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ҚОҒАМДЫҚ САЯСАТ ЖӘНЕ ДІН БОСТАНДЫҒЫ: ҚЫРҒЫЗСТАНДАҒЫ ЗАЙЫРЛЫ САЯСАТ КОНТЕКСТІНДЕГІ ИСЛАМ

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PUBLIC POLICY AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION: ISLAM IN THE CONTEXT OF SECULAR POLITICS IN KYRGYZSTAN

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ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ПОЛИТИКА И СВОБОДА ВЕРОИСПОВЕДАНИЯ: ИСЛАМ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СВЕТСКОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ В КЫРГЫЗСТАНЕ

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Аңдатпа. Посткеңестік Орталық Азия мемлекеті – Қырғызстан мемлекеттік саясат, діни сенім бостандығы және оның зайырлы саяси құрылымындағы исламның рөлі арасындағы күрделі динамикада. Бұл өзара әрекеттесуді түйсіну елдің тарихи мұрасын, геосаяси ықпалын және өзгеріп жатқан әлеуметтік-саяси ландшафты егжей-тегжейлі зерттеуді талап етеді. 1991 жылы Кеңес Одағының ыдырауы Қырғызстан үшін жаңа тәуелсіз мемлекет ретінде дамуға мүмкіндік бергенімен, әлеуметтік, саяси, экономикалық қиындықтарды да ала келді. Кейінгі саяси трансформация батыстық үлгідегі нарықтық экономика мен демократия орнайды деп үміттендіргенімен, 1990 жылдардың ортасына қарай билік біртіндеп президент қолына шоғырланып, республика экономикалық тоқырау мен демократиялық құндылықтың әлсіреуіне тап болды. Одан кейінгі жылдар саяси тұрақсыздық, этникалық шиеленістер және экономикалық дағдарыс мәселесімен сипатталды. Мұның барлығы тізбектеліп, ислам діні мен зайырлы жүйенің өзара әрекеттесу үдерісін қалыптастырды.

Түйін сөздер: мемлекеттік саясат, діни сенім бостандығы, зайырлылық, Қырғызстан, бірегейлік, зайырлы мемлекет, құқықтық нормалар.

الملخص: تواجه قيرغيزستان، وهي دولة في آسيا الوسطى ما بعد الحقبة السوفيتية، ديناميكيات معقدة بين سياسات الدولة، وحرية الدين، ودور الإسلام ضمن هيكلها السياسي العلماني. ويتطلب فهم هذا التفاعل دراسة تفصيلية للإرث التاريخي للبلاد، والتأثيرات الجيوسياسية، والمشهد الاجتماعي والسياسي المتغير.

لقد شكل انهيار الاتحاد السوفيتي عام 1991 نقطة تحول لقيرغيزستان، حيث فتح الباب أمام فرص وتحديات للدولة المستقلة حديثاً. وكان من المتوقع أن يؤدي هذا الانتقال إلى إقامة اقتصاد سوق وديمقراطية على غرار النموذج الغربي، إلا أنه بحلول منتصف تسعينيات القرن العشرين، بدت الجمهورية في حالة ركود اقتصادي وتراجع ديمقراطي مع تركيز السلطة في يد الرئيس. وقد اتسمت السنوات اللاحقة بعدم الاستقرار السياسي، والتوترات العرقية، والمصاعب الاقتصادية، وهي عوامل شكلت السياق الذي يتفاعل فيه الدين الإسلامي والعلمانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سياسة الدولة، حرية الدين، العلمانية، قيرغيزستان، الهوية، الدولة العلمانية، القواعد القانونية.

Abstract. Kyrgyzstan, a post-Soviet Central Asian state, faces complex dynamics between state policy, religious freedom, and the role of Islam in its secular political structure. Understanding this interplay requires a detailed examination of the country's historical legacies, geopolitical influences, and changing socio-political landscape. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point for Kyrgyzstan, creating both opportunities and challenges for the newly independent state. The subsequent transition was expected to bring a market economy and democracy similar to the Western model, yet by the mid-1990s the republic appeared to be in a state of economic stagnation and de-democratization as presidential power consolidated. The subsequent years have been characterized by political instability, ethnic tensions, and economic strife, all of which have shaped the context in which Islamic religion and secularism interact.

