

## ISLAM, ISLAMISM, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CENTRAL ASIA

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**Abstract.** To what extent does Islam help explain the dynamics of a participatory civil society in the post-Soviet Muslim-majority Central Asia? More specifically, to what extent does the variation in Islam (personal religiosity) and political Islam (support for Islam's role in politics) help predict the propensity to engage in elite-challenging collective political actions, rooted in self-assertive social capital? Grounded in emancipative social capital theory, this article embarks on an individual-level quantitative analysis to systematically examine the variation in self-assertive collective action in four Central Asian republics. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the empirical nexus between general religiosity (Islam), Islamism (Political Islam), and elite-challenging collective actions and offers new clues on the empirical interactions between resurgent Islam and collective political participation in the post-Communist Muslim world.

**Keywords:** Islam, political Islam, collective action, social capital, democracy, Central Asia

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### 1. Introduction

Vibrant civil society, active citizen participation, and social capital have long been viewed as vital for a healthy and robust democracy (Almond and Verba 1963, Putnam 2000). To many, the Islamic world represents an antithesis to these notions. The lesser known corner of the Muslim-majority areas, which were under the Soviet domination during much of the last century, seem to provide an ideal type of authoritarianism and social apathy aggravated by the state communist experience. Indeed, the Soviet Central Asian region that has preserved clan-based clientelistic networks, exhibits elite-controlled societies that voted overwhelmingly for the preservation of the USSR, and tolerated (ex-) communist leadership well into independence. While having a brief spike in civil action in the

last years of the Soviet rule and the early post-communist period (Beissinger 2002, Cichock 2003:262), it is common wisdom that the currently depressed status of the region's civil society leaves much to be desired. However, there are several examples which underline the potential for development of a vibrant civil society and social capital mobilized for collective public good in the region. Memories of the historical *Basmachi* movement that slowed down the Soviet advance in the region; Moscow's ensuing suspicion that the region is explosive and unreliable; the *Jeldoqsan* protests in Alma-Ata, which forebode the end of the Soviet Union; two Tulip Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan; the protest alliance of "seemingly antithetical political forces", which included "pro-democracy movement" active in Dushanbe, religious forces, and supporters of an ex-communist leader, Nabiyeu, in Tajikistan in opposition to the governing communist *nomenklatura* (Olcott 2005:45–46); and the active dissident diaspora are some of the examples, which underline the potential for development of a vibrant civil society and social capital mobilized for collective public good in the region. In this paper, we are using the cases of four Central Asian Republics (CARs) to examine our central question which addresses the influence of Islam on the formation of emancipative social capital, or self-assertive collective participation in mass political action. This question has relevance beyond the Central Asian region, both for the larger Islamic world and the areas where Muslims form significant minority populations.

By building on Welzel et al.'s (2005) frame of emancipative social capital theory, this study probes the following questions: To what extent does variation in attachments to spiritual Islam (as a way of life), as well as politically motivated Islamism, help explain the likelihood of elite-challenging collective protests? To examine the extent to which the dynamics of self-assertive publics can be explained by variation in attachments to Islam and Islamism, this study embarks on a quantitative analysis of elite-challenging actions in four Muslim-majority Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These cases will provide a stringent test of the relationship between Islamic resurgence and emancipative social capital as both, though not inherently related and often deemed to be a contradiction in terms, are harshly suppressed in much of the region. Yet, due to their historical prominence and current socio-political centrality in the region, we suspect their presence and hypothesize an explicit relationship between them.

In the first part of the paper, we engage in the discussion of the social capital literature, with an emphasis on emancipative social capital, and survey major factors responsible for the formation of collective action. Drawing on the extant literature, we then theorize about the relationship between Islam and emancipatory social capital in the context of the post-Soviet Muslim-majority Central Asia. We then empirically treat the hypothesized relationships and conclude deriving policy implications.

## 2. Emancipative social capital and collective action

The theories of social capital have been subjected to a great deal of empirical scrutiny in the last two decades (Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1990, Lin 2001, Putnam 2002, Putnam et al. 1993). Scholars have extensively explored the variation of social capital to explain a myriad of social and political puzzles (Casanova 2001, Fukuyama 2001, Radnitz, Wheatley, and Zurcher 2009). Regardless of how social capital has been defined or measured in the literature, scholars largely agree that social capital has emerged as an inseparable component of democratization (Fukuyama 2001). Most commonly, democracy without active citizen participation, faith in democratic institutions, and vibrant civil society is viewed as more of an empty concept without substance that mainly characterizes authoritarian regimes (Dahl 1971). Direct collective action is a distinct and influential form of political participation (Author 2013). In this context, social capital is not only important for providing *social bonding* (which connects individuals to pursue collective goals), but is also regarded as an instrumental tool to direct communities toward active participation in democracy building (Krishna 2002, Putnam 1995). In this respect, social capital is often cited to have an influence on political participation (Krishna 2002). Whether citizens are actively involved in politics or “are alienated and cynical nonparticipants, depends entirely, in this view, on the available level of social capital” (Krishna 2002:439).

Although it is one of the most widely studied concepts in comparative democratization literature (Ciftci 2010, Putnam 2002, Putnam, et al. 1993), social capital is a slippery concept. As Onyx and Bullen (2000) point out, it is slippery “because it has been poorly defined, important because it refers to the basic raw material of civil society” (p. 24). In general terms, social capital’s popularity in empirical research is its explanatory strength to answer the most basic question in socio-political research: “what keeps societies together and leads individuals to act for collective goals” (Welzel et al. 2005:122).

