather than a 4-item scale. The 5-item scale adds a neutral “Neither nor” response between “fairly important” and “not very important”. Responses in this category are not coded as contributing to the aggregate level of religionational fusion.

historical precedent. In cases where there were multiple religious traditions that had influence, I selected a religious tradition based on which tradition held a plurality at the time of data collection.

### Independent Variables

To measure each distinct dimension of state involvement in religion at the country-year level, I develop a series of indexes. Repression and subsidy are treated as separate concepts, since they are expected to have independent effects on religionational fusion. Similarly, state involvement in religious education is coded separately from state religious rhetoric. In all cases, the observations were lagged one year behind the year the survey collecting data took place. In other words, if the data on religionational fusion was collected in 2015, the data on state involvement in religion reflects the state of affairs in 2014. Data sources are noted below for each index.

For country-year indicators derived from the Religion and State (RAS) dataset, which only observations for 1990-2014, I personally coded each observation 2015-2017 using the same coding rules adopted by Fox in RAS. I relied on basic religious laws of each country, government and NGO reports on religious freedom, constitutions, and news sources. I referred to the most recent year coded, 2014, and only coded each variable with a different value if there had been a change since 2014 to maintain consistency with the RAS dataset.

The indicators that comprise each index are as follows:

#### *Religious Repression*

To code religious repression, for years between 1990 and 2014, I rely on data taken from Jonathan Fox's RAS Project, and manually code observations for 2015-2017 (Fox and The ARDA 2016). In particular, I select 26 relevant indicators of state repression of religion from his 29-variable set on regulation of and restrictions on the majority religion or all religions. Each of these variables is coded on a 0-3 scale, where unless otherwise noted a 0 indicates no restrictions, a 1 indicates slight restrictions or that the government rarely engages in the activity and on a small scale, a 2 indicates significant restrictions or that the government engages in the activity occasionally and on a moderate scale, and a 3 indicated that the activity is illegal or the government often engages in the activity at a large scale.<sup>164</sup>

#### Restrictions on Religion's Political Role

1. Restrictions on religious political parties (nx01)

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<sup>164</sup> See Religion and State Round 3 Codebook, page 6.

2. Restrictions on trade associations or other civil associations being affiliated with religion (nx02)
3. Restrictions on clergy holding political office (nx03)
4. Restrictions or monitoring of sermons by clergy (nx04)
5. Restrictions on clergy/religious organizations engaging in public political speech (other than sermons) or propaganda or on political activity in or by religious institutions (nx05)

#### Restrictions on Religious Institutions

6. Restrictions/harassment of members and organizations of the majority religion who operate outside of the state sponsored or recognized ecclesiastical framework (do not code arrests for activities that are commonly considered criminal unless these charges seem to be pretexts) (nx06)
7. Restrictions on formal religious organizations other than political parties (nx07)
8. Restrictions on access to places of worship (nx08)
9. Foreign religious organizations are required to have a local sponsor or affiliation (nx09)
10. Heads of religious organizations (e.g. Bishops) must be citizens of the state (nx10)
11. All practicing clergy must be citizens of the state (nx11)
12. The government appoints (code as 3) or must approve (code as 2) clerical appointments or somehow takes part in the appointment process (code as 1) (nx12)
13. Other than appointments, the government legislates or otherwise officially influences the internal workings or organization of religious institutions and organizations (nx13)
14. Laws governing the state religion are passed by the government or require the government's approval (nx14)

#### Restrictions on Religious Practices

15. Restrictions on the public observance of religious practices, including religious holidays and the Sabbath (nx15)
16. Restrictions on religious activities outside of recognized religious facilities (nx16)
17. Restrictions on the publication or dissemination of written religious material (nx17)
18. People are arrested for religious activities (nx18)
19. Restrictions on religious public gatherings that are not placed on other types of public gathering (nx19)

20. Restrictions on the public display by private persons or organizations of religious symbols, including (but not limited to) religious dress, the presence or absence of facial hair, nativity scenes/icons (nx20)
21. Conscientious objectors to military service are not allowed alternative service and are prosecuted (nx21)

#### Other Regulation of Religion

22. Arrest/detention/ harassment of religious figures, officials, and/or members of religious parties (nx22)
23. Restrictions on public religious speech (nx23)
24. Restrictions on religious-based hate speech (nx24)

#### Registration Requirements

25. In cases where registration is required for religious groups, is registration sometimes denied? (vregister07x)

This variable is coded differently from other variables in the index. A '0' indicates that there is no registration requirement; at '1' indicates that "Registration is required but is never denied and treatment of all religions in the registration process is equal."; a '2' indicates that "Registration is required, is never denied, but some religions have more difficulty registering than others", and a '3' indicates that "Registration is required but sometimes denied"

26. Are there penalties for not registering? (vregister08x)

This variable is also coded uniquely. A '0' indicates that there is no registration requirement; a '1' indicates that "Groups need not register but registration is allowed or encouraged. This encouragement may include benefits given only to registered religions; a '2' indicates that "Groups are officially required to register but groups which do not are not in any way restricted except in that they may be denied status as a legal entity", and a '3' indicates that "Groups are officially required to register, the government enforces this, and discriminates against unregistered groups."