Key words: state policy, freedom of religion, secularism, Kyrgyzstan, identity, secular state, legal norms.

Абстракт. Кыргызстан, постсоветское государство Центральной Азии, сталкивается со сложной динамикой между государственной политикой, религиозной свободой

и ролью ислама в его светской политической структуре. Понимание этого взаимодействия требует детального изучения исторического наследия, геополитических влияний и меняющегося социально-политического ландшафта страны. Распад Советского Союза в 1991 году ознаменовал поворотный момент для Кыргызстана, создав как возможности, так и новые задачи для нового независимого государства. Ожидалось, что последующий переход принесет рыночную экономику и демократию, подобные западной модели, однако к середине 1990-х годов республика, по-видимому, находилась в состоянии экономической стагнации и дедемократизации, поскольку консолидировалась президентская власть. Последующие годы характеризовались политической нестабильностью, этнической напряженностью и экономической борьбой, все из которых сформировали контекст, в котором взаимодействуют исламская религия и секуляризм.

Ключевые слова: государственная политика, свобода вероисповедания, секуляризм, Кыргызстан, идентичность, светское государство, правовые нормы.

INTRODUCTION

The revival of Islam in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been a notable phenomenon, with various Islamic groups promoting an “Islamic revival” in the region. Kyrgyzstan, like its neighbors, has experienced a surge in interest in Islam, filling the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of communism (Lenz-Raymann, K. 2014).

This religious revival has not been without challenges, however, as the rise of various groups has posed a threat to the secular order and national security. The state’s response to these challenges has been multifaceted, including efforts to promote moderate Islam and measures to counter extremism. The secular structure of the Kyrgyz state, enshrined in its constitution, is a legacy of the Soviet era, which promoted atheism and suppressed religious expression. Despite the constitutional commitment to secularism, the role of Islam in Kyrgyz society is undeniable, as the majority of the population identifies as Muslim, partly creating a tension between the formal separation of religion and state and the reality of Islam’s pervasive influence on cultural

norms, social practices, and even political discourse. In the early years of independence, Kyrgyzstan was recognized as a democratic state in Central Asia, even being hailed as an «island of democracy» (Lenz-Raymann, K. 2014). However, the drive for democratization and market reforms faced significant obstacles as the country struggled with a lack of experience with Western-style democracy and a fragmented society characterized by disparate actors (Wilkinson, C. 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Exploring the complex relationships between public policy, religious freedom, and the role of Islam in Kyrgyzstan’s secular political landscape requires a multifaceted methodological approach that must be carefully crafted to capture the nuances of a society undergoing a religious revival while navigating the complexities of secular governance (Junisbai et al., 2017). This will facilitate the study of both observed trends and the underlying meanings and experiences that shape the interaction between Islam, public policy and religious freedom (McGlinchey, 2005). This will involve examining

scholarly articles, policy documents, legal frameworks, and relevant historical accounts to understand the evolution of Islam in Kyrgyzstan, the development of secularism, and the legal and policy landscape governing religious freedom. This review will help identify key concepts, debates that will inform the subsequent stages of the investigation. Following the literature review, qualitative research methods will be employed to gain deeper insights into the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of various stakeholders. (Ysmailova, R. 2020)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Securitization theory provides a framework for understanding how certain issues, including religious practices, are elevated to the level of security threats, thereby justifying extraordinary measures to address them (Wilkinson, C. 2007). The securitization of Islam in Kyrgyzstan reflects broader trends in the region, where governments have attempted to manage the revival of religious identity through a combination of regulation, surveillance, and the promotion of state-sponsored Islam (Breskaya, O. 2020). The Copenhagen School's theory of securitization, while insightful, may prove untenable when applied outside a Western context because of its inherent assumptions about the state and society (Wilkinson, C. 2007). Critics argue that the securitization framework, developed primarily in a Western context, may not fully capture the complexities of state-religion relations in countries like Kyrgyzstan, where historical legacies, cultural norms, and geopolitical considerations play a significant role. The securitization

of Islam in Kyrgyzstan may lead to policies that restrict religious freedoms in the name of national security, which could alienate religious communities from society and fuel resentment against the state.

