

Fundamentalism in Central Asian Republic

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the complex dynamics of radicalization and extremism in the Central Asian republics. Fundamentalism calls for a return to fundamental principles that are considered original and pure. It is characterized by a rigorous devotion to certain texts, dogmas, or ideologies. Against the backdrop of porous borders and socio-economic instability, Central Asia, strategically located at a crossroads between different economic areas linking the West and the East, must deal with the urgent threat of extremism. The terrorist attack in Kunduz, the end of the ISAF mission, and Pakistan's Zarb-e-Azb operation near the Afghan border are just some of the recent events that highlight how serious this problem has become in the region. Although there are not many large, well-known terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, there are many regional extremist movements that are difficult to identify and understand. To clarify what elements influence the rise of fundamentalism in Central Asia, this secondary research summarises the existing knowledge. By looking at the socio-economic vulnerabilities and geopolitical background, the work aims to offer insights that will lead to more effective preventive measures. The study aims to contribute to a thorough understanding of regional dynamics as extremism continues to spread in Central Asia. This will enable international cooperation and informed policy decisions to counter the growing threat of fundamentalism in the heart of Asia.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, Central Asia, extremism, Islam, radicalization

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has been impacted by a variety of foreign forces over time, including Mongol invasions, the Silk Road, and the Soviet administration. However, the area has undergone tremendous transformations since the fall of the Soviet Union, including the rise of new countries and the dissemination of extreme ideologies. The area, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, is vital to the struggle of opposing political ideologies because of its advantageous location between China, Russia, and the Middle East. Ethnic strife, political corruption, and economic instability have been among the many difficulties that the post-Soviet Central Asian governments have had to deal with. The emergence of fundamentalism in the area has been facilitated by these circumstances.

The term "fundamentalism" is ambiguous and can signify several things depending on the situation. But in its widest definition, fundamentalism is an uncompromising, unwavering loyalty to core beliefs, frequently of a religious or intellectual nature. Fundamentalists ascribe to a literal reading of the Bible and a return to the purportedly original and unadulterated form of their philosophy or religion. They see secularism and modernization as threats to their principles and worldview, therefore they reject them. Strong conviction in the superiority and exclusivity of one's religion or philosophy, rejection of pluralism and tolerance for other faiths, rigid devotion to traditional values and customs, and a propensity for violence and extremism are some of the traits that define fundamentalism. When social or political

developments are perceived as a danger to the core beliefs of a certain group, fundamentalism frequently results. In 1991, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Central Asia saw profound transformation. Ethnic conflicts, poor economy, and corrupt administrations beset the newly independent republics. Radical ideas were able to proliferate because of these conditions.

The Islamic Organisation of Uzbekistan (IMU), which began to take shape in the late 1990s, was the first significant fundamentalist organization in Central Asia. The IMU aimed to topple the region's secular governments and impose an Islamic caliphate over Central Asia. The gang carried out many acts of terrorism, such as the vehicle bombs in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1999. The political unrest and economic troubles in Uzbekistan and its adjacent countries are to blame for the IMU's emergence. The region's closeness to Afghanistan and the dissemination of radical beliefs from there were further factors in the rise of fundamentalism in Central Asia. Extremists in Afghanistan known as the Taliban trained and supported terrorists throughout Central Asia, opening the door for extreme ideas to infiltrate the area. The governments of the area and the international community face serious problems because of the rise of fundamentalism in Central Asia. Extremist organizations have an easier time recruiting and operating in this climate because of governmental corruption, a lack of economic prospects, and ethnic conflicts. The region can only combat the menace of extremism and advance stability and peace in Central Asia by working together.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Central Asia is characterized by a combination of religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, and indigenous belief systems. Jonathan Fox's work "Fundamentalist & Extremism Politics," explores the nature, goals, potential sources of violence, and other important issues related to fundamentalist politics. To provide a basis for comprehending the dynamics of fundamentalism in the context of Central Asian Republics (CARs). Fox's study establishes the scene by tackling important issues about the origins and characteristics of fundamentalist politics. It aims to investigate the complex nature of fundamentalism in the modern period and highlights the relevance of secularism as a critical component in comprehending these phenomena. Fox's study makes a distinction between fundamentalists who practice the dominant religion in a state and those who are members of minority groups.¹

The historical roots of fundamentalism in Central Asia can be traced to the Soviet era when religious practices were systematically suppressed. The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a significant turning point, opening the door to newfound freedom and allowing for the resurgence of religious identity. The Work "Prospects of Fundamentalism in Central Asia" by Mutahir Ahmed provides a thorough examination of the historical development that may have contributed to the possible emergence of fundamentalism in the Central Asian Republics (CARs). By utilizing noteworthy occurrences from the Soviet era to the post-Cold War era, the study clarifies important advancements impacting the present situation along with the current problems of humanism, democracy, and regional interdependence. It downplays the possibility of religious fanaticism and claims that political pluralism is the best way to ease tensions and resolve issues in the Central Asian Republic².

