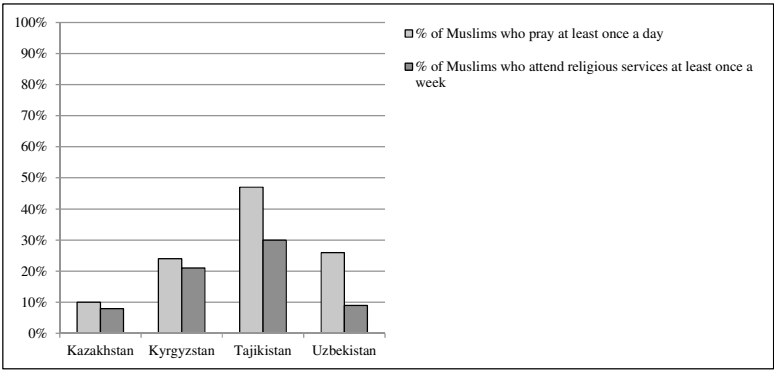
9. Typology of Religious and Counter-Terrorism Politics

9.1. Typology of State Regulation of Folk Islam

Keeping the dire (and since independence even deteriorating) social-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in mind, it is not surprising that in these two countries the percentage of those who regard attacks against civilians in the defence of Islam as justified is highest (see sections 1.2 and 6.2.5 as well as Figure 7 for explanation).

Despite this, the PEW data on Uzbekistan should be interpreted carefully. Taking the whole political and religious context into consideration, it seems logical to conclude that the low percentage of Muslims who say that violence against civilians in order to defend Islam can be justified is a reflection of the reluctance of respondents to give a positive answer to this question, which is most likely a result of the strong state surveillance and repression of Muslims. People here even fear to practice the officially accepted Islam. Although Uzbekistan used to be a beacon of Islam in Central Asia nowadays Uzbeks rarely visit mosques or read *namaz*. I can only assume that this country, which was traditionally regarded as the most devout of the Central Asian nations, has such a low number of everyday practising Muslims and such a large discrepancy between every day praying Muslims and mosque attendance because of the restrictive religious policies (see Figure 11).

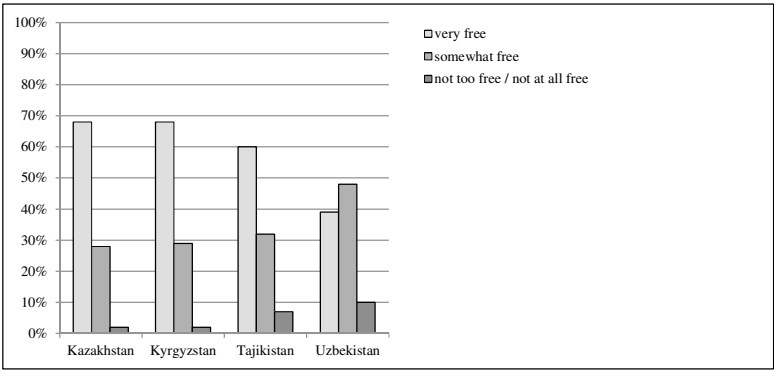
Figure 11: Frequency of Prayers and Visitation of Religious Services



Source: PEW 2012

My assumption that a discrepancy between every day praying Muslims and mosque attendance is an indicator of tight restrictions on religion in each respective country is confirmed by data concerning the perception of religious freedom in these countries. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan where the discrepancy between praying and mosque attendance is the greatest, up to 10% of the Muslim population feel either not very free or not at all free to practice religion (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Perception of Religious Policies by Central Asian Muslims



Source: PEW 2013

Furthermore, the countries where Muslims feel least free to practice religion – Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – are those with the highest percentage of Muslims (both around 90% as was shown in Table 5). They were also the first two to introduce restrictive religious policies and the countries which went furthest in their attempts to control traditional Islam: Uzbekistan exercises total control over all religious activities while Tajikistan has ascribed a 'special' status to Hanafi madhab. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are also those two countries which officially prohibited the wearing of hijab at schools (there are reports of such restrictions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well but only from school administrations which do not constitute legal prohibitions on a national level). In order to protect their countries from terrorism Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have even introduced travel restrictions. Indeed, Uzbekistan is "the only former Soviet administration to still require exit visas for its citizens to leave the country" (Blua 2013) while in the case of Tajikistan hundreds of students were recalled from abroad as I showed in 7.3.2. Kazakhstan has closed the gap on these two countries on the legal level just recently with its new "State Programme to Counter Religious Extremism and Terrorism for 2013-2017". So far, however, around two thirds of both Kazakh and Kyrgyz Muslims still feel free to practice religion. Nevertheless, Figure 12 not only has something to say about the religious policies Central Asian states but also about the acceptance of religious policies in the population. As Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are still presumed to be the least religious Central Asian countries, it is no surprise that governmental restrictions on religion there are a cause for concern for fewer people.

