

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW, AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**Master's degree in
Human Rights and Multi-level Governance**



**"PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CENTRAL ASIA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT"**

Supervisor: Prof. SARA PENNICINO

Candidate: ANEL BALGABEKOVA

Matriculation No. 1229809

A.Y. 2022/2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT	22
1.1 Islamic Context	22
1.2 Soviet Union Context	25
1.2 Post-Soviet Transition	31
CHAPTER 2 CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN CENTRAL ASIA	37
2.1 Gender inequality and discrimination	37
2.1 Gender based violence	43
CHAPTER 3. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT	51
3.1 Women’s Political Representation	51
3.2 Socio-economic Empowerment and democratic development	55
3.3 Women’s Mobilization and NGOs	58
CONCLUSION	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global landscape, the pursuit of gender equality and democratic principles stands as a fundamental aspiration for societies around the world. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Central Asian countries, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, embarked on a process of nation-building and defining their national identities. This transformative period involved a critical reexamination of cultural traditions and values, including the intricate dynamics of gender roles. The shift towards more traditional gender roles, accompanied by societal expectations that limit women's opportunities and choices, has had a notable impact on women's rights in the region.

When cultural norms prioritize women's roles primarily as housewives and mothers, it can lead to the marginalization or devaluation of women's contributions in other areas such as education, employment, and political participation. Consequently, this restricts their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power, hindering their ability to fully exercise their rights. Furthermore, the region underwent significant political and economic transformations, but the establishment of stable democratic institutions has proven to be a struggle. Authoritarian regimes emerged in several countries, resulting in limited political freedom and concerns regarding human rights.

There is a notable lack of political will to implement reforms and protect women's rights, and women face discrimination and violence despite legal protections. Therefore, the promotion of women's rights becomes an essential element of democratization efforts in Central Asia.

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of human rights, which emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of their gender, should have equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources and decision-making processes. Within the context of democratization, gender equality becomes even more significant as it strives to create inclusive and representative systems that reflect the diversity of society. Scholarship in feminist and gender research has shed light on the ways in which national ideology imposes limitations on women's political engagement and their involvement in state institutions. By emphasizing the domestic sphere as the primary domain for women's social fulfillment, national ideology restricts their agency and

participation in the public sphere.¹ The presence of liberal rights for both men and women is crucial for democratization to occur.² Furthermore, the emergence of feminist movements and advocacy for gender equality challenge established gender norms within the nation-state. Gender equality and female empowerment play active roles in the modernization process. Recent research has also highlighted the significance of female empowerment in democratic development.³

In this thesis, we aim to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of women's rights promotion in Central Asia, exploring the historical context, the unique characteristics of the region, the perception of women, and the challenges posed by authoritarian governance. Through an in-depth examination of these factors, we hope to contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding gender equality, democratic development, and the potential for positive change within Central Asian societies.

Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to examine the implications of promoting women's rights for the democratic development of Central Asia. The journey towards gender equality is inherently intertwined with the larger struggle for inclusive governance, respect for human rights, and the establishment of democratic institutions. By analyzing the efforts, achievements, and obstacles faced in promoting women's rights, we can better understand the potential pathways for fostering democratic values and aspirations within the region.

The first chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context of Central Asia and its influence on the promotion of women's rights. It delves into the rich tapestry of Central Asia's history, exploring the interplay of cultural, religious, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the region. The chapter examines the influence of Islam and its interpretations on gender dynamics, as well as the impact of the Soviet Union era and the subsequent post-Soviet transition on women's roles and societal norms. By unraveling the historical backdrop, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper analysis of contemporary women's rights issues in Central Asia.

During the existence of the Soviet Union, the position of women in Central Asian society underwent a remarkable transformation. The Soviet government implemented various policies

¹ Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and nationalism in the Third World*. Verso Books, 2016.

² Beer, Caroline. "Democracy and Gender Equality." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no. 3 (April 28, 2009): 212–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9043-2>.