Because the concept of public security is linked to religion, it raises questions about how religious identity is perceived in relation to national identity and social cohesion. The securitization of religion often involves the construction of narratives that portray certain religious groups or practices as threats to national security, public order, or cultural values (Koca, B.T. 2016). Applying securitization theory to Kyrgyzstan requires careful consideration of the country's unique socio-political context, including the legacy of Soviet-era secularism, the rise of religious movements in the post-Soviet period, and the influence of regional and international actors.

The securitization of Islam in Kyrgyzstan can also be understood as a means of consolidating state power, as it allows the government to justify interventions in religious affairs and maintain control over religious institutions (Baimyrzaeva, M. 2012). Securitization theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics between state policy and religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan, highlighting the ways in which the government seeks to manage the role of Islam in the country's public life.

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The concept of religious freedom, enshrined in international human rights law, is a cornerstone of democratic so-

cieties. However, the interpretation and application of religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan are the subject of ongoing debate and scholarly discussion. Government efforts to manage religious affairs have often been framed in terms of national security, with concerns about extremism and terrorism used to justify restrictions on certain religious activities. Critics argue that these restrictions disproportionately target Muslim groups. As M. Baimyrzaeva notes, reforms aimed at improving governance institutions and political decision-making processes have been undertaken in Kyrgyzstan since independence (Baimyrzaeva, M. 2012). These initiatives reflect broader efforts to align public policy with democratic principles and international norms, including the protection of religious freedom.

The legal framework governing religious issues in Kyrgyzstan is a complex structure of constitutional provisions, laws, and regulations. These legal instruments define the parameters of religious freedom, regulate the activities of religious organizations, and outline the role of the state in managing religious affairs. An examination of the implementation of these laws in practice reveals a gap between the legal guarantees of religious freedom and the actual experiences of religious communities. For example, the government's requirements for registering religious organizations have been criticized for being overly complex. The registration of religious organizations, the construction of mosques, and the wearing of religious clothing in public places are all subject to government regulation. As Asanbekova D. notes, the government's approach to religious edu-

cation is another area of contention, with debates over the role of religion in public schools and the regulation of private religious schools. Despite its efforts, Kyrgyzstan has struggled to establish itself on the world stage, the author believes, since the parliament is linked to entities such as political parties, which have a plurality of views on the issue of religion (Asanbekova, D. 2021).

An analysis of state policy towards Islam in Kyrgyzstan requires attention to the diverse perspectives and interests of different stakeholders, as state policy reflects not only government priorities but also the influence of religious leaders, civil society organizations, and international actors. The interaction between state policy and religious freedom is shaped by power dynamics and competing interests, with different actors vying to shape the direction of religious policy. The state's approach to Islam in Kyrgyzstan is also influenced by regional dynamics and geopolitical considerations. The country's geopolitical location influences state policy towards Islam, as the government must balance relations with regional powers, manage the influence of external religious actors, and address the potential spread of religious extremism from neighboring countries. In this context, the government can play a role in promoting cultural life and engaging different religions and affiliations in a broader civic culture, notes (Pottenger J. 2004).