#### *Religious Subsidy*

To code religious subsidy, I again rely on the RAS dataset, in this case focusing on the battery of variables concerning specific types of state support for religion. Unless otherwise noted, each of the variables selected from this section of the dataset are coded 1 if such a law or policy

exists, and 0 if not.<sup>165</sup> For the purposes of conceptual clarity, I divide these subsidies into my own categories of fiscal, institutional, and political support for religion.

#### Fiscal

1. State funding of religious education programs in non-public schools (lx27)
2. State funding of seminary schools (lx28)
3. Government funding of religious education in colleges or universities (lx29)
4. Government funding of religious charitable organizations (lx30)
5. Government collects taxes on behalf of religious organization (lx31)
6. Official government salaries for clergy, excluding teachers (lx32)
7. Direct general grants to religious organizations (lx33)
8. Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites (lx34)
9. Funding or other government support for religious pilgrimages (lx36)
10. Funding for religious organizations or activities other than those listed above (lx37)

#### Political

11. Some religious leaders are given diplomatic status, diplomatic passports, or immunity from prosecution by virtue of their religious office (lx38)
12. Presence of an official government ministry or department for dealing with religious affairs (lx39)
13. Certain government officials are also given an official position in the state church by virtue of their political office (lx40)
14. Certain religious officials become government officials by virtue of their religious position (lx41)
15. Some or all government officials must meet certain religious requirements in order to hold office (lx42)
16. Seats in Legislative branch/Cabinet are by law or custom granted, at least in part, along religious lines (lx43)

#### Institutional

17. Marriage and divorce can only occur under religious auspices (lx01)
18. Marriages performed by clergy of at least some religions are given automatic civil recognition, even in the absence of a state license (lx02)

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<sup>165</sup> See Religion and State Round 3 Codebook, page 8.



19. Restrictions on interfaith marriages (lx03)
20. Restrictions on premarital sex (lx04)
21. Laws which specifically make it illegal to be a homosexual or engage in homosexual sex (lx05)
22. Prohibitive restrictions on abortion (lx06)
23. Restrictions on access to birth control (lx07)
24. Dietary laws (restrictions on the production, import, selling, or consumption of specific foods) (lx12)
25. Laws of inheritance defined by religion (lx14)
26. Restrictions on conversions away from the dominant religion (lx18)
27. Mandatory closing of some/all businesses during religious holiday the Sabbath or its equivalent (lx20)
28. Other restrictions on activities during religious holidays, the Sabbath or its equivalent (“blue laws”) (lx21)
29. Blasphemy laws, or any other restrictions on speech about religion or religious figures (lx22)
30. Censorship of press or other publications on grounds of being anti-religious (lx23)
31. Presence of religious courts with jurisdiction [over] family law and inheritance (lx25)
32. Presence of religious courts with jurisdiction over matters of law other than family law and inheritance (lx26)
33. Burial is controlled by rel. organizations or clergy or otherwise subject to rel. laws or oversight. (lx50)
34. Other religious prohibitions or practices are mandatory (lx52)
35. Links between citizenship and religion. (vcitizenship01x)

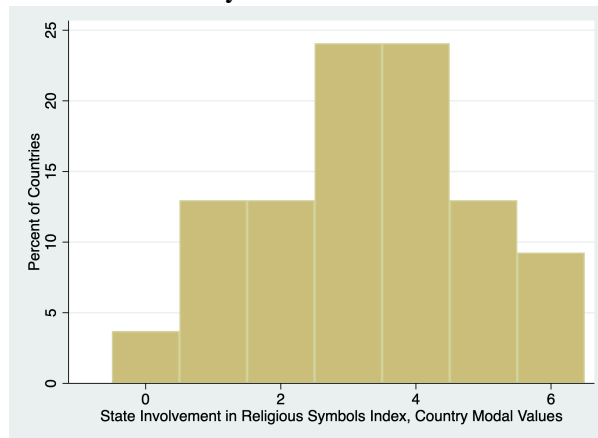
Unlike other items that constitute my subsidy index, this variable is coded 0-3 by the RAS dataset. I maintain these values when constructing the additive index to give this variable extra weight, given the gravity of linking citizenship to identity. The coding scheme is as follows: 0) There is no official link between citizenship and religion, 1) Members of some religions are given preference for citizenship but no religious disqualifies anyone from obtaining or keeping citizenship, 2) Citizenship is denied to members of certain religions or

conversion away from the dominant religion can be the basis for stripping an individual of citizenship, and 3) All citizens must be members of the state's dominant religion.<sup>166</sup>

### *Symbols*

To capture state involvement in religious symbols, I created an original 7 item dataset and constructed an additive state religious symbols index from these variables.<sup>167</sup> Scores on this index ranged from a 0 (France and Taiwan) to a 6 (Georgia, India, Israel, Norway, and the United Kingdom), with all other values in between represented. The index scores across countries are roughly normally distributed (see Figure V.1 for the distribution of scores).

**FIGURE VI.1: Distribution of modal country values on state involvement in religious symbols index**



For the countries for which I have longitudinal data, there were very few changes over time. Only Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Russia, Slovenia, and Sweden had index scores that shifted over time, with Russia increasing by one point and the remainder decreasing by one point.

1. Does the state include references to religion in its national anthem?

To code national anthems as religious or not, I begin by locating the English translation of the anthem on [nationalanthems.info](http://nationalanthems.info), and then cross checking this translation with other sources to verify its accuracy and completeness. I base my method on Robia Charles's

<sup>166</sup> See RAS Codebook, page 15.