It is widely held that social capital cannot be generated by individuals acting only by themselves in isolation from others (Leonard and Onyx 2003). The development of social capital often relies on active engagement of citizens working *collectively* within a participative community (Leonard and Onyx 2003). In this study, drawing from Welzel et al. (2005), we situate collective political actions within the framework of *emancipative social capital* theory.<sup>1</sup> Most commonly, an empirical operationalization of social capital is predominately based on institutional memberships. To conceptualize emancipative (or self-assertive) social capital, we rely on Welzel et al.’s (2005) definition of citizens’ elite-challenging actions as a key determinant of self-assertive (emancipative)

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<sup>1</sup> By drawing from Weizal et al.’s (2005) conceptualization of emancipative social capital measured by three elite-challenging actions asked by the World Values Survey project.

social capital that produces *collective actions* through which individuals pursue their goals in society through non-violent means.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. Explaining collective action

Multiple theories compete to explain collective mass-protest actions in politics. The Political Opportunity Structure theory, for instance, emphasizes institutional structures and political processes that influence the level and scale of political activities. This approach focuses on “the influence of political institutions” of the state (Tatari 2009:278), or “key regime characteristics – such as whether it is a unitary or federal polity; the type of electoral system; the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; and the position of key political elites” (Fetzer and Soper 2005:10–11). Yet, “such institutional factors as the electoral system and the legal balance of the presidential/parliamentary powers may be much less relevant in undemocratic settings” and it has been argued that “regime type is key to understanding other political and social outcomes in the post-communist context in light of vast variations in the regime type in the [post-communist] region” (Shaykhutdinov 2013:652). In democratic societies, which generally tolerate and accommodate protest behavior, individuals are more likely to engage in peaceful political actions without fear of reprisal (Foweraker and Landman 1997, Rootes 2003, Tarrow 1998). Given that virtually all CARs have been authoritarian, with inappreciable differences in civil liberties and political rights, this theory can do little to explain why Central Asians would embark on collective protests. Alternatively, one might suggest that insignificant differences in political opportunity structures may lead to vast differences in outcomes.

In contrast, some subscribe to a third view, which is best represented by the grievances approach where the lack of available political channels (opportunity) for citizens to express criticism via mass demonstrations due to the closed nature of some political systems are more likely to motivate individuals to seek unconventional extra-institutional elite-challenging actions (Brockett 1991, Hafez 2003, Kitschelt 1986). In this perspective, nations with low levels of civil and political liberties offer no or limited platforms for citizens to seek their political interests through legal state institutions. This increases the levels of dissatisfaction and thus stimulates unauthorized protests. This proposition may apply to the Central Asian context and is tested for its explanatory strength in this paper.

The grievance approach is not limited to an inability to express anger and discontent via institutional political channels. The proponents of this approach

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<sup>2</sup> Actions that are not sought within a broadly defined framework (e.g., violent protests) are discounted. On the premise that “[t]he future of Muslim politics is likely to belong to those who can speak to Muslim values and ethics, but within the framework of political platforms fit to thrive in democratic settings” (Nasr, 2005:20), we attempt to probe Islam and emancipative social capital by adopting Nasr’s framework that highlights Muslim participation within existing state statutes and the rule of law. In other words, *violent* elite-challenging actions fall outside the scope of our analysis.

would also argue that another major motivation in elite-challenging collective actions is the degree of socio-economic development, financial well-being, and behavior of the state. According to Ted Gurr's prominent theory of "relative deprivation," social and economic inequality, poverty, oppression, regime exploitation and other negative living conditions provide fertile ground for mass protests (Gurr 1968, Gurr 1970). In a similar vein, Goodwin argues that revolutions arise largely due to political repression and violence (Goodwin 2001). In this theoretical camp, individual *motivations* that stem from various social and political contexts, rather than "opportunity structures," play a much bigger role in stimulating protest behavior. Scholars of Central Asian politics have used this approach to account for a number of social and political puzzles. In this respect, controlling for the effects of grievances is essential.

The resource mobilization thesis also offers compelling explanations for collective action. This thesis states that the extent of available resources is central in mobilizing and, more importantly, *sustaining* collective protests (McCarthy and Zald 1977). NGOs and various civil society groups often play highly instrumental roles in communicating salient issues to the public through their extensive voluntary networks by organizing mass protests. They also sustain the momentum of collective actions through a dedicated voluntary spirit. In this respect, an "affluent society, a highly skilled public and citizens freely engaging in voluntary associations create a resource environment that can support collective action" (Dalton et al 2010:4). Others have argued that such resources also include "effective organizational structures, wealth channeled to these organizations to further the political agendas of the group, and a successful leadership with knowledge of the political system of the host country" (Tatari 2009:278). Indeed, analyzing the World Values Survey data at both macro and micro levels, Dalton et al. (2010) find that resources, such as education and social group memberships, are strong and significant predictors of protests (Dalton et. al 2010). Not surprisingly, citizens with political skills and resources often spearhead, if not dominate, the discourse of collective action by effectively justifying the cause and the need for sustained elite-challenging actions.

As a central resource, the level of education is often viewed as a leading factor that motivates collective political protests (Dalton et al 2010). Education equips citizens with an ability to internalize the tactical significance of nonviolence; it enhances communication skills, cultivates democratic values such as tolerance, and helps develop distinct interests within the social movement that reject political violence. Conversely, groups and individuals exhibiting lower educational status are inclined to deploy more violent means for expressing political demands as lack of education prevents them from nurturing nonviolent discipline and developing collective interests and the norms of tolerance (Shaykhutdinov 2011). Our expectation, therefore, is that the most peaceful movements will be those that emphasize educational attainment among their members. Such groups have the advantage of comprehending, organizing and maintaining nonviolent protests that lack the animosity and distrust associated with violent conflict.

In fact, there is much theoretical argumentation that better educated individuals are inclined to use nonviolent strategies. Many theorists agree that education fosters the ‘culture of democracy’ and commitment to civil liberties among various political actors (Hyman and Wright 1979, Kohn 1969, Lipset 1959, McCloskey and Brill 1983, Nunn et al. 1978, Stouffer 1955). Education also broadens human horizons and “enables them to understand the need for norms of tolerance” (Lipset 1959:79). Moreover, education provides individuals with the skills to make rational choices; it also “restrains them from adhering to extremist and monistic doctrines” (Lipset 1981:39). Consequently, people with a higher degree of schooling are inclined to be tolerant of others’ actions (Hall et al. 1986:565) and less supportive of violent protests (Hall et al. 1986).