Table №1

**Comparative table of the analysis of the interaction of religion and state policy
in the context of secularism.**

Aspect	Description of public policy	Freedom of religion	Influence on Islam	Comments
<i>Constitutional status</i>	The Constitution of Kyrgyzstan enshrines the secular nature of the state	Freedom of religion is guaranteed, but within the framework of the law	Islam is not recognized as a state religion, but has cultural influence	Constitution of 2010, Art. 16, paragraph 2.
<i>Registration of religious organizations</i>	Mandatory registration of religious associations is required	Criticized as a restriction on religious freedom	Local Islamic associations go through a complicated registration process	Law "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations"
<i>The role of the SCRA (State Commission on Religious Affairs)</i>	Control over religious activities, examination of religious literature	SCRA may restrict religious practice	Participates in the regulation of Islamic education and publications	Maintains a balance between security and religious freedom
<i>Religious education</i>	Secular education system, religion is excluded from the official curriculum	Religious education is only possible outside of school	Madras and Islamic universities exist, but under state control.	Support for private Islamic schools in the regions
<i>Politicization of Islam</i>	The use of religion in politics is prohibited	Politicians often appeal to Islamic values in informal rhetoric	Some parties and movements associate themselves with Islamic identity	Conflict between official secularism and public religious sentiment
<i>Counter-extremist policy</i>	Active measures to prevent radicalization	May lead to restrictions on legal religious practices	Strict control over "unconventional" Islamic movements	Examples of banning Salafi groups
<i>The social role of Islam</i>	Respect for religious culture while maintaining a secular model	Increase in religious activity of the population	Islam influences norms of behavior, family relationships	Increased focus on hijab, mosques, Friday prayers
<i>Public Holidays and Islam</i>	Holidays such as Orozo Ait and Kurman Ait are officially recognized	The importance of Islamic tradition is recognized	Combination of secular and Islamic elements in society	Civil servants are given days off on these days

Although Kyrgyzstan remains a secular state, Islam has increasingly gained cultural and social significance. State policy seeks to balance secular principles with respect for religious freedom. However, due to threats of religious extremism, the state resorts to regulatory mechanisms that sometimes limit freedom of religion.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The impact of government policies on religious freedom is also shaped by broader socioeconomic factors. Poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education can exacerbate religious tensions and create fertile ground for extremism. Government policies on Islam have implications for social cohesion and interfaith relations. Promoting tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect among different religious communities is essential to building a harmonious and inclusive society. The influence of external actors such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and various international NGOs further complicates the religious landscape. Foreign Islamic centers, along with ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, and Kazakhs from Central Asia, have been quick to take advantage of the situation and the artificial religious and ideological void in the minds of the population. As a result, there has been a slight surge in religious schools and educational centers directly funded from abroad (Pulatov, A. 2021).

Kyrgyzstan's pursuit of secularism while governing a predominantly Muslim population presents ongoing challenges. These include balancing state neutrality with religious freedom, preven-

ting religious extremism, and promoting social cohesion in a religiously diverse society. Looking at Uzbekistan, for example, there has been some progress in promoting religious freedom, improving prospects for pluralism, Clark E. A. and Vovk D. note (Clark, E. A., & Vovk, D. 2020).

The Kyrgyz government has struggled to balance the secular and religious landscape in the post-Soviet era, prompting the state to develop strategies to manage religious affairs and prevent the spread of extremism. These policies often include monitoring religious activity, regulating religious education, and countering extremist narratives. In Kyrgyzstan, promoting religious freedom and preventing religious extremism requires a nuanced approach, respecting human rights, upholding the rule of law, and addressing the root causes of radicalization.

The political landscape in Central Asia, marked by varying degrees of authoritarianism, has significant implications for religious freedom. While some states prioritize stability and control, others balance secular governance with religious expression (Kubiček, P. (1998). Wilkinson K. believes that Kyrgyzstan's statehood remains limited in its practical authority, and informal patronage systems undermine formal institutions (Wilkinson, C. 2007). The legacy of Soviet policy on religion continues to shape contemporary state-religion relations in Central Asia. During the Soviet era, religion was repressed and controlled by the state, and this legacy continues to influence state policy on religion in the post-Soviet era. Kyrgyzstan, although it has

made efforts to democratize, is the only country to have undergone a significant political transition since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This transition has allowed for greater, albeit limited, religious freedom compared to its neighbors. The interaction between state policy and religious freedom is further complicated by the rise of religious extremism and terrorism on the global stage.