<sup>167</sup> State's adopting religious holidays as national holidays are an important symbolic endorsement of religion. However, such practices are not included here due to lack of variation across countries.

coding method, which involves coding an anthem as ‘1’ if it contains at least one religious reference and a ‘0’ if there are none.<sup>168</sup>

2. Does the state have religious symbols on the flag representing the dominant religion?

Flags were coded using Pew Research Center’s analysis of the religious content of 196 national flags as a reference point. Of the 196 national flags in the world, Pew coded 64 as containing religious symbols, and of these 64, 48% contain Christian symbols, and 33% contain Islamic symbols. I deviate from Pew in that I do not code the Argentinian, Mexican, and Uruguayan flags as religious, since although they do contain Incan and Aztec religious symbols, they do not contain any symbols derived from the current dominant religion, Catholicism or Christianity more broadly.

3. Are there religious norms or requirements as part of the oath of office at the national level?

Countries that have oaths of office or oaths of allegiance for state officials that include religious components are coded as 1, and countries with no religious content in their oaths or no oath at all (such as France) are coded 0. To code each country in the dataset, I conducted content analysis of each country’s constitution to determine if there was a constitutionally mandated oath that included religious wording, even if a provision was given allowing individuals to opt out of including this wording. In cases where the wording of the oaths was not stipulated by the constitution, the law that determined the content of the oaths was located and analyzed, and in cases where there was no law, news articles were used to analyze oaths taken by heads of government and members of the legislature in the country. Finally, in cases where no evidence of religious oaths was found, I referred to the indicator of religious requirements and oaths for holding office in the RAS dataset.<sup>169</sup> Coding did not include whether or not the oath is taken on a holy book, instead only considering the verbal or written content of the oath as dictated by laws and tradition.

4. Are there religious symbols on currency?

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<sup>168</sup> These references to religion fall into seven separate categories, each taken directly from Charles’s coding. They are: “(1) references for supernatural beings (e.g., God, Allah, creator, almighty, father, lord), (2) religious adjectives and nouns (e.g., spirit, faith archangel, monastic, holy, sacred, religion, prayer), (3) religious texts and personages from religious texts (Qur’an, Bible, David), (4) religious places of worship or locations commonly associated with religion (e.g., church, mosque, temple, Eden, Zion), (5) religious items (e.g., icon, cross), (6) religious personnel (e.g., sultan, imam, priest), and (7) religious names, adjectives (e.g., Sharia, Islamic, Christian, Muslim)” (Charles 2013, 21). Anthems that contained the word “blessed” but did not contain any other referenced to religion were not coded as religious, as without religious context the term could be taken to mean fortunate without specific religious connotation.

<sup>169</sup> The only cases that I coded as ‘1’ due to a disagreement with the RAS dataset were Bosnia, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Sweden in 1994.

If a coin or banknote being minted and circulated by the country in a given year contains at least one religious aspect, the observation is coded ‘1’. In the case of countries using the Euro, only coinage was analyzed, since individual countries do not have control over the design of banknotes.<sup>170</sup> Only currency in regular circulation was considered; thus, commemorative coins and banknotes were not coded, despite the fact that they frequently contained religious symbols in many countries that otherwise had no religious currency. This choice made because commemorative currency will not be seen as frequently in regular circulation, and thus will not have the repetitive and reinforcing effect on identity that I theorize is the mechanism through which religious national symbols increase religionational fusion. Content that was coded as religious included the presence of 1) religious symbols, such as crosses, crescent moons, and the Dharmachakra, 2) religious text, such as references to God, and 3) religious architecture, such as churches, cathedrals, mosques, and temples.

5. Are there religious symbols on the state armorial?

Coding included official national coats of arms, national emblems, and national seals. The same coding categories used for currency were applied.

6. Are there references to religion in the state motto?

In cases where there was a national motto and a motto of the sovereign or royal family, I only coded the national motto. When there was a widely recognized unofficial national motto that had religious content, I coded the observation ‘1’. I did not code royal sovereign mottos. The same rules used for identifying religious content in national anthems were applied.

7. Is there a religion officially recognized by the state in the constitution or through a concordat?

I base this variable on the index produced by Ahmet Kuru (Kuru 2009, 247–254). Countries are coded as a “1” if they recognize an established national religion in their constitution or have an active concordat with a dominant church establishing this, and 0 otherwise.<sup>171</sup> In cases where laws or government programs recognize particular religions as historically important, as in the case in Kyrgyzstan, but this preference does not have constitutional

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<sup>170</sup> National sides of Euro coins found at <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/coins/html/index.en.html>

<sup>171</sup> Though a constitutional amendment in Norway in 2012 puts the Norwegian National Church on equal footing with other faiths, due to its special mention that it remains the national church I still code Norway as having an established religion after 2012.

recognition, the observation was coded as “0”. In cases where countries have an active concordat but do not favor the Catholic Church, the observation is coded as “0”.

### *Rhetoric*

To capture religious rhetoric, I utilize two indicators from the RAS dataset. Both are coded as binary variable, and then added together to form an index ranging from 0 to 2.<sup>172</sup>

1. Does the state have religious political parties capable of being elected to office? (vpartiesx)
2. Is free air time on television or radio is provided to religious organizations on government channels or by government decree? (lx35)<sup>173</sup>

### *Education*

While religious education is conceptually a part of rhetoric, I expect it to have a strong and independent effect on religionational fusion, separate from other aspects of state religious rhetoric. To capture the independent effects of state involvement in religious education, I create a state involvement in religious education index using a number of indicators based on the RAS dataset. Each item in the index is normalized to be 0-1 and then added together to create the index, which ranges from 0-8. The highest recorded value in my data on this index is a 4.58 in Turkey, and the lowest recorded value is a 0.