¹ Fox, Jonathan. (2021). FUNDAMENTALIST EXTREMISM AND POLITICS. 10.1142/9789811235504_0001

² Ahmed, M. (1992). Prospects of Fundamentalism in Central Asia. Pakistan Horizon, 45(3), 71–82.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41393384>

³Dustin Gamza and Pauline Jones' groundbreaking study, "The Evolution of Religious Regulation in Central Asia, 1991-2018," explores the emergence of fundamentalism in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Despite shared Soviet-era legacies and Muslim-majority populations, these nations diverge significantly in their post-independence approaches to religious control. Kyrgyzstan initially championed individual religious freedom and secularism, evolving over two decades to emphasize a specific interpretation of Islam, counterterrorism, and regulation of unapproved religious practices. Uzbekistan, establishing the Committee on Religious Affairs in 1992, consistently prioritized combating extremism and promoting a state-aligned Islam. Tajikistan's trajectory, marked by a decade of religious tolerance followed by state-sanctioned Islam, demonstrates the transformative impact of constitutional amendments and legislative changes. The nuanced evolution of religious regulation in these countries underscores the intricate interplay of historical, political, and social factors shaping fundamentalism in Central Asia. This concise overview sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration in our research paper, aiming to unravel the complexities of religious dynamics in the region.

This paper "Rising Extremism in Central Asia? Stability in the Heartland for a Secure Eurasia" by Sebastiano Mori and Leonardo Taccetti⁴ delves into several important topics, such as the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the importance of religion, Islamic groups in Central Asia, the threat of radicalization, and Europe's shift towards Central Asia. The five-pronged approach of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy- prevent, protect, pursue, and respond is emphasized by Mori and Taccetti. The strategy was adopted in 2005. The strategy's emphasis on avoiding extremist behaviour through information sharing, international cooperation, values promotion, and local community participation is emphasized by the authors. The authors concluded by recognizing the diversity of Islamic movements in Central Asia and advocating for a nuanced, non-uniform response by governments to Islam. To combat radicalization, they emphasize the significance of advancing religious freedom, recognizing moderate groups, investing in positive education methodologies, including religious leaders, addressing prisons as possible breeding grounds, and encouraging global collaboration.

Shirin Akiner's work, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia: Historical Background and Contemporary Context,"⁵ delves into the nuanced dynamics of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. The paper outlines Central Asia's historical position on the fringes of the Islamic world, its recent integration with broader Muslim tendencies, and the traditionally conservative nature of Islam loyal to ruling regimes. Highlighted are issues, such as the rise of extreme Islamist movements that oppose governments. Significant social and economic issues foster dissent, yet most people are reluctant to openly back what they see as "fundamentalist" Islam. The study highlights how cross-border migrations are escalating regional turmoil and how demographic changes following the fall of the Soviet Union and instability in Afghanistan are among the evolving variables. Stability is threatened by anticipated recurrent wars, especially in regions like the Ferghana Valley and portions of Tajikistan. In a nutshell, Akiner's work

³ Dustin Gamza & Pauline Jones (2020): The evolution of religious regulation in Central Asia, 1991-2018, Central Asian Survey, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2020.1836477

⁴ Team, E. (2021, May 9). Rising Extremism in Central Asia? Stability in the Heartland for a Secure Eurasia (February 2016). EIAS. <https://eias.org/publications/briefing-paper/rising-extremism-in-central-asia-stability-in-the-heartland-for-a-secure-eurasia-february-2016/>

⁵ Shirin Akiner, Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia: Historical Background and Contemporary Context, 13/2000, WRITENET, 1 May 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/writenet/2001/en/31426>

offers an in-depth examination of the Central Asian government's reactions to Islamic fundamentalism as well as the historical background, current issues, variables that are changing, possibility of conflict, and dialogue opportunities.

The paper 'Religious extremism is a threat to society: social analysis of Central Asian countries' by Tabashev Galymbek, Bagasharov Kudaiberdi, Nurgazinova Svetlana, Portnov Vitalii, & Aimbetova Ulbossyn⁶ investigates the social aspects of religious extremism as a threat to society in Central Asian nations. It draws attention to the extraordinary scope and effects of societal violence, with extremism being a serious threat. The research attempts to uncover the causes, sources, categorization, and trends of religious extremism by exploring its essence, content, and manifestations. Several analytical techniques are used together with frameworks from social and philosophical sciences. Thus, the paper emphasizes how crucial it is to deal with religious extremism as a social concern in Central Asian nations. Through comprehension of the characteristics and processes of religious radicalism, communities may devise focused measures to safeguard the safety of people, groups, and nations.

With an emphasis on nations like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the paper "Religious Extremism in Central Asia" by Poona Mann offers a thorough examination of the elements fostering the growth of religious extremism in the area. It draws attention to the background of Islamic extremism in Central Asia, going back to the post-Soviet era and the rise of organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and their campaigns against the establishment of governments. The study also addresses outside factors that contribute to religious extremism in Central Asia, including financial backing for extreme ideology and religious organizations from nations like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. Another destabilizing element that is brought up is the Taliban's participation in arming and training rebel groups in the area. To lessen the threat presented by extremist organizations, the document emphasizes the need for international collaboration, economic reforms, and social development efforts. Overall, it argues for a holistic strategy that addresses the underlying reasons for religious extremism in Central Asia.⁷

Martha Brill Olcott in his paper titled 'Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia'⁸ discusses the resilience of Islamic identity in Central Asia despite Soviet suppression, highlighting how Islamic traditions and beliefs continued to influence the population's self-awareness. It also looks at how fundamentalist movements that opposed Soviet rule and supported Islamic education in local communities first emerged in the Fergana Valley in the 1980s. Additionally, the study highlights how important free political systems are for fostering creativity and preserving stable state-society interactions in the middle of Islamic economic expansion and community-based endeavors in Central Asia. The goal of Wolters' research is to shed light on how Central Asian governments deal with the challenges posed by social, cultural, and religious shifts in a globalized world.