This growth has prompted governments to adopt stricter laws and regulations to monitor and control religious activity. These measures, while intended to prevent extremism, can also infringe on the rights of peaceful religious communities. The ruling elite's use of "extremism" and "fundamentalism" as labels to delegitimize political opposition further complicates the picture, note Alymkulov N., Ashakeeva G. (Alymkulov, N., & Ashakeeva, G. 2004).

The lack of historical experience of democratic governance and the absence of a deeply rooted tradition of statehood in the countries of Central Asia make it difficult to implement and develop the principles of religious freedom. The lack of institutional stability and political continuity leads to the dominance of authoritarian mechanisms for regulating social and religious life (Brown, B. 1996). As Treacher A. notes, the preservation of authoritarian culture is associated with collective identities, cultural attitudes and historical memory, which were formed under the influence of Soviet power (Treacher, A. 1996). Moreover, the failure to build modern nation-states has led to the emergence of multiple identities, including religious ones, that compete with national identity. Following the collapse

of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries began to transition to democratic political systems, but they rejected some Western general democratic guidelines because they contradicted the traditional cultures and histories of their societies. The transition to democratic systems in post-Soviet Central Asia was accompanied by a selective adoption of Western democratic practices. Many universal principles of democracy were rejected as incompatible with local traditions, leading to the creation of hybrid political systems that combine authoritarian elements with seemingly democratic institutions (Kukeyeva, F., & Shkapyak, O. 2013). Kyrgyzstan positions itself as a secular state, which forms the framework for its interaction with religious organizations. Secularism in this context serves not only as a principle of separation of religion from the state, but also as a mechanism for managing the religious sphere in order to ensure stability and neutralize threats from radical movements (McGlinchey, E. 2005).

Religious Education and Regulation are areas of policy attention. The issues of religious education, registration and monitoring of religious organizations have become the subject of serious academic and political debate. The state is trying to limit the influence of radical movements while maintaining the possibility of legal religious expression. This duality of policy reflects an attempt to maintain a balance between control and freedom (Breskaya, O., Francis, L. 2020). State policies in Kyrgyzstan balancing secularism and religious expression are influenced by concerns about extremism and national security, which

affect religious education and the regulation of organizations. The fragmented nature of Kyrgyz society complicates the analysis of securitization, as different spatial scales exhibit disjointed transitions, calling into question the legitimacy and norms of political behavior (Wilkinson, C. (2007). This highlights the importance of understanding internal security analysis. Scholars have noted the challenges of democratization in Central Asia, attributing them to factors such as cultural norms, economic pressures, and the legacy of Soviet political systems (Treacher, A. 1996). The imbalance in security analysis caused by the focus on regional dynamics over domestic politics was highlighted during the 2005 “March events” in Kyrgyzstan, when the resignation of the president was unexpected both domestically and internationally (Wilkinson, C. (2007). Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet history has been marked by political instability, including violent uprisings, which has influenced the state’s approach to managing potential threats.

From the above, it can be concluded that the government strives to maintain a neutral stance towards religion, ensuring that all religions are treated equally before the law. However, this neutrality is often challenged by the need to counter extremist ideologies and protect national security.

Current research highlights the complex and multifaceted relationship between religion, identity and social integration, particularly in multicultural societies where the role of religion in shaping social order is evolving. Recent research shows that government restrictions on religion and broader social hostility asso-

ciated with religion are correlated with lower average levels of education (Breskaya, O., Francis, L. 2020). Kyrgyzstan’s experience with religious freedom and secular politics provides a valuable case study for understanding these dynamics in the context of Central Asia, where the legacy of Soviet secularism intersects with a predominantly Muslim population. Current research seeks to understand the conditions under which religious diversity fosters social cohesion or, conversely, leads to conflict and fragmentation. Pelkmans M. argues that state paternalism and suspicion of religious minorities, remnants of the Soviet era, persist as important characteristics in the management of religious pluralism (Pelkmans, M. (2014).