³ Wyndow, Paula, Jianghong Li, and Eugen Mattes. "Female empowerment as a core driver of democratic development: A dynamic panel model from 1980 to 2005." *World Development* 52 (2013): 34–54.

and initiatives aimed at improving the status and conditions of women in the region. Women comprised 47% of the workforce and were ensured equal remuneration for their labor. Additionally, they were granted a year of fully paid maternity leave. Moreover, the Soviet government mandated the formal representation of women in governance, and within the Soviet Union, women were provided with unrestricted and accessible abortion services.⁴ Notably, in regions like Central Asia, the Soviet Union adopted a targeted approach, promising women equality and significantly enhancing their rights and freedoms.

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a regression in women's rights, as traditional gender stereotypes resurfaced in the newly independent countries of Central Asia. Consequently, women encountered increasing obstacles in advocating for their right to education, equitable working conditions, and political representation. Gender inequality persists in many areas, and women, despite state programs, laws, and populist statements by authorities, find it difficult to overcome barriers and advance in careers related to politics, governance, and the distribution of economic benefits.

Chapter two focuses on the present state of women's rights in Central Asia, shedding light on the persisting gender inequalities and discrimination that women face in various spheres of their lives. It examines the socio-cultural norms, patriarchal traditions, and legal frameworks that perpetuate gender disparities. By critically analyzing the existing challenges and barriers, this chapter highlights the urgent need for promoting women's rights in the region.

Chapter three delves into the multifaceted implications of promoting women's rights for democratic development in Central Asia. It explores the importance of women's political representation and its impact on democratic governance, examining the barriers and opportunities for women's participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, it investigates the socio-economic empowerment of women and its contribution to broader social and economic development. The chapter also explores the role of women's mobilization and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advocating for women's rights and fostering democratic values. By examining these implications, this chapter highlights the transformative potential of gender equality for advancing democratic ideals in the region.

⁴ Handrahan, Lori M. "Gender and ethnicity in the 'transitional democracy' of Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (2001): 467-496.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Central Asia, comprising of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has long been a region of political, economic, and social turbulence. After the Soviet Union's collapse, the newly independent states struggled to build democratic institutions, with authoritarian regimes dominating the political landscape. In particular, women's rights were widely ignored, with traditional patriarchal attitudes dominating society. Women's participation in politics, education, and the economy was limited, with few opportunities for advancement.

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature drawing on a range of books, articles, scholarly and non-academic sources, the review will examine the research that has been conducted on how women's rights promote democratization, the factors driving change, the challenges, and opportunities for promoting gender equality within the context of democratization, the current state of women's rights in the region of Central Asia and its implications for democratic development.

Women rights in authoritarian regimes

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had significant implications for women's rights in Central Asia. While the Soviet regime had promoted gender equality and women's participation in the workforce, political and social life, the transition to a market economy and democratic governance in the post-Soviet period brought about new challenges and opportunities for women in the region. While there is a vast body of academic literature investigating women's rights, equality, and representation in Eastern and Central Europe following the fall of communism, little research has been conducted on the five recently established Central Asian countries. The literature on inter-regional comparative studies about transitions from authoritarian and communist rule include Waylen (1994), Jaquette & Wolchik eds. (1998), Matland and Montgomery (2003), Waylen (2007).

Matland and Montgomery's book (2003) offers valuable insights into gender and politics, particularly in post-communist Europe. The authors conduct a comparative analysis of electoral systems, gender quotas, and cultural norms, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact women's participation in politics, such as poverty, traditional gender roles, lack of pro-feminist attitudes, and weak women's groups to support female candidates. Their interdisciplinary approach draws on political science, gender studies, and sociology. The book has practical implications for policymakers and activists who aim to promote gender equality

and women's empowerment, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both formal and informal barriers to women's political participation. The authors suggest that a range of strategies, from electoral reform to public education and awareness-raising, can be effective in increasing women's political representation and the need for gender-sensitive policies to address the persistent gender inequalities in politics.⁵

The legacy of Soviet rule, combined with the challenges of nation-building and the emergence of new elites, has contributed to the authoritarianism that characterizes many of the Central Asian states today. These regimes frequently restrict freedom of speech and assembly, limit political competition, and repress civil society and independent media, which can all negatively impact the ability of women's rights activists to organize and advocate for their rights.