⁶ Tabashev Galymbek, Bagasharov Kudaiberdi, Nurgazinova Svetlana, Portnov Vitalii, & Aimbetova Ulbossyn. (2020). RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IS A THREAT TO SOCIETY: SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, 17(8), 346-353. Retrieved from <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/3254>

⁷ Mann. (n.d.). Religious Extremism In Central Asia. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_dec01map01.html

⁸ Olcott, M. B. (2023, May 10). *Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia*. Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003417088-3>

METHODOLOGY

This research explores the complex phenomena of fundamentalism in the Central Asian Republics using a thorough literature review methodology. The first step in our research is to identify relevant research, for which we search widely in academic databases, libraries, and respectable journals. Using terms like "fundamentalism" and "Central Asian Republics," this stage seeks to guarantee a comprehensive, yet targeted, collection of scholarly works covering various viewpoints, approaches, and periods.

Following the identification of relevant material, each selected work is meticulously reviewed and summarised. Critical analysis is employed to evaluate the principal discoveries, contentions, and approaches employed by various writers. The goal is to find common themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature in addition to comprehending the complex nature of individual contributions.

A key element of our approach is identifying research gaps, which necessitates a careful review of the body of literature to look for unresolved issues, debates, or neglected dimensions of fundamentalism in Central Asian Republics. It directs the synthesis of data from multiple sources and adds to the theoretical foundation of our research study.

In this work, key lessons gathered from existing research are summarised. The emphasis is on recognizing both the limitations of current understanding and the distinctive contributions made by earlier researchers. Furthermore, research is required to fill in the gaps that have been found, laying the groundwork for possible future research projects.

INTRODUCTION TO FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

The tendency for some groups to adhere to particular scriptures, dogmas, or ideologies rigorously and literally with a heavy emphasis on upholding in-group and out-group distinctions is known as fundamentalism. Returning to the core or basics or fundamentals. It alludes to a movement or a way of thinking that demands a return to foundational writings or books that are seen as pure and full of original morals and behaviours. The term "fundamentalism" describes the unwavering, uncompromising loyalty to core values, sometimes of a religious or ideological nature. They exhibit a strong adherence to their values and beliefs by rejecting modernization and secularism.

Given the amount of violence and religiously motivated battles that occurred in Central Asia before the modern era, religious fundamentalism is evident there. Most Central Asians are Sunni Muslims, namely those of the Hanafi school. The history of the Mongol invasion, the Silk Road, which connected China to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe served as the hub of Eurasia's trade network, Soviet rule since the 19th century, the communist takeover of the Soviet Union in 1917 with the Bolshevik Revolution, and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 created a vacuum in the region's political and religious landscape and laid the groundwork for the spread of radical ideologies and religious extremism

In the 19th century, the Soviet Union occupied Central Asia, and as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, communists seized power in 1917. As part of Soviet strategy, national territorial delimitation was implemented in Central Asia in the mid-1920s, with ethnicity serving as the foundation for the delimitation. They drew the boundaries because they believed that strong nationalism would result from

an area having a shared linguistic, ethnic, and cultural past. As a result, ethnic lines were used to draw the current borders of the five former Soviet states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. The Soviet Union's understanding of these ethnic distinctions gave them the ability to divide and conquer the region that they controlled for decades.

Muslim groups in Central Asia were ruthlessly suppressed both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution. Alongside the delimitation process and the subsequent establishment of national republics, national designations, languages, cultural practices, historical figures, and artifacts were also codified, distributed, and appropriated. Simultaneously, the traditional values of self-identification, ancestry, and Islam were being challenged in a public domain that was meant to transition into a contemporary, secular one. Soviet nation-building efforts with their ethnic minority commenced in the 1920s and 1930s, at a time when many Central Asian incidents of violence and rebellion came to be seen as primarily ethnic. The most resilient opposition was provided by the so-called Basmachis, or guerrilla warriors, who were mostly found in the Ferghana Valley and the mountains of contemporary Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan and is frequently the site of their operations bases. Indigenous people in Central Asia tried to preserve their freedom of religion in 1918 with the Basmachi Movement in Soviet Central Asia. Up until the early 1930s, they launched occasional strikes against Soviet authority. During the early years of colonialism, the area lost any genuine feeling of freedom. Rather than modernizing Central Asia, the Soviet Union crushed its soul.