### 2.2. *Islam vs. Islamism in collective action*

Religious affiliation can be categorized as a resource mobilized to connect individuals sharing the same faith and help nurture a fertile ground for collective action. We, however, distinguish between two very different mechanisms of religion (i.e. Islam), through which such mobilization occurs: *Islam vs. Islamism*. By Islam, we refer to the general spiritual piety of individuals embodied as a way of life. *Political Islam* or *Islamism*, at the most general level, can be broadly defined as “a body of faith” that “has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslims world and implemented in some fashion” (Fuller 2004:xi). In other words, Islamism is “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives,” which “provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic traditions” (Denoeux 2002:61).

The inclusion and participation of Islamists in politics has been argued as a necessary condition in moderating Islamists (Hafez 2003, Achilov and Shaykhutdinov 2012).<sup>3</sup> For example, providing the opportunities for Islamists to engage in *tactical* moderation by participating in democratic process has been theorized to result in *ideological* moderation (Karakaya and Yildirim 2012). Further, questioning whether military suppression of political Islam has ever worked, Cole (2013) argues that “long term attempts to limit political expressions of religion in modern history [...] is a mixed bag [as] it doesn’t work in the long run” at least in the Middle East and North Africa (Cole 2013). In essence, bringing Islamists to the political arena and offering them venues for self-expression are seen as ways of steering them away from the underground institutionalization and radicalized networks and more toward pragmatism and political compromise.

There is a wide variety of opinions about the role of Islam in political and social life among religious Muslims, with Islamism being a political expression of

<sup>3</sup> While a body of literature has engaged the compatibility, coexistence, and empirical relationship between Islam, democracy, and participatory civil society in general, very limited research exists that systematically examines the effects of religious resurgence on collective protesting – an important dimension of self-assertive emancipative social capital (ESC).

Islam (Ayoob 2008). Scholars have long considered the relationship between religion as a private, non-governmental enterprise on the one hand and social capital on the other (Achilov 2013). For instance, social capital is often cited as an important by-product of *religion*, tradition, shared historical experience and other social “factors that lie outside the control of any government” (Fukuyama 2001:17) or the political ideology of Islamism. In the last two decades, the studies analyzing Islam, civil society, democratization, and the interactions thereof have received a great deal of scholarly attention. In this respect, employing individual-level survey data on Muslim attitudes is swiftly becoming a leading empirical tool for understanding the highly complex composition of Muslim societies and polities, which “offer strong evidence that judgments pertaining to political circumstances and performance do make a difference” (Jamal and Tessler 2008:108) with a possibility of having a productive “Muslim politics without an “Islamic” state” (Kuru 2013).

On the contrary, some scholars have argued that Islam is “exceptional” and “uniquely resistant” and questioned Islam’s compatibility with liberal democratic norms (Fish 2002, Huntington 1996). Despite the claims of Islam’s inherent incompatibility with democracy and a possible clash of civilizations between the West and the Muslim world, the evidence from empirical analyses has revealed that democracy has an overwhelmingly positive image in the Islamic world (Inglehart 2007, Norris and Inglehart 2002). For instance, according to Inglehart (2007:42):

*In response to the item “Democracy may have many problems but it is better than any other form of government,” 61 per cent of the publics of the five Arab countries agreed strongly – a figure higher than 52 per cent registered in 16 Western European countries or the 38 per cent strong agreement in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.... Clearly, the publics of Arab countries (and Islamic societies in general) do not reject democracy: overwhelmingly majorities want it.*

The findings from survey data analyses have consistently illustrated that popular support for democracy is remarkably high in the Muslim world. For instance, Esposito and Mogahed’s (2008) study finds that “Muslims see no contradiction between democratic values and religious principles” (Esposito and Mogahed 2008:63). Further, the studies on Muslim attitudes in the Arab world (Jamal and Tessler 2008), Africa (Bratton 2003), Central Asia (Rose 2002), and non-Arab Muslim states (Hofmann 2004) have yielded decidedly similar results that Islam and democracy are not inherently incompatible and that Islam neither fosters antidemocratic attitudes nor diminishes support for democracy (Inglehart and Norris 2011).

By applying a civil society argument to the Muslim world, Cavatorta (2006) highlights three factors illustrating that Islamist networks are a potential force for, not a barrier to, democratization: (1) Islamic civil society movements are capable of political learning; (2) they generate secular civil society activism as a response to their activities, increasing the number of actors in the political and social

systems; and finally (3), they can cooperate with *other* civil society groups on a variety of issues, provided that they are all subject to the same autocratic rule (Cavatorta 2006). Given this propensity for Islamic actors to support a democratic civil society, it is theoretically plausible to expect that Islam may be positively positioned to motivate citizens to participate in elite-challenging actions which promote emancipative social capital.

**H1:** *A higher level of attachments to Islam (spiritual piety) is positively associated with higher levels of elite-challenging collective actions and, thus, promotes emancipative social capital.*

Furthermore, it has been argued that political Islamist groups and networks have emerged as an important oppositional force against incumbent secular regimes. According to Gerges,

*In the last four decades, centrist Islamists skillfully positioned themselves as the credible alternative to the failed secular authoritarian order[...] They invested considerable capital in building social networks on the national and local levels, including non-government professional civil society associations, welfare organizations, and family ties (Gerges 2013:390).*

Although political Islamic networks are not tolerated by CARs, it might be plausible to expect citizens who support political Islam to pursue oppositional elite-challenging actions. Interestingly, the mainstream Islamists have been recently noted as important political actors who can “both reassure liberals and challenge Salafis from a position of strength” through a “discourse that is based on democratic freedoms but does not compromise Muslim values”, and engage in generating emancipative social capital (Kuru 2013:8). Thus, “Islamist parties are slowly moving away from their traditional agenda of establishing an authoritarian Islamic state and imposing Islamic law, to a new focus that is centered on creating a ‘civil Islam’ that permeates society and accepts political pluralism” (Gerges 2013:391). Since such parties have been recently lauded for the attempts to peacefully challenge authoritarian regimes and adhere to nonviolent protests, we introduce the following hypothesis:

**H2:** *Support for political Islam is positively associated with higher levels of elite-challenging collective actions, and, thus, promotes emancipative social capital.*

While the inclusion of Islamists in the political system is seen as an effective moderating tool that may ensure stability, many cast doubt on whether adherents to political Islam are capable of contributing to nonviolent and pro-democratic elite-challenging actions. While there is little doubt that Islamists – the advocates of political Islam – have emerged as the most significant non-state political actors throughout the Muslim world, they vary with respect to norms, goals, and tactics they employ in reaching their social or political ends (Schwedler 2011). Some observers, and especially the governments of CARs, Russia, and China, find it difficult to distinguish between the adherents of moderate movements and politically-radical Islamists. In their eyes, sympathizers of “Centrist Islamist



parties like Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt [which] are slowly travelling down a similar path toward pluralism and parliamentarianism already traversed by the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah in Indonesia” (Gerges 2013:391) are not likely to be that different from a “minority” of “the Salafis and Islamic ultraconservatives in general” (Gerges 2013:389, emphasis added).

The argument of relative economic deprivation is also put to test. Specifically, we probe the likelihood that Central Asians who indicate economic distress partake in collective political protests in the framework of the following hypothesis:

**H3:** *High economic grievances are likely to trigger elite-challenging collective actions.*

As argued above, resources at the avail of the groups are likely to condition the way in which religiosity influences collective action. A primary resource that individuals and groups can draw on and is difficult to withdraw once it is attained, is education. Consequently, we also test the resource mobilization theory focusing specifically on education. We particularly question how the level of individuals’ adherence to Islamic religious practices interacts with the degree of education in forming public-good-generating collective action. We hypothesize that individuals and groups with higher educational status are more likely to favor the use of peaceful tactics such as boycotts and demonstrations. Such attitudes are likely to be augmented with the increased levels of religiosity among Islamic publics. Among predominantly Islamic groups that have chosen to employ violent means of political claim making, there are notable examples of collectivities that exhibit lower levels of secular educational attainment than the dominant groups in the country. The case of the Taliban in Afghanistan is one example. In contrast, a number of groups that enjoy levels of education equitable with that of the dominant ethnic groups, such as the Muslim Tatars in Russia, have used non-violent strategies of political protest (Shaykhutdinov 2010).

In summary, our theoretical expectation is that the better educated individuals will tend to employ nonviolent strategies in their political pursuits. Education is likely to cultivate the values of tolerance, decrease the costs of social interaction and establish distinct strata within ethnic movements which favor nonviolent political strategies. The following is the main educational hypothesis that we investigate:

**H4:** *Education positively influences emancipative social capital.*

It is likely that the effects of religiosity and education on emancipative social capital are of a mutually reinforcing nature. Individuals exhibiting lower levels of both religiosity and education are likely to produce the lowest levels of emancipative capital. Those with a lower level of education but higher degree of religiosity or higher educational attainment but practicing religion infrequently may exhibit higher tendencies toward emancipative social capital than those who exhibit the minimal characteristics of both education and personal religiosity.

However, higher levels of education may unveil some alternative, non-dogmatic views and attitudes toward religion. Higher education may also provide a critical view of religious authorities, challenging politicization and instrumentalization of religion. In the last category, individuals who experienced greater exposure to education coupled with higher religiosity may also gain a broader understanding of the notion of public good that is not limited to the narrower primordial and communal interests.

**H5:** *Higher levels of religiosity conditioned by greater educational attainments positively influence the emancipative social capital.*

We also control for gender, age, and minority status of the respondents. It has been claimed that “[...] in practically all realms [...] women are less belligerent than men” (Page and Shapiro 295). Yet they are likely to be at odds with the status quo, as women generally show more liberal and left-leaning attitudes than men do in a number of policy areas. We, then, expect that women are more supportive participants of emancipative social capital formation than men are.

**H6:** *Women are more likely to engage in emancipative collective action than their male counterparts.*

Expecting that younger respondents have greater resources such as enthusiasm, time, health, and opportunities to engage in collective action, we hypothesize that

**H7:** *Younger respondents are likely to partake in emancipative social capital formation.*

As members of minority groups may face the type and depth of problems to which the majority population is not exposed, they are more likely to engage in collective action and be an active part of emancipative capital formation.

**H8:** *Minority group respondents are more active in emancipative social capital formation than members of the majority populations.*

### 3. Islam and collective action in cross-national context

To probe the propositions and hypotheses developed in this study, we utilize aggregate and individual-level survey data from the Brookings Institution Conflict Prevention and Cooperation initiative in 2004 for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>4</sup>

At the aggregate level, there is a clear variation in the instances of collective action across the countries in question. Of 1,500 surveys taken in each of the four CARs examined in this study, Kazakhstan had the lowest count of collective action instances, 119 (7.93%), while Tajikistan provided the highest, 631 (42.07%) providing tentative support to the relative deprivation thesis. Since Kazakhstan is less politically repressive and significantly wealthier (Table 1),

<sup>4</sup> For detailed descriptive statistics for all variables under investigation, see Appendix A.