Despite progress in women's education and workforce participation, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms persist, hindering women's advancement in political spheres. The dominance of male-dominated political structures and limited opportunities for women to assume leadership roles remain prevalent. In Kyrgyzstan, under a recent legislation, a maximum limit of 70 percent was imposed on the representation of a single gender among elected officials. The intention behind this law was to promote women's participation in politics, and it proved to be effective. In the local elections held in April 2021, 39 percent of the elected individuals were women, which is a significant increase compared to the previous election where women only accounted for 10 percent of the elected officials. However, facing an unexpected and progressive achievement on a global scale, proponents of the patriarchal system in Kyrgyzstan, both women and men, mobilized to hinder women politicians from securing parliamentary seats in the November elections. This coalition against reform succeeded in passing a new election law, which reduced the gender quota to 60 percent. As a result, anti-democracy politicians gained eight additional seats in the 90-seat parliament, known as the Jogorku Kenesh, thereby leaving women with only 19 seats. It's worth noting that despite women constituting 52 percent of the country's 3.6 million voters, their representation in the parliament was disproportionately low.⁶

⁵ Matland, Richard, and Kathleen Montgomery, eds. *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780199246854>.

⁶ Kuhns, Mirgul, Pierre-Olivier Bussi eres, Dr. Rishi Gupta, and Amna Zaman. "Central Asia Needs to Promote Women Politicians." *Modern Diplomacy*, February 10, 2022. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/10/central-asia-needs-to-promote-women-politicians/>.

Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan, the rise of nationalist ideologies and political instability has created additional hurdles for women's rights activists. The country has witnessed instances of backlash against progressive gender equality legislation, such as the attempts to repeal the law criminalizing bride kidnapping, which poses a direct threat to women's safety and autonomy. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, under the authoritarian regime of President Islam Karimov, women's rights activists faced severe restrictions and repression. The Uzbek government maintained tight control over civil society, limiting opportunities for women's organizations to advocate for gender equality and suppressing dissenting voices. For example, in Turkmenistan, where the government maintains tight control over society, there are few opportunities for women's rights activists to organize and advocate for change. Women's participation in political and public life is limited, and discrimination and gender-based violence are common.⁷ Similarly, in Tajikistan, where the government has suppressed political opposition and independent media, women's rights activists have faced harassment and intimidation from state authorities⁸. Human rights in authoritarian regimes are often severely restricted or violated and women's rights can be particularly vulnerable to political repression and cultural conservatism, making it difficult to advance gender equality and protect women's rights. These examples highlight the specific challenges faced in each Central Asian country, reflecting the complexities of women's rights within authoritarian regimes and the need for tailored approaches to address region-specific barriers.

Due to the increasing prominence of Central Asian countries, researchers have turned their attention to the independence process of the region (Roy 2000; Luong 2003; Collins 2006; Sahadeo and Zanca 2007). The Central Asian region presents distinct challenges and specific examples that further illuminate the dynamics of women's rights in authoritarian regimes. Scholars concur that understanding clan politics is crucial to comprehending the region. For example, Collins (2006) asserts that the continued presence of kin groups, known as "clans," in Central Asia influences the nature and trajectory of regime transition, as well as the stability of regimes after the transition.⁹ This socio-cultural phenomenon has implications for women's rights as well. For example, in Kazakhstan, Dariga Nazarbayeva served as Chairman of the Senate of Kazakhstan of Kazakhstan and actively supported women's participation in politics. However, it should be noted that she also has a notable family background, with her

⁷Oslo, A. H. (2012, September 25). *NHC: Women second-class citizens in Turkmenistan*. Human Rights House Foundation. <https://humanrightshouse.org/articles/nhc-women-second-class-citizens-in-turkmenistan/>

⁸*Tajikistan*. UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. (n.d.). <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/tajikistan>

⁹ Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*.

father having previously served as the president of the country. Saida Mirziyoeva, the eldest daughter of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoev, has been entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding her father's government's reputation during a challenging period. Recently, she was appointed as the head of communications and information policy in the presidential administration.