In summary, it is important to note that government policy in Kyrgyzstan reflects a delicate balance between accepting religious expression and maintaining secular governance, often influenced by concerns about religious extremism and national security. The rise of non-traditional Islamic movements in Central Asia has raised concerns among secular governments, prompting them to take steps to control religious activity and promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the cultural and civilizational characteristics of the region (Kubiček, P. 1998).

SYNTHESIS OF THREE IN THE CONTEXT OF KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan’s experience, marked by political instability and social fragmentation, provides a unique context for understanding the interactions between state, religion, and political processes in

society. The country's post-Soviet transition has been characterized by increased democratization and decentralization, but problems such as ethno-nationalism, regional divisions, and economic instability persist. As Wilkinson K. notes, the government's attempts to portray protests as existential threats to the republic, citing the possibility of civil war, illustrate the use of securitization to delegitimize power (Wilkinson, C. 2007). The state's efforts to maintain a delicate balance between religious expression and the provision of secular governance reflect the difficulties of managing religious pluralism in the post-Soviet context.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the relationship between public policy and religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan is complex and dynamic, shaped by a variety of factors, including historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, and security concerns. State efforts to manage the role of Islam in public life reflect a broader pattern of secular governance in Central Asia, influenced by both the Soviet-era legacy and contemporary challenges. Periodic changes of power, often through mass protests and revolutions (2005, 2010), have demonstrated the instability of the political system and an acute deficit of trust in government institutions. The political elite, in turn, often used democratic mechanisms to fight for their own interests rather than to strengthen the rule of law. As a result, authoritarian and liberal tendencies alternated, preventing the formation of a sustainable democratic tradition. The fragility of governance structures, bureaucratic corruption, and regional

contradictions only aggravated the situation, making the country's democratic development unstable and contradictory (Cummings, S. N., Juraev, S. 2013). Current research on religion and human rights highlights the importance of state policies that promote religious freedom, inclusiveness, and equal treatment of all religious communities. State efforts to maintain a delicate balance between accommodating religious expression and ensuring secular governance reflect the complexities of managing religious pluralism in the post-Soviet context (Aytiev, S. A. 2020). The transition from Soviet republic to independent state was marked by shifts in educational paradigms as Kyrgyzstan navigated foreign educational proposals and policies and sought to assert ownership of its educational reforms (DeYoung, A. J. (2005). The country's geographic location and political system have helped promote freedom within the country. Kyrgyzstan's experience is highly relevant for other Central Asian states and countries in the wider Muslim world (Baimyrzaeva, M. 2012).

Managing religious pluralism in Kyrgyzstan is a complex task, requiring the state to find a delicate balance between accepting religious expression and ensuring secular governance. The state's approach to managing Islam in public life reflects a broader pattern of secular governance in Central Asia, influenced by both the legacy of the Soviet era and contemporary challenges. Western expectations of rapid democratization in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been tempered by the growing authoritarianism of their leaders, who prioritize stability, reflecting the lack of experience with

Western-style democracy and traditions of statehood in Central Asia. The secular political system in Kyrgyzstan is a structure that ensures religious freedom for all citizens while maintaining the separation of religion and state.

A study of state policy and religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of secularism, Islam, and religious governance in Central Asia. It offers nuanced understanding of how governments in the region navigate the complex relation-

ship between religious diversity and secular political frameworks, often shaped by historical legacies and contemporary security concerns. This analysis of Kyrgyzstan's experience sheds light on the difficult balancing act that Central Asian states must perform to accommodate religious expression while maintaining secular governance – a delicate balance that is further complicated by factors such as political instability, social fragmentation, and the legacy of Soviet-era politics.

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