In 1991, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Central Asia saw profound transformation. The 1990s saw the inhabitants of Central Asia placed in an unstable geopolitical position because of the region's resource depletion and lack of compensation due to water scarcity, population exile, and violent Soviet persecution. The newly independent republics were faced with struggling economies, corrupt administrations, and ethnic conflicts. Radical ideas were able to proliferate because of these conditions. The Islamic Organisation of Uzbekistan (IMU), which began to take shape in the late 1990s, was the first significant fundamentalist organization in Central Asia. The IMU aimed to topple the region's secular governments and impose an Islamic caliphate over Central Asia. Extremists in Afghanistan known as the Taliban trained and supported terrorists throughout Central Asia, opening the door for extreme ideas to infiltrate the area. An authoritarian administration and escalating political unrest stemming from ethnic tensions were serious issues. Interethnic clashes have plagued the former Soviet republics of Central Asia since the 1989s. These confrontations have been reported in the Ferghana Valley, Kokand, Kuvasaj, and Namangam in Uzbekistan, Isfara and Dushanbe in Tajikistan, and among the Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz populations. The 1990s saw ethnic uprisings in Kyrgyzstan and a civil war in Tajikistan. These events were followed in 2005 by an uprising in Uzbekistan and two more revolutions in Kyrgyzstan. In the 1990s, ethnic uprisings in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan witnessed civil war, while Uzbekistan experienced an uprising in 2005, Kyrgyzstan saw two additional revolutions and Afghan jihadists continued to infiltrate the country during the post-Soviet era. A complicated cycle of action and response was sparked by the mobilization of groups with disparate political goals and interpretations of Islam. Conflicts between the Muslim opposition and the government were becoming more frequent because of their rivalry. Fears that Islam, or more specifically, the contestation of Islam, is becoming seen as a security issue have resulted from worries that Central Asia is becoming a new hub for terrorism.

BASMACHI MOVEMENT

From 1916 until the beginning of the 1930s, there was an Islamic insurrection in Soviet Central Asia known as the Basmachi movement. Compared to other counter-revolutionary movements in the Soviet Union, it was more widespread and persisted longer. The Jadidists, a reformist Islamic organization, and the Qadimists, who stood in for conventional Islamists and the Bukhara Emir, were the two primary forces behind the insurgency. The goal of the Basmachi movement was to create independent nations in Central Asia and to challenge Soviet rule over the region. However, the movement's eventual collapse was caused by internal conflicts, outside pressures, and the passing of its leaders. The hard-line atheist Soviet government and its policies in Central Asia, which endangered their Islamic identity and way of life, were challenged by the Basmachi guerrillas. Political and social concerns, such as economic policies, social changes that alienated the local populace, and land confiscations by the Soviet government, drove the movement. Many people joined the Basmachi movement to create independent, non-Soviet Central Asian nations. Their goal was independence and self-governance. Strong Islamic theology also propelled the Basmachi movement, and religious authorities were crucial in inspiring opposition and support against the Soviet government. Internal conflicts within the movement, such as the divide between Qadimists and Jadidists, reduced its effectiveness and cohesiveness in opposing Soviet rule. The Basmachi movement laid the groundwork for later Islamic fundamentalist groups in the area by emphasizing the significance of religion in spurring support for the fight against perceived foreign influences and oppressors.

ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN (IMU)

In 1998, Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani founded the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which sought to topple the Uzbek government via force and establish an Islamic state. The IMU, which gained popularity after the 1999 bombings in Tashkent, developed into a significant terrorist group in Central Asia, leading to the US designating it as a terrorist organization in 2000. Particularly after the September 11 attacks, the US connected Osama bin Laden to the IMU as part of its counterterrorism activities. During the US-led war on terror, the group faced severe setbacks, including unsubstantiated allegations of Namangani's death and financial difficulties because of interrupted funding sources. There are implications for the surrounding Central Asian nations from IMU's relocation to South Waziristan in Pakistan and its subsequent collaboration with the Taliban, ISIS, and other extremist groups. Concerns were raised regarding Tajik and Uzbek people in northern Afghanistan because of IMU recruiting activities. As seen by its rebranding as the Islamic Party of Turkestan (IPT), the IMU's ideological shift from an Uzbek-centric focus to militant pan-Islamism demonstrates a larger commitment to fundamentalist doctrines that cut beyond national boundaries. The IMU is aligned with fundamentalist movements outside of Central Asia, as seen by its alliances with internationally recognized extremist groups such as the Taliban and ISIS. Following the withdrawal of coalition forces headed by NATO from northern Afghanistan, the IMU began targeting Tajik and Uzbek communities between 2010 and 2013. ISIS and the IMU allied in 2014, and Usman Ghazi, the commander of ISIS, pledged loyalty in 2015. There was a split because the Taliban insisted on the rejection of loyalty. Following an assault targeting IMU strongholds, the Taliban killed Ghazi and essentially dismantled the organization. According to a UN assessment from January 2017, there are still IMU activities going on in northern Afghanistan, and some of the branch organizations are trying to get into the republics of Central Asia. However, according to analysts, the organization is no longer a significant danger to regional stability and is only operating at

a fraction of its former strength. The development of the IMU highlights the intricate interactions between regional wars, alliances, and the changing nature of extremist organizations throughout Central Asia.