Conceptually, this index measures the pervasiveness of state involvement in religious education, both in terms of its ubiquity as well as its level of control. As is the case for all other variables based on existing datasets, for country-years not available I coded each observation.

1. Is religious education optional or mandatory in public schools? (ved1x)

This four item scale is coded as ‘1’ if religious education is “optional or there is a choice between religion and a non-religion course on topics like, ethics, philosophy, or religions of the world”; ‘2’ if it is “mandatory but, upon specific request, student may opt out of the course. (this is different from the above category in that in the above case the choice is automatic and in this case a special request to opt out must be made.)”; ‘3’ if it is “mandatory for some who have no ability to opt out, the course must be in religion but optional for others or there exists for some the option of taking a non-religious course on topics like,

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<sup>172</sup> One direct indicator of rhetoric is the religious content of presidential and prime ministerial speeches. However, due to the wide variety of languages this dataset includes, the undertaking of collecting and coding this data outside of Central Asia is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>173</sup> For five countries, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Spain, I disagree with the RAS coding of “0” on this variable. For example, RTVE, the state media network in Spain, airs four Catholic programs regularly, and Rai, the state television network in Italy, regularly broadcasts Catholic mass.(Geybels, Mels, and Walrave 2009, 141–142). Thus, these countries are recoded as ‘1’.

ethics, philosophy, or religions of the world, and '4' if it is "mandatory for all, [and] the course must be in religion".

2. Is there mandatory education in the majority religion? (mx29)

This indicator is taken from the RAS dataset. It is coded as a '0' if there is no mandatory education, a '1' if some but not all students can opt out or take courses in their own religion, '2' if this education is only mandatory in public schools, and a '3' if it is mandatory in all schools including private schools.

3. Who teaches public religious education? (ved3x)

This item is coded as a 0 if there is no religious education in public schools, a '1' if religious education in public schools is taught by lay teachers, and a '2' if religious education is taught by clergy or teachers appointed by religious organizations.

4. Is there official prayer in public schools? (vprayer01x)

This item is coded '0' if there are no official prayer sessions, '1' if there are official prayer sessions that are fully optional, '2' if there are official prayer sessions that are mandatory for members of some religions, '3' if they are mandatory for all and available in all religions for which there are a significant number of students, and '4' if some students are forced to attend prayer sessions in religions other than their own.

5. Are public schools segregated by religion or do separate public schools exist for members of some religions? (lx46)

Binary variable coded '1' if yes.

6. Does the government have control or influence over the instructors or content of religious education in public schools? (n25x)

Scaled 0-3 based on the severity of this influence.

7. Does the government have control or influence over the instructors or content of religious education outside of public schools? (n26x)

Scaled 0-3 based on the severity of this influence.

8. Does the government have control or influence over the instructors or content of religious education at the university level? (n27x)

Scaled 0-3 based on the severity of this influence. Of the countries examined in this study, only Taiwan and Kyrgyzstan control religious education at the university level.

### *Controls*

I control for religiosity as religious attendance by using the percentage of the dominant religion population in a given country year that attends religious services at least once a month. Where possible, this data was taken directly from the dependent variable source survey. For the Turkey observation, World Values Survey Wave 6 data was used to calculate religiosity. Additionally, the 12 observations taken from the Pew Spring Values Survey 2016 did not include religiosity data. Where possible, I use religiosity data taken from the subsequent year in the Pew Western Europe survey and prior year in the Pew Eastern Europe survey. For observations where this is not possible, I use data from the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al. 2014).

I also estimate models controlling for the dominant religion in each country. In particular, I estimate models predicting the effect of countries being Catholic, Orthodox, or Muslim using dummy variables.

To control for the level of religious fractionalization and diversity, I opted to use the 2010 Pew Religious Diversity Index. This index is an inverted Herfindahl-Hirschman Index where higher values for a country indicate higher diversity. The scale ranges from 0-10, where a 0 represents a population where 100% belong to a single religion, while a 10 represents perfectly equal distribution of the population into the 8 major world religions.<sup>174</sup> I also estimated models using a measure of religious fractionalization in place of the diversity index. This variable, taken from a 2003 dataset, also uses an inverted Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, but applied to different underlying data from 2001. This data can be thought of as the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population will belong to different religious groups (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, et al. 2003). Since I only have one value for each of these variables per country, due to collinearity issues they are not included in the fixed effects model.

To control for level of development, natural logged GDP per capita PPP was used, with data taken from the World Bank. Models were also estimated using life expectancy as a different control for development.

### **Methods**

Leveraging the longitudinal data I had was difficult given the unbalanced nature of the panel. Not only did the number of observations per country vary from as few as 1 to as many as 5, but also

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<sup>174</sup> For full methodology, see: <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/methodology-2/>

the temporal distance between subsequent observations ranged from as little as one year to as much as 10 years. Further, many of the explanatory variables do not change consistently over time, instead remaining static for long periods and then changing quickly over short periods of time.