**Table 1. Key indicators for civil liberties, political rights, and socio-economic conditions in Central Asia**

Socio-economic Indicators	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Religious freedom – (U.S. State Dept. 1992–2000) <sup>1</sup>	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Extremely Low
Freedom of religion - restrictions on freedom	Moderate	Limited	High	High
Persecution of religious clerics/activists	Low	Low	High	High
Access to worship (Muslims/Mosques ratio)	Moderate (3,200:1)	Moderate (3,010:1)	Moderate (2,100:1)	Low (16,000:1)
Censorship of religious clerics	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Human Development Index (HDI) <sup>4</sup>	0.71	0.61	0.65	0.63
Political rights (1-7, lower is freer) <sup>2</sup>	6/7	5/7	6/7	7/7
Civil liberties (1-7, lower is freer) <sup>2</sup>	5/7	5/7	6/7	7/7
Freedom of expression (0-16) <sup>2</sup>	7/16	10/16	6/16	1/16
Rule of Law (percentile) <sup>3</sup>	15.6	26	11.8	9.5
Control of corruption (percentile) <sup>3</sup>	11	21	10	14

## SOURCE:

<sup>1</sup> Derived from the U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom reports from 1992–2000. Coded by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA);

<sup>2</sup> Freedomhouse annual reports on political and civil liberties;

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank: Government Effectiveness;

<sup>4</sup> 2005 Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations.

Kazakhstanis might have had less incentive to protest and voice their grievances. The picture becomes more complex once the in-between cases are considered. Uzbekistan appears to have the second lowest number of protests, 323 (21.53%), while Kyrgyzstan the second highest, 429 (28.60%), suggesting that political opportunity structures accorded by the regimes may also play a role in explaining protest behavior. The proportion of aggregate Muslim populations in each of the four cases seems to suggest some role for group resources in explaining collective action. According to the most recent estimates by the CIA World Factbook, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the lowest proportion of Muslim population among the CAR, 70.2% and 75%, respectively, while those in Uzbekistan (88%) and Tajikistan (90%) are among the highest. These proportions correspond on the ordinal level with the amounts of collective protest action across the CARs. However, at the higher levels of measurement (interval/ratio) this explanation is weakened. While Kazakhstan and Tajikistan clearly stand out as the extremes on the CAR protest behavior continuum, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan come very close to each other in the middle of the scale.

Yet how do the main explanatory variables of interest, the level of religiosity on the one hand and political Islam on the other, account for this variation in collective political behavior at the country level? We measure the level of general religiosity, or attachments to Islamic way of life, by the frequency of daily prayers (i.e. *Namaz*). Political Islam, or Islamism, is gauged by individual attitudes that

support the role of Islam in political life (What should be the role of Islam in political life?).<sup>5</sup> Cross-case variation in the levels of both personal religiosity (Islam) and political Islam in the context of four CARs points to an appreciable difference between Islamic values as individual religiosity and the attitudes toward Islam's role in political life.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given its long secular tradition, Kazakhstan stands out with a population expressing lowest levels of public support for political Islam; surprisingly, Kazakhstanis are second in personal religiosity in CAR. Tajikistan, on the other hand, places high in both categories suggesting that Tajik citizens are more religious and manifest significantly high support for Islamism in comparison to other Central Asians. While there are insignificant differences in personal religiosity levels between Uzbekistan (lower) and the Kyrgyz Republic (higher), Uzbeks appear to view Islam's role in politics slightly higher than do their Kyrgyz neighbors. While both personal Islam and political Islamism seem to explain cross-country variation in collective action, we also analyze more nuanced individual-level data to account for these competing theories.

#### 4. Data and methods

##### 4.1. Dependent variable

The dependent variable, emancipative social capital, or *self-assertive collective action*, is measured using a 0-100 scale derived from the following four *elite-challenging* collective actions:

1. Did you sign any collective petition to the national or local authorities in the past three years?
2. Did you organize people in your district/village to resolve any issue in the past three years?
3. Did you take part in an authorized protest (meetings, strikes, pickets) in the past three years?
4. Did you take part in an unauthorized protest (meetings, strikes, pickets) in the past three years?

In constructing the dependent variable we accounted for two major factors, the level or risk embedded in taking a certain course of action and the diversity of protest actions employed by each respondent. In regard to the risk factor, we deem signing collective petitions to the authorities as the least risky way to express one's demands (1); taking part in legalized demonstrations is somewhat riskier (2), but not as dangerous as taking part in an illegal demonstration or organize people for a mass protest (3). We also consider the relative normative weights of protest types in formulating the dependent variable.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For technical details for variable operationalization, see Appendix A.

<sup>6</sup> The weighted DV is aggregated as follows:  $DV_{weighted} = (q14b\_sign\_collective\_petition*1) + (q14e\_partake\_legal\_demonstrations*2) + (q14c\_organize\_people\_for\_coll\_action*3) + (q4f14f\_partake\_partake\_illegal\_demonstrations*3)$

To facilitate interpretation of the results the measure was re-scaled on a continuum from 0 to 100, where a score of 100 indicates that a survey respondent had signed a petition, mobilized people to resolve issues, and attended both authorized and unauthorized demonstrations or protest marches. A '0' is assigned to those with no previous history of participation in any of the four types of collective political action.

#### 4.2. Independent variables

*Islam (spiritual piety)* is measured using a 0-6 scale of individual survey respondents' number of daily prayers. The maximum score of 6 (high religiosity) is assigned to those who pray five times a day or more; the minimal score of 0 is assigned to respondents indicating that they do not pray at all (No/Low religiosity).<sup>7</sup> *Political Islam* is gauged through normative attitudes toward the importance of Islam's role in politics. Respondents attributing a "Very important role" to Islam in politics are assigned a score of 4; those deeming that Islam should play a "Somewhat important role" are coded 3; a 2 is assigned to those who think that Islam should have "A small role" in politics; a 1 reflects the attitudes of "No role at all" for Islam in political life of the country. *Financial satisfaction* is captured by a 4-point scale of a survey respondent's financial satisfaction of household income level. Respondent's gender is reflected by a dichotomous variable, *Female*. Variable *Age* represents respondents' reported age (18+). *Education* is a 5-point scale of the survey respondents' education level ("incomplete secondary school or less" = 1; "complete higher education, master's degree or greater" = 5). *Minority* status is a dichotomous variable that controls for ethnicity. Further detail on variable coding, and descriptive statistics are available in Appendix A.

We begin with a descriptive analysis by systematically comparing and contrasting associational patterns followed by a multivariate analysis to examine the empirical relationship between Islam and collective political action in four Central Asian states.