FERGHANA EVENT (1989)

The Ferghana Events of 1989 were mostly motivated by ethnic tensions between the Uzbek majority and the minority Meskhi Turks. The fighting took place in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley and was marked by widespread atrocities, including murders, wounds, and property devastation. Historical circumstances, especially Stalin's deportations in the middle of the 20th century, which brought Meskhi Turks to the Ferghana area, are to blame for the conflict's origins. In 1944, the Meskhi Turks, who had previously resided in the southern region of Soviet Georgia, were sent to Central Asia. The Meskhi Turks encountered prejudice and conflict even though they were identical to the Uzbeks in language, culture, and religion. Fights in May 1989 in Quvasoy, Ferghana Valley, involving local Uzbek and Meskhi Turkish youth groups, were the cause of the 1989 events. Tensions increased due to rumors and misleading information, including claims that Turks were abusing local women and children. The spread of false information fuelled the violence, which resulted in crowds attacking and physically attacking Meskhi Turks as well as setting their homes on fire. The fight became less about ethnic strife and more about confrontations between furious youngsters and local officials. A hundred or more individuals, including Turks and Uzbeks, perished. Nearly 100,000 Turks from Meskhetia were moved to Russia. To reduce tensions, there were political repercussions such as the Communist Party head being replaced, and land being distributed. The fall of the Soviet Union created an environment that was more favorable to the rise of diverse Islamic groups in the political and social spheres as well as a revival of religious rituals.

OSH MASSACRE (1990)

In 1990, the conflict took place in Kyrgyzstan. There was an ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz (majority) and Uzbeks (minority). A protest for land was the catalyst for the confrontation. The demonstration, which focused on allocating collective farmland, exposed racial and class divisions. The distribution of land, which gave preference to Kyrgyz over Uzbeks, caused dissatisfaction among the Uzbek minority. Police opened fire during a riot as the situation worsened, killing many people, and escalating the ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. There were violent incidents in Karasu and heated arguments in Uzgen. Aravan, which was ruled by foreign forces, also broke out in violence. There was a great deal of bloodshed and casualties from the fight. According to official statistics, there have been 171 confirmed deaths and thousands of recorded crimes, including rape, robbery, pillage, injuries, and property destruction. Two-thirds of the victims were among the ethnic minority in the area, the Uzbeks. A chaotic situation with large-scale protests, altercations, assaults on public buildings, and killings resulted from the violence. Although religious fundamentalism was not the driving force behind the Osh Massacre, Central Asia has had problems with religious extremism and fundamentalism in the years that have followed. In many Central Asian countries, extremist ideologies gained traction because of post-Soviet period factors such as political unrest, economic hardships, and oppressive government.

KYRGYZSTAN – TAJIKISTAN CONFLICT (2020)

The rising violence in Central Asia between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is largely driven by long-standing border disputes. Concerns regarding regional stability have been raised by the over 100 deaths from recent clashes that occurred in September and November of 2022. The 1,000-kilometre contested boundary,

which was drawn during the Soviet era, is made worse by problems including agreements over water rights, resource transfer, and changes in ethnic demographics. Unease about the conflict has affected economic connections and fostered mutual mistrust among the Central Asian Republics. Global leaders, notably Putin and Blinken, have advocated for patience and peaceful settlement. Its humanitarian impact, interruptions to everyday life, and greater implications for regional stability, collaboration, and possible exploitation by outside players are what makes it significant. Ethnic and religious dynamics, security concerns, outside influence, socioeconomic considerations, and the significance of regional collaboration in opposing extremist beliefs are some of the ways that the conflict is connected to fundamentalism. Reducing the influence on the future of the region requires addressing the underlying issues and encouraging communication.

POROUS BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN

The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, twenty years after U.S. troops had driven them out, and the presence of jihadist aspirations in the region acted as a threat to the Central Asian republics in organizing efforts to secure their borders. Historical challenges faced by foreign powers in Afghanistan, the rise of extremist groups like the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Islamic State-Khorasan Province, and the efforts of Central Asian states to combat religious extremism and preserve their secular identity. The emergence and spread of fundamentalism in the region are significantly impacted by the porous borders that the Central Asian republics share with Afghanistan. Because of the Taliban, there are worries that their influence may spread to Central Asian nations. The boundaries make it easier for Taliban fighters to travel, which might aid in the hard-line ideology's dissemination. There have been documented instances of cross-border assaults and conflicts involving extremist organizations like the Taliban. For example, there have been reports of armed gangs invading Tajikistan and fighting one another. Because of the permeable borders, anyone from Central Asia can travel to Afghanistan to join extremist organizations and then return home with extreme views and combat experience. Returned citizens who fought alongside extremist organizations in Afghanistan have affected the countries. These returnees may serve as messengers for the dissemination of extremist beliefs in their neighbourhoods. The borders make it easier for weapons, money, and other supplies to be smuggled in, giving extremist organizations vital assistance. Due to the unrest in Afghanistan, many individuals have fled their country and are now seeking asylum in neighbouring Central Asian countries. Social conflicts and resource constraints in the area may result from this relocation. Additionally, cooperative attempts to handle border security challenges may be made more difficult by the varied interests of other powers in the region, including China, Russia, and the United States.

RELIGIOUS OVERSIGHT IN CENTRAL ASIA- KYRGYZSTAN, UZBEKISTAN, TAJIKISTAN

All five countries of Central Asia- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are Muslim-dominated countries most of them being Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi Mazhab School, which strongly encouraged moderate and tolerant Islamic practices. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan had similar legacy of religious regulation under the Soviet Union, almost the same religious demographics, and state fragility due to their common experience under Soviet rule. The dictatorship established a statist method of controlling religious life starting in the 1940s. This involved creating a strong muftiate in Central Asia, dubbed SADUM (Sredneaziatskoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man) in Russian.