To check the robustness of my findings, I estimated my models using three versions of my data. I first estimated my models using country-year fixed effects.<sup>175</sup> Then, to account for the unbalanced panel, I treated the panel as cross-sectional data by taking the average survey year observation (2009) and limiting my data to include the country-year observation for each state that was most proximate to 2009, using the more recent observation in cases of a tie. Finally, given that state involvement in religion tends to change slowly over time, I also estimated each model using averaged values for all variables by country. In each case, I estimated my models using OLS.

## **Results and Analysis**

In summary, I find support for my hypotheses that religious subsidies and symbols will increase religionational fusion at the aggregate country level. I do not find support for the hypothesis that countries with higher levels of religious rhetoric will have higher levels of religionational fusion, though I do find some support for the hypothesis that countries with higher levels of state involvement in religious education will have higher aggregate religionational fusion. Interestingly, while I do not find support for the hypothesis that repression decreases religionational fusion at the aggregate level, I do find that repression has a positive effect on religionational fusion, contradicting my findings in the previous chapter. The results of my models are presented in Table VI.2, and a summary of my hypotheses tests is in Table VI.3.

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<sup>175</sup> A Hausman test was used to verify that fixed effects should be used versus random effects. However, given the low number of country-year observations for many countries, and the small variation across years on key explanatory variables, a fixed-effects model is not ideal.



**Table VI.2: OLS results by data format, net religionational fusion dependent variable**

	Country-Fixed Effects	Most Proximate Country-Year, 2009	Country Averages
Repression	.054 (.82)	.478** (.24)	.458** (.22)
Subsidy	2.391** (1.04)	-.428 (.671)	-.359 (.62)
Symbols	2.984 (4.29)	3.00** (1.363)	2.35* (1.27)
Rhetoric	8.000 (5.66)	5.131 (3.185)	3.743 (2.84)
Religious Education	1.749 (4.58)	2.263 (2.10)	2.574 (1.86)
Religiosity	.343*** (.129)	.543*** (.121)	.431*** (.111)
Log GDP PPP	3.289 (2.79)	-11.785*** (3.63)	-12.145*** (3.19)
Religious Diversity		-.796 (1.263)	-1.722 (1.14)
*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01			

H1: *States with higher amounts of religious repression will have lower levels of aggregate religionational fusion*

In my country-average and proximate to 2009 data, repression had a significant effect on religionational fusion in the model. However, this effect was consistently positive, contrary to my hypothesis that repression lowers religionational fusion by sending a signal to the population that ascribed religionational identity does not include religious components. Moreover, the coefficients on repression were high; for each increase of a single point on the repression index (which ranges from 0 to 39 in my sample with a theoretical maximum of 78). This effect remains significant and positive even if Kyrgyzstan, which is an outlier, is removed from the data (see Figure VI.2 for a scatter plot of RNF and repression index scores).

One factor to keep in mind when interpreting these results, however, is that repression in this study is measured as the legal structure and its degree of enforcement rather than actually perceived levels of repression as reported by the population. For example, 2011-2012 data shows that 60% of Muslims in Tajikistan, one of the more religiously repressive countries in the world, believe that they are “very free” to practice their religion. In Iran, a country that, like Tajikistan, is designated by the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom as a Tier 1



*H2: States with higher amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion*

In my model using country fixed effects, the subsidy index has a significant positive relationship with religionational fusion, with a strong coefficient. For each point increase on the subsidy index, religionational fusion is estimated to increase by 2.39%. This lends support to my hypothesis that religious subsidies will increase religionational fusion.

However, taken in the context of the results in the prior chapter and the manner in which subsidies are measured, these results should be interpreted cautiously. In the Kyrgyz survey, I did not find significant evidence that perceptions of subsidies increase imbrication, instead finding that perceptions of religious subsidy increased primacy. It may simply be that subsidies increase forms of religiosity other than congregational attendance over time, which in turn has an effect on religionational fusion. Additionally, while it is possible that people's perceptions of state support for religion through subsidies is directly correlated with the extent to which states actually support religion, this may vary substantially across countries and time.

*H3: States with higher levels of religious symbols incorporated into national symbols will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion*

In my cross-sectional models, state involvement in religious symbols has a significant and positive relationship with religionational fusion, with a 1-point increase on the index increasing the estimated level of religionational fusion by around 3%.

Looking at only the lowest and highest scoring countries (those scoring a 0-1 or a 5-6 on the index) further illustrates this effect. The average level of imbrication in the low-symbols countries is 45.84%, while in the high-symbols countries it is nearly 10% higher, at 56.23%.<sup>176</sup>

These results support the notion that in countries where the state makes heavy use of religion in its national symbols, citizens will have higher levels of religionational fusion. I argue this is because as citizens hear and see religion represented alongside the formal trappings of the nation,

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<sup>176</sup> Average value data used. Low-symbols countries include Bosnia, Estonia, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Taiwan, Ukraine, and Uruguay. High-symbols countries include Denmark, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, India, Israel, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

religion will subconsciously be primed along with nationalism. This intertwines the two identities for highly religious and not very religious individuals alike.

*H4: States with higher levels of religious rhetoric will have higher aggregate levels of religionational fusion*

In each of my models, religious rhetoric had no significant effect on religionational fusion. This suggests that at the aggregate level, references to religion in political rhetoric do not have a strong effect on national identity.