To sum up, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan's legislation is most restrictive with regards to religious issues. But despite these differences among the Central Asian countries, it is worth remarking that all of them interfere with traditional Islam to a great extent as it is the only interpretation of Islam that is officially sanctioned. The Uzbek Muftiate, for example, oversees important holy sites which exclude non-official muftis and shayks. Furthermore the Uzbek security forces arrested the regional leader of the Naqshbandiyah tariqa in 1999 under the accusation of Wahhabism – after a two-year sentence he received amnesty and immigrated to Kazakhstan (interview with Ponomarev). In Kazakhstan, however, new Sufi orders are unwelcome and incidents of detained Sufis have been reported as well, even though the country has appropriated historical Sufi figures such as

Ahmad Yasawi for its own ends. In regard of folk Islam, all Central Asian states prohibit private religious classes. Such instruction, which can even be considered the traditional method of religious education in the region, has been criminalized throughout Central Asia due to the impossibility of controlling its content.

I therefore conclude that state restrictions on Islam not only pertain to non-traditional but also to traditional Islam. Private religious classes, for example, are a typical Central Asian form of religious education and practice and are held by many of the traditional and non-traditional groups, but they are prohibited in all Central Asian states.

Finally, the Central Asian governments can also be identified as actors contributing to the revival of Islam as they use the term *traditional Islam* in order to build a national ideology and maintain tight control over religion.

9.2. TYPOLOGY OF STATE REGULATION OF NON-TRADITIONAL GROUPS

I now give a final overview of the 'non-traditional' groups that have been banned in the Central Asian countries and how security forces and judiciary deal with members of these groups. In Table 20, a cross indicates that a group has been banned by a country while a tick indicates that the group is legal and has even established itself in state institutions to some extent (Tablighi Jama'at in the Kyrgyz Muftiate and the Islamic Revival Party in the Tajik parliament).

Table 20: Legal Status of Non-Traditional Islamic Groups in Central Asia (✔ = legal; x = illegal)

	Kazakhstan	**Kyrgyzstan**	**Tajikistan**	**Uzbekistan**
Modernists: FG	✔	✔	✔	x
Fundamentalists: TJ	x	✔	x	x
Islamists: IRP	x	x	✔	x
Islamists: HT	x	x	x	x
Jihadists: IMU	x	x	x	x

I now summarize the situation in each country and then summarize the legal situation of all groups in the different countries.

Country-Comparison:

- *Kazakhstan* has become the second most repressive country in terms of religious freedom since it banned Tablighi Jama'at in early 2013. (Up until this point this apolitical fundamentalist movement had not been registered but was tacitly accepted). The only non-traditional group included in this study that is so far still legal in Kazakhstan is the Gülen movement. There is evidence that Gülen schools are even welcomed by Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments and only feared because of pan-Turkish tendencies in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- *Kyrgyzstan* is the only country that tolerates apolitical Salafis, whereas it outlaws all Islamist groups – whether they are violent or non-violent.
- *Tajikistan's* religious politics are less consistent than those of Kyrgyzstan. Among the Islamists, Tajikistan tolerates the former civil-war party IRPT but has banned the pacifist HT. And despite the partial acceptance of political Islam, apolitical Salafis such as the Tablighi Jama'at are persecuted.
- *Uzbekistan* was the first Central Asian state to refer to radical Islam as a national security threat as early as the 1990s. It still holds a leading position in the suppression of all Salafi movements. Not only Islamists but also all fundamentalist and modernist groups are persecuted: even members of Nurcu and Gülen movements have spent many years in prison. Nonetheless, Uzbekistan has made some attempts to improve its human-rights image among the international community following the 2005 Andijan events though this did not bring any real changes for religious Muslims.

Group-Comparison:

- The *jihadist* Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its successor organizations such as the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) are banned in all states. This is not surprising and from a human security point of view must be considered as necessary since they are openly hostile towards

the contemporary regimes and overtly apply violence against civilians in order to reach their goals.