Although it was ostensibly autonomous, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults kept a careful eye on it. However, the unregistered Muslim "clergy," who outnumbered those formally recognized by SADUM, were never systematically dealt with by this bureaucracy. Due to their comparatively weak central administrations and open borders with Afghanistan, all three republics have also experienced severe political instability since gaining their independence. These qualities distinguish these three nations from their neighbours, Turkmenistan, which has been more stable and markedly more dictatorial, and nearby Kazakhstan, which has been wealthier and more stable since independence.

Kyrgyzstan

Over time, Kyrgyzstan's attitude towards religion has changed. In its 1993 constitution, Kyrgyzstan declared itself to be a secular state, valuing religious liberty but forbidding religious institutions from influencing politics. The state abstained from interfering with citizens' rights to manifest their religions unless doing so would have violated the 1991 Law on Freedom of Religion. Recognizing the necessity for a legal framework, Kyrgyzstan started creating systems to monitor religious activity in 1998. This stage prepared the way for upcoming regulations. 2008 saw Kyrgyzstan increase restrictions on unapproved religious rituals and beliefs while endorsing a certain version of Islam. This signalled a change towards a more regulated religious setting. As the emphasis shifted to fighting terrorism, religious activities that were seen as a danger to national security came under closer investigation. Kyrgyzstan implemented a comprehensive counterterrorism and extremism program that included public education, surveillance, training, media campaigns, and changes to the country's legal system. 2018 saw the passage of many laws to implement the counter-extremism program's objectives. Among these laws were strict licensing requirements for religious schools. As part of its changing regulatory approach, Kyrgyzstan is focusing on fighting terrorism because of concerns about fundamentalist ideology that might inspire violence or endanger national security. The goal of the government's campaigns against unapproved religious activities and beliefs is to stop the development of radical ideologies.

Uzbekistan

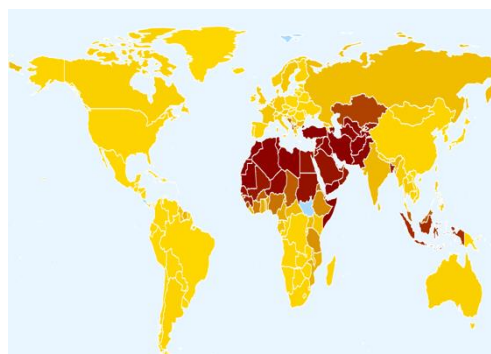
Soon after gaining independence, the government of Uzbekistan passed the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations in 1991, which protected individual religious freedom but placed restrictions on the operations of religious organizations. Established in 1992, the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) was tasked with coordinating enforcement and policy. The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience established strict registration requirements and made unregistered religious activities illegal. An interdepartmental body was formed by the government in 1998 to oversee religious organizations. "Community Guardians" were designated to monitor and document religious activities. The introduction of severe sanctions for both giving religious teaching in households and dressing in spiritual attire in public. Participation in unlicensed religious organizations carries criminal sanctions. Uzbekistan's policies and attitude towards religion have an impact on regional dynamics because of its strategic location in Central Asia. Uzbekistan's repressive measures against fundamentalism may have an indirect impact on neighbouring countries, potentially shaping their policies and approaches to religious practices, as the government's regulatory measures are designed to combat extremism, maintain stability, and assert control over religious practices to prevent the spread of fundamentalist ideology.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan created a religious regulatory framework quickly after gaining independence, including laws such as the 1993 Resolution on the Registration of Muslim Spiritual Administrations and the 1994 Law on Religion and Religious Organisations. These regulations sought to protect individual religious freedom while regulating religious organizations and activities. In reaction to the civil war, the Muftiate was abolished, the Council of Ulema was established, and laws permitting religious parties were changed to reflect a more inclusive political environment. In 2006, the government abolished the Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) and gave the Ministry of Culture regulatory authority instead. Restrictions tightened under the 2009 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, and the state's role in the appointment of imams and imam-khatibs was heightened. 2007 saw the introduction of comprehensive rules on the cultural components of religious rituals. Children under the age of eighteen are not allowed to enter mosques. Foreign religious instruction was subject to stringent restrictions. In 2014, the CRA was reconstituted with expanded powers. The government has taken steps in the form of regulatory measures to prevent the resurgence of fundamentalist movements, combat extremism, and maintain stability and security within the nation and the wider region. These steps include the adoption of a programme to indoctrinate youth against extremism in 2018, a ban on religious political parties in the 2016 amendment to the Constitution, and amendments in 2017 that prohibit or limit Muslim customs and celebrations.

FINDINGS

With a complicated historical background, Central Asia has seen the rise of radical politics and fundamentalism since the end of the Cold War, especially with the fall of the Soviet Union. The features, origins, and effects of fundamentalism in the Central Asian Republics namely Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan as a whole along with a particular study of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan because of their comparable populations by religion, a legacy of religious restriction from the Soviet Union, and state instability from shared Soviet authority all are examined in depth in this research article. It examines the relationship between Islamic extremism and fundamentalism and assesses the movement's future course. In the Central Asian setting, "fundamentalism" refers to a rigid commitment to certain religious doctrines, frequently in reaction to perceived challenges like secularisation and modernization. Fundamentalism is a response to the perceived loss of religious identity and purity, which is made worse by inter-ethnic strife. The 2020 World Religion Database Report estimated the Muslim population living in the Central Asian Republic and the data of the same is given below. The data shows that 97.45%, 95.83%, 94.78%, 87.18%, and 68.84% Muslim population reside in the countries of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan respectively (Johnson and Grim 2020).