The limitation of the variable used to measure rhetoric here, however, should be noted. First, religious political parties being elected to office is not directly reflective of the amount of religious rhetoric used on the national stage by party leaders. For example, in the United States, there are no officially religious political parties, yet presidents and presidential aspirants frequently utilize religious rhetoric on the national stage.

Second, while state media providing a platform for religious rhetoric is a form of state involvement in religious rhetoric, it is disconnected from the mechanism I propose influences religionational fusion. Even though religious programming may be aired on state television and radio networks, this does not mean the average consumer interprets the programming as an endorsement by the state; rather, they may simply view it as an independent program that is not indicative of any state agenda, and not in any way connected to national identity. Such religious programming might have an effect on religiosity over time, which we would expect in turn to influence religionational fusion, but this effect would not be a direct result of the state sending a signal about their ascribed form of religionational identity. Further, the popularity of such programming may vary widely, and thus, we can not necessarily expect such rhetoric to reach mass audiences through the echo chamber of political media.

In a future study, a measure of religious rhetoric could be developed that quantifies the number and kind of references to religion in a subset of head of state and head of government speeches, such as annual addresses to the nation, inaugural addresses, or holiday speeches. This has the dual benefit of ensuring that the rhetoric in question is interpreted by citizens as directly representative of the state's official position, as well as ensuring the rhetoric is reaching a relatively wide audience.

*H5: States with higher levels of state involvement in religious education will have higher levels of religionational fusion*

State involvement in religious education does not have a significant effect on religionational fusion in any of my models. This suggests that, controlling for other factors, increases in religious education do not elicit increases in religionational fusion measured as imbrication.

This null result could partially be attributed to an artifact of measurement; my data measures the extent to which the state involves itself in religion, but in cases where religious education is optional or opt-in, the data does not reflect the proportion of the population that elects to receive this education.

Further, the data does not pick up specificities in the religious curricula in countries that have high levels of involvement. It is possible for a state to highly involve itself in religious education by requiring classes in the dominant religion and allowing clergy to teach these classes, but if the content of the courses do not make implicit or explicit connections between nationality, national history, national belonging, and the dominant religion, the signal being received by students concerning ascribed religionational identity will be indirect and weak, having little to no direct effect on religionational fusion as imbrication. We may, however, still expect an increase in primacy as religious identity is kept salient and emphasized as important by educational institutions.

Note that when religionational fusion is recoded as only those who believe being a member of the dominant religion is “very important” to being truly a member of the nation, rather than also including those who deem religion “somewhat important”, religious education becomes significant with a positive effect in both the country-average and 2009 proximate year models. This may suggest that, when the state more heavily involves itself in religious education, those who are exposed to that religious education are more likely to have extremely high levels of imbrication, creating a greater degree of polarization of religionational fusion within the dominant religion.

**Table VI.3: Summary of results**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Result</b>
H1: <i>States with higher amounts of religious repression will have lower levels of aggregate religionational fusion</i>	Not supported. Effect of repression on RNF is significant, but positive rather than negative.
H2: <i>States with higher amounts of religious subsidies will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion</i>	Supported
H3: <i>States with higher levels of religious symbols incorporated into national symbols will have higher levels of aggregate religionational fusion</i>	Supported
H4: <i>States with higher levels of religious rhetoric will have higher aggregate levels of religionational fusion</i>	Not supported
H5: <i>States with higher levels of state involvement in religious education will have higher levels of religionational fusion.</i>	Partially supported. State involvement in religious education has a significant positive effect on polarizing religionational fusion but does not appear to raise religionational fusion overall.

*A Note on Religious Traditions*

A country having Orthodox Christianity as the dominant religion had a significant and large effect on aggregate religionational fusion in all models. This is unsurprising; the history of Caesaropapism, or the idea that secular leaders exercise complete authority over ecclesiastic matters by virtue of political legitimacy, played an important role in Byzantine history and the Christian East, influencing understandings of state ascribed religionational identity and state involvement in religion today.<sup>177</sup> Further, as the Ottoman Empire dissolved, churches were organized along ethnic lines with their own hierarchies (despite centralized teachings), resulting in varying relationships between the national Orthodox churches and nation-building processes in Balkan nation-states (Leuştean 2014).

Interestingly, a country having Catholicism as the dominant religion had a significant and negative effect on religionational fusion. An argument could be made that this is because Catholicism is a centralized, global, hierarchical religion, with institutions at the supra-national level. This includes the pope as both the head of the global church but also as the sovereign of the Vatican as a Catholic theocratic state. It is possible that this concretely defined supranational organization ensures that Catholic identity has less ability to be fundamentally fused with any single nationality in the view of many Catholics, relative to other less globally centralized religious traditions.

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<sup>177</sup> It should be noted that in most contexts there was never a fully caesaropapist system. For example, the Byzantine basileus as well as the rulers of medieval Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia did not achieve full control over religion, unlike the German and Scandinavian states. Eastern Orthodox churches managed to maintain autonomy over sacramental and doctrinal matters. Instead, the states exerted control over churches through hierarchical, administrative, and economic affairs (Kalkandjieva 2011, 591).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter supports the generalizability of my theory concerning the effects of state involvement in religion on religionational fusion. My overall findings suggest repression, subsidy, symbols, and rhetoric through religious education have an effect on religionational fusion outside of solely the Kyrgyz context.