### 5. Statistical analysis and results

Figure 1 illustrates the scale of collective action across the four republics under consideration. Among them Tajikistan has the highest and Kazakhstan the lowest mean score on the collective action index. From the linear confidence of fit plot in Figure 1, it is readily observable that religiosity clearly stands out with a positive and systematically increasing association with respect to the level of collective actions. This trend is particularly evident in the case of Tajikistan. The residents of Kazakhstan, known for its predominately secularized social fabric, show the

<sup>7</sup> In addition, a dichotomous high religiosity variable was obtained by transforming newly constructed religiosity scales of 2-3 into "0" and 4-5 into "1."

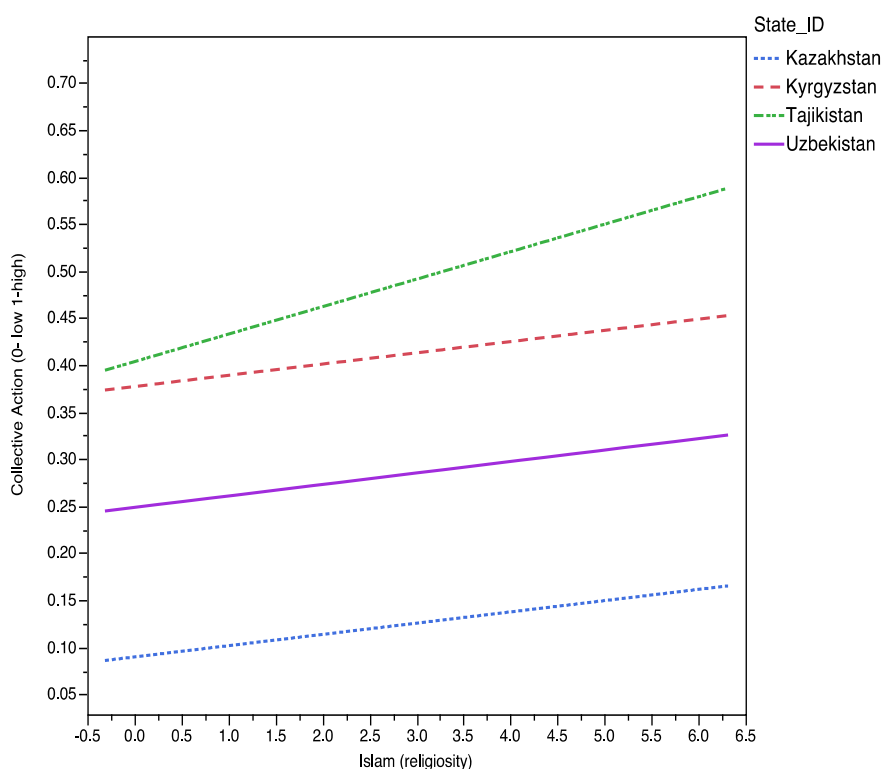


Figure 1. Confidence of fit plot for collective action and spiritual Islam.

lowest likelihood of engaging in collective action in the region. This is true even for the most religious Kazakhstanis. Overall, in light of this largely positive bivariate association between religiosity and collective action, one may draw initial insights about the propensity of Central Asian publics with higher levels of personal religiosity to participate in elite-challenging actions.

While descriptive-associational patterns provide important insights, a more nuanced analysis is necessary to better understand the overall effects of Islam and political Islam on contentious political attitudes while accounting for other confounding factors.

Given the hierarchical structure of the survey data, consisting of individual and state levels, a potential fit of our theoretical model to the *Hierarchical Linear Model* (HLM) was tested. Specifically, an analysis of variance of the collective action was conducted to compare the country-level variance and the individual-level variance. Applying this approach to an intercept only model, an intra-class correlation (ICC) coefficient was calculated as 0.103. With this in mind, we can conclude that only 10% of the total variance of the random effects is attributed to the second-level (i.e., country level). A high ICC value implies that most of the differences in the dependent variable are due to group differences while a small ICC indicates that the variance in the dependent variable stems from individual

differences within groups (Snijders & Bosker 2012). In other words, when the percentage for random effects at the second-level is very small, then the random effects are hardly present. Moreover, there are only four states from the same region with comparatively low variability among macro-level factors. Consequently, HLM is not necessary for the empirical analysis. Therefore, we utilize Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) as a primary statistical tool of analysis as it enables the assessment of both the direction and strength of the influence that independent variables situated at various levels of analysis exert on the outcome variable in our model.<sup>8</sup> We estimate the following model (Table 2):

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 \dots \beta_k x_k + \varepsilon,$$

where the effects of  $k$  independent variables are estimated on the outcome variable  $Y$  (*Collective Actions*).

All other factor being equal, the effects of general religiosity (Islam) on participation in elite-challenging collective actions are positive and statistically significant across all models (1–4). Although the substantive effect of Islam is

**Table 2. OLS Estimates for collective action**

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
<i>Islam</i>				
Islam (religiosity)	<b>1.470***</b>	<b>1.569***</b>	<b>1.367***</b>	<b>0.667*</b>
	0.145	0.145	0.150	0.346
Political Islam	–0.148	0.041	0.078	0.043
	0.289	0.288	0.288	0.288
<i>Deprivation, Resources, Volunteerism</i>				
Financial (household income) satisfaction		<b>–2.799***</b>	<b>–2.732***</b>	<b>–2.713***</b>
		0.455	0.461	0.461
Education level		<b>1.318***</b>	<b>1.345***</b>	<b>0.948***</b>
		0.236	0.236	0.295
<i>Socio-demographic Controls</i>				
Age			<b>0.097***</b>	<b>0.102***</b>
			0.020	0.020
Gender (Female)			<b>–1.662**</b>	<b>–1.598***</b>
			0.567	0.567
Minority status			<b>–1.131*</b>	<b>–1.103*</b>
			0.642	0.642
<i>Interaction terms</i>				
Islam and education				<b>0.259**</b>
				0.115
Constant	<b>10.295***</b>	<b>13.640***</b>	<b>12.675***</b>	<b>13.575***</b>
	0.769	1.555	2.077	2.115
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.023	0.037	0.044	0.044
N	4356	4357	4357	4357

<sup>8</sup> In addition to OLS, binomial logit and ordered logit procedures were employed. The results obtained through OLS were robust to these methodological checks.

relatively small, the finding suggests that more religious citizens are more likely to engage in non-violent collective actions against incumbent regimes, on average, which lends support for Hypothesis 1. Said otherwise, a higher level of attachments to spiritual piety is positively associated with higher levels of elite-challenging collective actions, which, in turn, promotes emancipative social capital.