Total number of Muslims by country and percent of population that are Muslims: Followers of Islam, in two primary branches: (a) Sunni; and (b) Shia. Other, significantly smaller, branches include Kharijite, Sanusi, Mahdiya, Ahmadiya, Druzes, and Sabbateans. (World Religion Database, 2020)
 From the ARDA Web Page: https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/np-sort?var=ADH_L495

NATION	REGION	Muslims(2020)1 [X]	% Muslims(2020)1 [X]
Afghanistan	South-Central Asia	38,874,606	99.86
Maldives	South-Central Asia	533,435	98.69
Iran	South-Central Asia	82,770,145	98.54
Tajikistan	South-Central Asia	9,294,837	97.45
Pakistan	South-Central Asia	213,085,718	96.47
Turkmenistan	South-Central Asia	5,779,977	95.83
Uzbekistan	South-Central Asia	31,721,531	94.78
Bangladesh	South-Central Asia	146,253,593	88.81
Kyrgyzstan	South-Central Asia	5,687,649	87.18
Kazakhstan	South-Central Asia	12,926,705	68.84
India	South-Central Asia	198,476,545	14.38
Sri Lanka	South-Central Asia	1,938,392	9.05
Nepal	South-Central Asia	1,187,282	4.07
Bhutan	South-Central Asia	1,736	0.23

Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds. World Religion Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022).

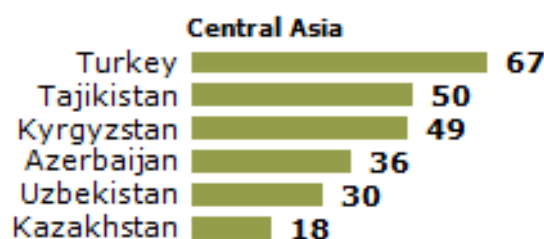
Source: Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds. World Religion Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022).

Further the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life report on The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity (2012, August 9) presents data that nearly all Muslims in Tajikistan (99%), Azerbaijan (98%), Turkey (97%) and Uzbekistan (97%) declare their belief in God and the Prophet Muhammad. These countries are located in Central Asia. This concept is held by somewhat fewer Muslims in Kyrgyzstan (94%) and Kazakhstan (83%).

The relevance of religion is viewed quite differently throughout Central Asia. Turkey is unique among the nations in the area because, according to two-thirds of its Muslims, religion plays a significant role in their daily lives. About half (50%) of people in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and 49% of people in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, respectively, agree with this statement. Only 18% of Kazakhstani Muslims claim to place a high value on religion. The data sheds light on the disparities in religious belief levels and the perceived importance of religion in day-to-day living in Central Asian nations. Strong commitment to essential Islamic beliefs is indicated by the high percentages of Muslims (99%), Azerbaijan (98%), Turkey (97%), and Uzbekistan (97%) who declare belief in God and the Prophet Muhammad. The divergent perspectives among Central Asian nations about the significance of religion in day-to-day existence are vital. The information reveals differences in the relative weights given to religion by area. This discrepancy suggests that religious precepts are understood and adhered to differently throughout the region. The differences in the weight assigned to religion might indicate different ways that people understand Islam and different levels of devotion to extremist beliefs. Although a firm foundation is indicated by high belief levels, the degree to which people incorporate religious ideas into their everyday lives differs, which affects the risk of fundamentalism. To sum up, the data indicates a variety of religious perspectives and ideas about the place of religion in daily life throughout Central Asia, pointing to a complex fundamentalist landscape in the area. High levels of belief do not always translate into the same fundamentalist views, since different nations differ greatly in how important they view religion to be. The data for the same is given below:

How Much Religion Matters

% saying religion is very important in their lives



*Data for all countries except Niger from "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa."
^Interviews conducted with Muslims in five southern provinces only.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q36.

Source: The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity. (2012, August 9). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>

With the world moving towards westernization and modernization there has been religious syncretism which entails the peaceful blending of many religious doctrines, practices, and traditions into a unique, cohesive belief system. In Central Asia, the term "Islamic religious syncretism" describes the merging of Islamic rituals and ideas with pre-existing indigenous practices, customs, and beliefs. The distinction between Islamic customs and nationalist beliefs is becoming blurred in Central Asia due to the growing "nationalization" of Islam. The idea of a complete Islamisation of society, of "halalization," and the application of the shari'a to cover every aspect of Muslim life bound the opposing groups together during this conflict between the state and civil society actors. This created a great deal of anxiety for non-Muslims and sparked the emergence of counter-Islamization and liberal civil society groups. Fundamentalism emerged partly because of foreign extremist groups and global jihadist ideas. Local radical organizations received funding and support from transnational networks, which fuelled their activities and attempts to radicalize others. The Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan poses a danger to Central Asian fundamentalism. The numerous obstacles are highlighted by the possibility of inspiration, cross-border terrorism, security issues, influence on regional stability, and consequences for human rights and governance. The Taliban's stringent interpretation of Islamic law gives rise to worries about the decline of liberal principles in the area. To topple the Uzbek government and establish an Islamic state the rise of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (1998) gives an idea of how opposition by extremist groups can further lead them into converting to a terrorist group in the name of professing, promoting, and practicing religious beliefs. In Central Asia, extremist organizations use religious authority to defend their practices. By posing as the real defenders of Islam and justifying their radical goal as a call to prayer. Acts of terrorism and violence committed by extremists in Central Asia may be justified as religiously mandated efforts to uphold Islam or further their religious agendas.