Repression, which my theory suggests should have a negative effect, and did have a strong negative effect in my study on Kyrgyzstan, appears to have a positive effect on religionational fusion in this cross-national study. While it is possible that repression has different effects outside of Kyrgyzstan, it is more likely that increased levels of religionational fusion provide states with both the motivation and the legitimacy necessary to exert greater control over religion over time.

Unfortunately, given the constraints of existing data, it is not currently possible to consider how perceptions of state involvement in religion influence religionational fusion outside of Kyrgyzstan at the individual level. As a result, the low sample size necessitated by the data limitations in this chapter means that the results presented here should be taken as suggestive rather than definitive. However, planned surveys in 2019 and 2020 in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan should help fill this data deficit, and allow for more robust comparisons across countries that can account for individual-level effects while also controlling for country-fixed effects.

In the next chapter, I discuss possible extensions of this dissertation, as well as the potential political implications of my results.

## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion

There is little doubt that the role religion plays as a component of national identity radically influences political attitudes, political behaviors, and even the incentive structure regimes face when making policy decisions and seeking legitimacy. What historically has been less well understood is the role that the state, in turn, plays in bolstering, weakening, transforming, and maintaining religious identity as a component of national identity.

This dissertation has demonstrated that, at least in part, the role that the state plays in involving itself in religious identity does directly influence the form and strength of national identity by increasing or decreasing religionational fusion. To varying degrees, state involvement in subsidy, rhetoric, and symbols increases RNF, while involvement in repression decreases it at the level of individuals.

As the chapter focusing on the evolution of state involvement in religion in Central Asia demonstrated, the region has great potential for evaluating the effects of these varying strategies on religious and national identity over time given the widely divergent kinds and degrees of state involvement in religion each state has adopted since independence. The evolution of this involvement also serves to empirically illustrate the possible spectrum of state involvement in religion.

### Implications

The attempt this dissertation has made to understand the extent to which the state is influencing religionational identity is not merely an academic exercise. Religionational fusion—and by association its explanators—is a concept that has implications for politics broadly. High levels of RNF may more easily allow the state to justify policies repressing religious minorities or excluding them from benefits, may explain citizen support for international policies such as conflicts against states with different religious traditions, helps to explain religious influence in political attitudes, and can help to explain how new states successfully or unsuccessfully consolidate a common identity among their populations. Understanding low levels of religionational fusion is also informative, and



may be used to explain the success or failure of secularism, interreligious harmony and attitudes towards migrants from other religious traditions, the strength or lack of strength of independent and state religious institutions, among other questions.

The political implications of RNF become especially important when one considers that the ascribed religionational identity that the state promotes through state involvement in religion does not necessarily match the inhabited religionational identity that individuals develop in part as a result of the state's involvement in religion. In fact, the manner in which religionational fusion may develop in response to certain state strategies may be averse to the regime's preferences, as we see to some extent in the Kyrgyzstani context. In extreme cases, this could develop into an identity centered around religion that is oppositional to the regime.

Beyond just influencing religionational fusion, state involvement in religion has potential implications for understanding political attitudes and mobilization directly. For example, those whose interpretation of their religion clashes with the way the state represents it through its involvement in religion may develop grievances against the state that motivate political action. Alternatively, highly religious people who believe in religious involvement in governance may increasingly support the regime as they see the regime utilizing increasingly more positive forms of state involvement in religion. The state's involvement in religion may also contribute to the construction of political fault lines; in cases where the regime maintains low levels of involvement, an opportunity is created for the opposition to utilize religion as part of its platform, and vice versa.

Further, this theory has testable implications for understanding the construction of national identity and its components broadly beyond just religion. For example, how does regulation, use of symbols, and ethnically charged rhetoric influence how strongly ethnicity is tied to national identity? How quickly can state interventions in forms of collective identity transform national identity? How do states shift their involvement in collective identity to garner support for nationalist causes, to legitimize conflicts and war, and to justify the repression of minority identities? How does the use of regulation, rhetoric, and symbols of different kinds of collective identity foster more civic or ethnic forms of nationalism? How does state involvement in other collective identities increase national pride, patriotism, and the strength of national identity for groups not targeted by this involvement (but who receive an implicit signal about their identity as part of ascribed national identity as a result of being ignored)?

## Extensions

There are a number of ways the methods and theory of this study can be extended. One aspect of this dissertation that warrants additional examination is the treatment of religious symbols and rhetoric. I focused primarily on the effects of state use of symbols and rhetoric that positively reference the dominant religion. However, as the Central Asian cases demonstrate, both rhetoric and religious symbols can be used repressively to attack religious identity by the state. Systematically identifying and measuring these negative manifestations of religious rhetoric and symbols would aid in developing a more complete understanding of state involvement in religion, as well as enable an extension of my theory to include negative forms of state involvement in religion beyond regulatory repression.

Additionally, methods that more closely test the mechanisms behind positive rhetoric and symbols that influence religionational fusion are needed. Survey experiments in particular are well-suited to gauge the strength of the signal concerning religionational identity transmitted by use of religious symbols and use of religious rhetoric. For example, respondents could be randomly sorted into a control group with no prime, a treatment group primed with a presidential address without religious rhetoric, and a second treatment group primed with a presidential address that contains religious rhetoric but is otherwise identical to the first treatment. The respondents could then be asked a battery of questions about their religionational identity to parse out the effect of religious rhetoric on religionational fusion in the short-term. A similar design could be used to understand the strength of the signal sent by religious symbols, by having a control group without a prime, a treatment group primed with an image of a national symbol that does not incorporate religious imagery, and a second treatment group primed with a national symbol that does include religious imagery.