There is insufficient evidence across the four models for political Islam, on the other hand, to explain the propensity toward engaging in elite-challenging collective actions. Therefore, the evidence does not support the second hypothesis that individuals who attach high importance to political Islam are associated with greater levels of collective political actions in Central Asia. In part, these findings support the conventional thinking that support for Islamism is often associated with mistrust and suspicions toward state institutions (Denoeux 2002).

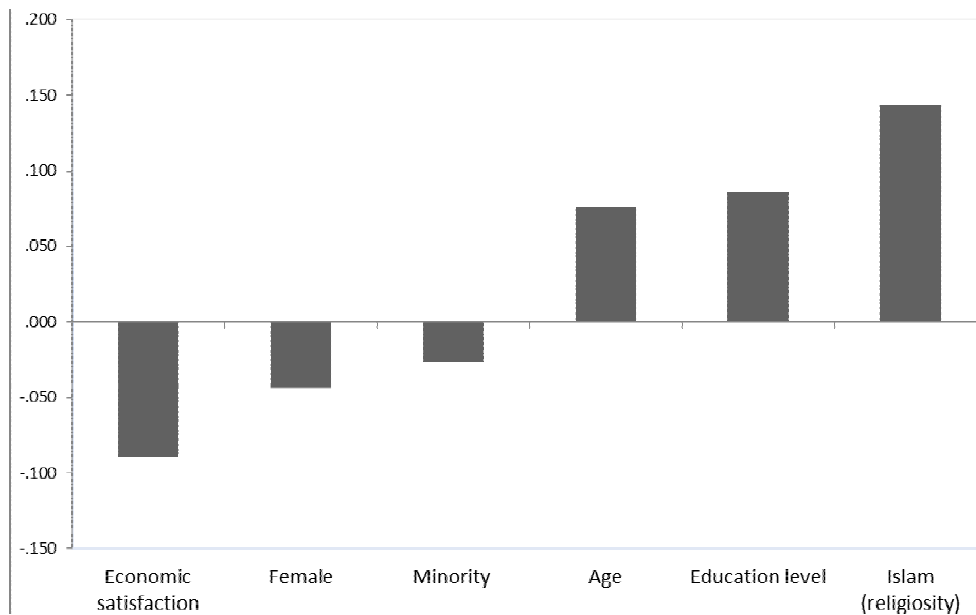
Perhaps not surprisingly, given Central Asia's lackluster economic conditions (with the exception of Kazakhstan), economic relative deprivation strongly predicts the level of collective actions (models 2–4); individuals with relatively higher economic satisfaction appear to be less likely to embark on collective protests whereas those who rate their financial conditions unfavorably are more so, on average ( $p < 0.01$ ). It is noteworthy that economic conditions are found to highly matter in this context, a finding which supports Hypothesis 3: as financial satisfaction decreases, many more incentives emerge for citizens to seek action by petitioning to state authorities.

The impact of education stands out, *ceteris paribus*, with statistically significant and substantively large net-effects ( $p < 0.01$ ). As expected, individuals with higher educational credentials are more likely to pursue collective political actions compared with those who do not. Intuitively, this finding highlights the importance of intellectual human capital as a key resource which in turn may be playing an important role in collective political mobilization. Moreover, the interaction between religiosity and education (model 4) is also statistically relevant in explaining collective protests. That is, Muslims with higher levels of educational attainment and greater religiosity are more likely to mobilize and pursue elite-challenging collective actions than those with lower values on these factors ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings provide empirical support for hypotheses 4 and 5, respectively.

Non-titular ethnic minorities appear to be less likely to engage in collective political actions, as do women (Models 3 and 4). Although a more nuanced research is necessary in this regard, it is possible that ethnic minorities lack confidence and trust in a political system dominated by a titular nationality, where they find themselves socially marginalized and politically disenfranchised. They may simply feel apathetic towards a system that is unresponsive, at best, and punitive of dissent, at worst. Gender gap in participation in collective action also stands out; Central Asian women are less likely to be part of collective political actions than men are. In regard to age, older citizens appear to be more likely to be a part of collective protests compared to the young. With this mind, we find no support for hypotheses 6, 7, and 8.



To put the influences of the variables discussed in the comparative perspective below we include the standardized effects of the statistically significant explanatory variables on collective action (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Standardized effects of statistically significant explanatory variables on collective action.

Figure 2 shows the scaled effects of statistically significant explanatory variables. The substantive effects of spiritual Islam stands out with the highest impact on emancipative social capital. Economic satisfaction, education, and age factors appear to share the impact level on collective action whereas the substantive effects of gender and minority status predictors are comparatively small.

## 6. Discussion

By engaging in an empirical analysis of Islam and its increasing role in shaping the rapidly changing social and political landscape of the Muslim-majority societies, this study offers new clues on the emerging interactions between Islam, Islamism and political activism in the lesser known corner of the Muslim-majority areas – the post-Soviet Central Asia. At the same time, the article provides one of the first attempts to empirically examine the extent of both spiritual Islam and political Islam's propensity for engaging in self-assertive collective actions in the contexts of four Central Asian republics. In line with Hypothesis 1, the level of religiosity is positively associated with the tendency toward collective protest.