Further, the impact of repression on religious activities may have mixed implications, potentially fuelling radicalization. In Central Asia, the degree of repression towards religious practice and belief has changed throughout time, gradually shifting towards more repression after independence. The region's changing religious regulatory landscape is characterized by a common trend towards stricter regulation of religious activities outside state-approved interpretations of Islam, despite differences in the pace, degree, and nature of repression. Fundamentalism may be impacted by the suppression of religious rituals in Central Asia in two ways. On the one hand, fundamentalism may grow as a form of resistance or empowerment when people feel oppressed or marginalized because of limitations on their religious beliefs. Repression, on the other hand, may also reduce fundamentalism by reducing the prominence and power of extreme organizations. Tight restrictions on religious activity might impede the radicalization of ideology and deter fundamentalist organizations from organizing. Extremist ideologies can flourish unchecked when

religious organizations are forced underground by repression of their rituals. Thus, suppression can also be a driving force of fundamentalism in Central Asia.

Extremist elements take advantage of the vacuum left by the government's suppression of free speech and understanding among people. This communication failure makes it difficult to resolve religious issues, widening divisions and creating an environment that is conducive to the spread of fundamentalist beliefs. Extremist movements flourish in contexts characterized by distrust, polarization, and a lack of dialogue. Government repression deepens already-existing rifts in society, which fosters conflict and provides fundamentalist beliefs with an opportunity to acquire momentum by taking advantage of the ensuing distrust. Moreover, Afghanistan is a serious concern because of its close vicinity and weak borders. The possibility of radical ideas spreading throughout Central Asia and the transnational movement of militants increase the likelihood of fundamentalist influence in the region. Also, past ethnic conflicts in Central Asia have created a fertile ground for fundamentalist movements. Grievances resulting from ethnic tensions contribute to the appeal of ideologies that promise a sense of identity, belonging, and empowerment through religious affiliation.

The future of fundamentalism in Central Asia is a dynamic and diverse problem, driven by the complex interplay of political, socioeconomic, and religious forces. The future environment will be significantly shaped by the strategies adopted by the governments of Central Asia. On the other hand, laws that support religious diversity, communication, and tolerance may slow the development of extreme viewpoints. Social welfare programs and inclusive development policies might lessen people's vulnerability to extreme narratives, which will lessen the attraction of fundamentalist ideologies. Working together can help combat transnational extremist networks and stop extreme beliefs from spreading throughout Central Asia. It is crucial to invest in young empowerment, education, and critical thinking abilities. Interacting with youth populations helps keep them away from extremist views and avoid radicalization. It is essential to establish robust community networks, encourage social cohesiveness, and cultivate a sense of belonging. Fundamentalist tendencies can be resisted by community-led programs that promote tolerance and peaceful relationships.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the study presents a thorough picture of fundamentalism in Central Asia by combining historical nuances, outside influences, governmental regulations, socioeconomic variables, theological dynamics, and the critical role that young people play. The work analyses the historical underpinnings of fundamentalism and emphasizes its origins in the Soviet era when the suppression of religious rituals and the ensuing power vacuum gave rise to movements such as the Basmachi, which echoed the opposition to communist ideals. The growth of organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the post-Soviet era demonstrated the long-lasting influence of past events on the current environment.

External factors provide significant obstacles, especially the porous nature of borders and the Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan. Regional conflicts, ethnic tensions, and fundamentalist beliefs are intricately intertwined, as seen by the war between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the Ferghana Events. While recognizing security concerns, government policy must strike a balance between the risk of unintentionally encouraging extremism and strict safeguards. Comprehensive development strategies are required to

address the underlying causes of extremist beliefs since the socio-economic environment characterized by struggling economies and ethnic tensions serves as a breeding ground for these ideas.

To promote a more inclusive understanding of Islam, religious leadership is essential. The blurring of lines between Islamic rituals and nationalist ideas is acknowledged as a factor shaping religious narratives. It becomes clear that efforts to encourage tolerance and communication within religious groups are crucial to combating fanaticism. The young require funding for programs that promote empowerment, critical thinking abilities, and education since they have been identified as both vulnerable targets and potential change agents. Initiatives conducted by the community, especially those that involve young people, are essential for building resilience against fundamentalist impulses.

Due to the interconnectedness of the issues, international players as well as countries in Central Asia must work together to address them. The significance of teamwork in tackling the many aspects of fundamentalism is emphasized in the research's findings. The region's chances for the future depend on a complex, all-encompassing strategy that addresses the underlying issues and builds a strong, accepting community. To put it concisely, the conclusion calls for a sophisticated, multifaceted approach that integrates global, sociological, and political elements to successfully tackle the multifaceted problems that radical ideologies in Central Asia present.

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