One factor that I was unable to directly control for in this study but could be helpful for understanding religionational fusion in some contexts is both the real and perceived prospect of high levels of immigration stemming from countries with a dominant religion different from the country in question. Perceptions of the threats from immigration have been shown to influence how national identity is constructed by individuals (Ha and Jang 2015). Other research has demonstrated that discrepancies between the state's conception of national identity as reflected by policies towards migrants and popular national identity reduces political trust (McLaren 2017), considered how increased immigration and refugees contribute to increased tension between inclusive and exclusive conceptions of the nation (Kurthen 1995), and discussed how immigrants provide the "other"

around which popular and state discourses concerning national identity and what it means to be truly a member of the nation are framed (Doty 1996). However, how perceptions of increasing immigration of specifically members of minority religious groups influences religionational fusion and national identity more broadly remains underexplored.

Additionally, a growing body of research considers the inclusiveness of national identities for Muslim minorities (both immigrants and converts), and the factors determining the degree to which these minorities feel they belong as part of the nation (e.g. Schmidt 2004; Gudrun Jensen 2008; Fleischmann and Phalet 2018). The role state involvement in religion plays in influencing the development (or lack thereof) of national and transnational identities for these immigrant members of minority religions deserves direct investigation.

Finally, the scope of this project merits extension to include religious minorities generally, as well as those unaffiliated with any religion. This necessitates the development of additional theory concerning the effects of state involvement in religion.

There are two reasons the theory presented in this dissertation does not apply to religious minorities. First, religious minorities will interpret the signals sent by the state differently than members of the majority religion. While the signals sent by the state concerning the role of the majority religion may fuse religious and national identity in the minds of members of other religions, it may also have a deleterious effect on their sense of belonging in the nation, and thus reduce the strength of their religionational identity. For example, religious subsidies could create feelings of resentment and otherness for unsubsidized groups, particularly when they also suffer from repression. By engaging in both of these practices simultaneously, the state not only signals what the “incorrect” religious practices are, but also signals what they view as the national, “traditional” religion. This may reduce feelings of national attachment and belongingness, while at the same time increasing their sense that religion—in this case, one other than their own—and national identity are fused.

For this reason, for religious minorities it does not make sense to think of primacy and imbrication of the majority religion as comprising a single construct; instead, these two attitudes will be distinct and inversely related. As a member of a minority religion perceives their national identity as increasingly defined by another religion, the degree to which they will feel this identity describes them will decrease.

Second, the degree to which religious minorities feel they belong as members of the nation will also be predicated upon social regulation of religion. This social regulation—which include “the

restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or the culture at large”— can create pressures for government regulation, which in turn creates persecution which gives rise to greater calls for social regulation as part of a non-recursive feedback loop (Grim and Finke 2007). However, this treatment of minority religious groups by members of the dominant religion will have direct effects through the mechanism of societal signaling about national belonging, rather than through state signals. In cases where members of minority religions perceive this societal regulation—such as families of Christian converts in Kyrgyzstan facing large protests and community persecution when they try to bury family members (Botobekov 2017)—a signal is being sent by societal actors that members of the minority religious group have no place in the community and as part of the nation. If the state does not intervene in such instances of societal repression, or incorporates this societal repression into state regulation, this signal is reinforced by their tacit or explicit endorsement.

It is possible that state involvement in religion that selects religious “winners” through positive forms of involvement, while also designating “losers” through repression, may not only cleave religious and national identity, but contribute to the creation of an oppositional identity. Religious identity itself may serve as a replacement for national identity and as a locus of mobilization for political behavior. In a case such as this, state involvement may not only influence religionational fusion, but also contribute to the establishment of political opposition through the generation of grievances.

Further, state involvement in religion targeting religious minorities, rather than religious majorities, may also have effects on dominant religion religionational identity distinct from the effects of state involvement in the dominant religion. For example, while I argue that religious repression of the dominant religion decreases religionational fusion, we might expect that repression exclusively targeting minority religious groups will have a strictly positive effect on religionational fusion for members of the dominant religion. National identities can be contracted vis-à-vis the differentiation of an outgroup (Druckman 1994), and this distinction can be at the core of contested notions of national identity (Kuzio 2001). Repression exclusively targeting minority groups can send a signal about the boundaries of the nation to members of the dominant religion, implying that identities other than theirs are “foreign” to the nation, and insinuating that their religious identity is “traditional”, thus increasing religionational fusion for the dominant group by reifying these boundaries. Similarly, positive subsidies targeting minority religion or rhetoric drawing on minority

faiths may have the effect of reducing religionational fusion for members of the dominant religion, instead fostering a multidenominational understanding of national identity.

In summary, while this dissertation has shown that religionational fusion is in part dependent on how the state involves itself in religion, there remains work to be done explaining the determinants of religionational fusion for groups other than the dominant religion, as well as considering other forms of state involvement in religion, including involvement in minority religions and negative use of religious rhetoric and symbols. Insights from the work presented here—and future work on the topic—have the potential to expand our general understanding of national identity and nation-building, as well as the role religion plays in these identities and processes.

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