- *Islamist* groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and Islamic Revival Party (IRP) face different situations among the Central Asian countries.
  HT today is persecuted throughout Central Asia. However, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the Islamist party was not banned up until the early 2000s. In Kyrgyzstan, the group was only banned in 2003 and treated quite moderately until the regime change in 2005 (Taji-Farouki 2009: 423). In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan members of the group are harshly persecuted and arrested even for the possession of leaflets: Rotar estimates that in 2004 150 members were detained in Tajikistan and 5,000 in Uzbekistan (Rotar 2004b; see also Khalid 2007: 161).
  The Islamic Revival Party (IRP) is banned in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Although the IRPT is legal in Tajikistan it is subject to severe state control. The parliamentary party has to report the names of its members to the government and according to the party it often happens that state officers and imams who are members of the party subsequently lose their jobs (interviews with IRPT members). The persecution that party members face can be even more severe as examples of beaten and even killed party members show.
- *Fundamentalist* Tablighi Jama'at was banned in Uzbekistan in 2004, in Tajikistan in 2006 and Kazakhstan in 2013. For example, in Tajikistan mass arrests of Tablighi members took place in 2009 when 124 people were arrested in one single raid on a mosque in Dushanbe: "Although most were soon released, four alleged members of Tablighi Jamaat […] face trial on charges of inciting religious, national and ethnic hatred" (Hamrabaeva 2009). In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the practice of Tablighi Jama'at "is strictly prohibited and persecuted" (Nasritdinov 2012: 162). In Kazakhstan, the group is still very active and popular despite being illegal and censored (Nasritdinov 2012: 163). Nasritdinov estimates that at a meeting in India where he was present around 70% of all Tablighis from CIS countries were Kazakhs (Nasritdinov 2012: 163). Unlike in the other Central Asian countries in Kyrgyzstan, the group is even represented in the Muftiate.
- *Modernist* movements such as Nurcu and the Fetullah Gülen movements are not prohibited in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, the movement is under close government control in Tajiki-

stan. Only in Uzbekistan has the movement had to close its schools – as early as the 1990s – and only here are members of the movement regularly arrested and convicted. For example, in 2009, three people were sentenced to eight years in prison for their membership in the Nur movement while an imam of Namangan province was sentenced to twelve years (Yadgarova 2009).

To sum up, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are more open to moderate Salafis with providing legal status to the Islamic Revival Party (Tajikistan) and Tablighi Jama'at (Kyrgyzstan), respectively. These two countries as well as Kazakhstan furthermore accept Nurucs and the Fetullah Gülen movement. The most restrictive country is Uzbekistan, where none of the here mentioned Salafi groups are tolerated

Not only do the Central Asian countries differ in their views regarding which religious groups to ban or tolerate, but their views also differ regarding the extent to which the religious laws should be implemented: this seems to be due to the different means that governments have at their disposal for implementing their policies. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are best equipped to put their restrictive laws into action which can probably explain their higher ARDA Religious Persecution Index (see Table 21):[1] With regards to religious issues, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan show a much lower level of persecution (1.0) than Kazakhstan (3.0) while Uzbekistan witnesses the highest persecution on religious grounds with an index of 6.0.

Table 21: Religious Persecution Index

	Kazakhstan	**Kyrgyzstan**	**Tajikistan**	**Uzbekistan**
Religious Persecution Index (ARDA) (0-10, lower means less persecution)				
Value 2013	3.0	1.0	1.0	6.0

1 The Religious Persecution Index is devised by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) and describes persecution on religious grounds more precisely than the general Political Terror Scale. It measures the "average number of people physically abused or displaced due to their religion" and is based on recent U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom reports (ARDA).

In addition to the Religious Persecution Index, the following estimations indicate that in Kazakhstan radical Isalm has become a security issue and that the country has closed up to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Whereas in Uzbekistan still by far the most persons are detained on religious grounds, there is a high number of detainees in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well, and only Kyrgyzstan has a significantly low number of around 50 detentions due to religious affiliation.

Table 22: Detainees on Religious Grounds

	Kazakhstan	**Kyrgyzstan**	**Tajikistan**	**Uzbekistan**
number of persons detained on religious grounds	300-400	50	300-400	7,000

Source: Interview with Ponomarev.

To conclude, I can say that Kazakhstan is the least religious country in Central Asia, and religious policies have only just recently become harsher – especially with the re-registration process of 2011/2012. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan's religious policies are most open with regards to religious laws and the acceptance of religious diversity. As for Tajikistan; its laws are far-reaching but the country does not seem to be able to fully put them into action. After the peace agreement the IRPT was legalized but its real potential as an Islamist opposition force has been reduced to absurdity by a very tight state control and repression against its members. Uzbekistan has the most 'totalitarian' situation as it is the country with the most restrictive laws and at the same time has the necessary resources to exercise a great deal of control over devout Muslims.