Support for political Islam, however, does not seem to explain the variation in collective action in Central Asia. While religious Muslims seem more likely to participate in collective protests, the evidence is scant to suggest that attitudinal support for the Islam's role in political life translates into collective action.

We also find support for the economic grievances thesis and the level of education, which appear to strongly predict the level of collective political protests in the Central Asian context. The effects of education on political action are augmented by greater religiosity of the respondents. A male and a person of a dominant ethnic group is more likely to engage in emancipative collective action.

One of the specific implications offered by this study deals with its implicit challenge of the conception of Islam as a monolithic "black box," for which a one-size-fits-all approach should be employed. This study shows that personal religiosity is very different from an attitudinal support for political Islam, at least as far as the collective action is concerned. In fact, it is noteworthy that the empirical correlation between personal religiosity and favoritism of political Islam is rather mediocre, 0.188 (N = 6,000), for the Central Asian region as a whole.

While there are questions concerning the nature of demands advanced in these protests in the region, it is clear that they do not directly call for a greater role of religion in public social and political life since those for whom this problem is important shy away from the protest behavior. Rather, numerous economic, environmental, and social issues associated with emancipative social capital are likely to be highlighted in the collective actions under study. It is important to emphasize that it is personal religiosity, and not support for Islamist political ambitions, which has a greater bearing on such actions.

Consequently, one should be careful in categorizing the Islamic "peril" in the "broad church" terms and crafting "wide-brush" policy proposals for dealing with it. First, while support for greater visibility of Islam in public life is certainly present among Central Asia's populations, it does not get carried out to the Central Asian street; certainly, not as often as many Central Asian governments portray it to be. Further, greater religiosity is associated with a higher propensity for quality-of-life type of demands, which have little to do with public expression of religion. Thus, by suppressing political Islamists who tend to be personally non-religious, one would engage in solving a problem which is essentially miniscule or non-existent. Such policies may, in fact, be at risk of radicalizing political Islamists, legitimize their demands, and push them to the street. On the other hand, policies designed to persecute those who are personally religious are likely to result in unintended consequence of suppressing emancipative social capital. This does not mean, however, that radical Islamists who justify violence should not be prosecuted if they engage in destructive actions (e.g. terrorism). Policy-makers, however, should be wise and nuanced in deciding how to allocate scarce tangible and intangible resources for attaining greater public good.

In sum, the findings provide insightful explanations to better understand and contextualize the emerging dynamics of participatory civil society in the context of collective protest behavior of the post-Soviet Central Asia. While this study

contributes to an understanding of the rising role of Islam on contentious politics, rooted in self-assertive emancipative social capital, it has also sought to advance the debate by bringing to the picture an empirical nexus of religion, civil society, and democratization.

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## TECHNICAL APPENDIX A

## A.1. Variable coding and operationalization

Variable	Source, coding and definition
Age	Actual age of respondents (18+). <i>Q2: Age of respondent.</i>
Islam (religiosity)	A scale of 1-6 of survey respondents' on <i>how often</i> they pray: <i>Q93: How many times a day do you pray?</i> ("Five times" =6, "Never" = 1).
Political Islam	A scale of 1-4 of survey respondents' on <i>how they view</i> the role of Islam should be in political life: <i>Q91: What role do you think Islam should play in the political life of [country]?</i> ("Very important role" =4, "Somewhat important role" = 3, "A small role" =2, "No role at all" = 1).
Female	Gender dummy: <i>Q10: "Female" = 1, "Male" = 0.</i>
Minority status	A dichotomous value of ethnic minority status. <i>Q3p: Nationality of respondent.</i> ("Minority" = 1, "Titular ethnicity" = 0).
Financial satisfaction (household income)	A 1-4 Likert-scale for financial satisfaction of household income: <i>Q10: How do you estimate current economic situation of your household?</i> ("Very good" = 4; "Very bad" =1).
Education	A 5-point scale of the survey respondent's education level. <i>Q5: Highest level of Education of respondent</i> ("incomplete secondary school or less" = 1, "complete higher education, master's degree or greater" = 5.)

## A.2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Collective Action	4306	.00	100.00	.44	17.928
Islam (religiosity)	4453	.00	6.00	1.34	2.081
Islam should play important role	5229	1.00	4.00	2.40	1.051
Econ. conditions in household	5867	1.00	4.00	2.74	.630
Age	6000	18.00	92.00	39.92	15.394
Gender (female = 1)	6000	1.00	2.00	1.55	.497
Minority	6000	.00	1.00	.32	.466
Education level	6000	1.00	9.00	2.80	1.229

## A.3. State-level OLS estimates for collective action

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyz Republic	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan
<i>Islam</i>				
Islam (spiritual piety)	<b>0.272**</b>	<b>0.357**</b>	<b>0.199**</b>	<b>0.229**</b>
	0.081	0.153	0.096	0.102
Political Islam	-0.049	-0.136	-0.236	0.236
	0.095	0.235	0.149	0.214
<i>Deprivation and resources</i>				
Financial (income) satisfaction	<b>-0.405***</b>	0.289	<b>-0.999***</b>	<b>-1.555***</b>
	0.135	0.396	0.221	0.36
Education level	<b>0.127*</b>	<b>0.679***</b>	0.056	<b>0.491***</b>
	0.069	0.204	0.128	0.167
<i>Socio-demographic controls</i>				
Age	<b>0.008***</b>	<b>0.067***</b>	0.007	<b>0.106***</b>
	0.006	0.017	0.009	0.015
Gender (female)	-0.04	0.165	0.288	<b>-2.073***</b>
	0.165	0.459	0.286	0.428
Minority status	<b>-0.082**</b>	<b>-1.057**</b>	0.389	<b>-1.235***</b>
	0.174	0.497	0.348	0.51
Constant	<b>1.182***</b>	<b>0.144***</b>	<b>4.935***</b>	<b>7.699***</b>
	0.612	1.709	1.034	1.578
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.014	0.021	0.021	0.075
N	1499	1453	1488	1415