Numerous academic studies have been conducted on the topic of gender and democratization, particularly regarding women's involvement in politics during the process of transitioning from authoritarian regimes to democracies. These studies have examined various phases of democratization and authoritarianism and have also focused on conceptual aspects of gendered political participation in democratization (Waylen 2000; Rai 2000; Norris 2001; Waylen 2007; Wang et. al. 2017; Donno 2018;)

In their study titled "Women's rights in democratic transitions: A global sequence analysis, 1900-2012" (Wang et. al. 2017) examine the effects of granting civil rights in authoritarian regimes, specifically regarding gender. They posit that the presence of liberal rights for both men and women is crucial for democratization to occur. According to the authors, granting rights to both genders reduces inequality that affects half of the population, making repression more costly and enabling women's organizing, which has historically played a key role in sparking protests during the early stages of democratization.¹⁰

Moreover, some researchers contend that democratic governments are more likely to support women's rights compared to authoritarian governments. For instance, Norris (2001) has shown that women's political representation is higher in democracies than in autocracies.¹¹ However, other scholars dispute this notion and argue that authoritarian regimes may also promote women's rights for strategic reasons. Waylen (2007) argues that authoritarian regimes may use women's rights as a means of co-opting women and constructing political alliances.¹²

Furthermore, Jalušič, Vlasta, and Milica G. Antić (2001) have found that some authoritarian regimes have embraced gender-equality laws and policies with more enthusiasm than numerous democracies.¹³ Donno (2018), conducted case studies on Uganda, Tanzania, and

¹⁰ WANG et al., "Women's Rights in Democratic Transitions: A Global Sequence Analysis, 1900-2012."

¹¹ Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. "Cultural Obstacles to Equal Representation." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 3 (2001): 126–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0054>.

¹² Waylen, Georgina. "Women's Mobilization and Gender Outcomes in Transitions to Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 5 (May 2007): 521–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005285750>.

¹³ Jalušič, Vlasta, and Milica G. Antić. "Women-Politics-Equal Opportunities." *Prospects for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2001.

Kenya to analyze the relationship between authoritarian regimes and women's rights. The study found that some authoritarian regimes prioritize women's rights as a tool for securing women's loyalty and building political coalitions, and institutionalized party-based regimes have greater capacity to advance women's rights.¹⁴ Similarly, the second paper of Donno (2021), argue that dictatorships have vigorously enacted gender-related legislation, at a rate that surpasses democracies in the developing world, as a way to signal adherence to international norms and demonstrate progress on gender equality.¹⁵

Ottaway (2004) believes that efforts to advance women's rights alone are premature in effecting substantial change. While Ottaway's analysis primarily focuses on the Arab region, it is noteworthy to draw parallels between her observations and the context of Central Asia. Ottaway contends that the main obstacle to democratic progress in the Arab region lies in the excessive concentration of power held by Arab presidents and kings. She argues that these leaders often employ policies aimed at enhancing women's rights as strategic maneuvers to cultivate reformist credentials and gain favor with Western governments, media outlets, and non-governmental organizations. However, these initiatives are often perceived as deceptive tactics, diverting attention from their underlying reluctance to relinquish substantive power.¹⁶ This notion resonates with the situation in Central Asia, where authoritarian regimes have prevailed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In both regions, political elites strategically navigate women's rights issues to serve their interests, whether it be to legitimize their authority within a secular context or to consolidate power in the face of potential opposition. Consequently, it becomes crucial to critically examine the intentions and outcomes of women's rights initiatives in these contexts, taking into account the broader political dynamics and motivations of the ruling elites.

Furthermore, Arat's (2022) adds to existing research on different types of political regimes and their impact on women's rights by shifting the focus from the type of regime to the process of regime change itself. Arat demonstrates how the ruling elites strategically employed women's rights to fulfill their varying objectives during different stages of the political stages. Initially, they expanded liberal laws concerning women's rights to legitimize their authority within a secular context. Subsequently, they reinterpreted existing laws to advance conservative agendas during a period of regression. Finally, they established new institutions and marginalized

¹⁴ Donno and Kreft, "Authoritarian Institutions and Women's Rights."

¹⁵ Donno, Fox, and Kaasik, "International Incentives for Women's Rights in Dictatorships."

¹⁶ Ottaway and Carothers, *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*.

existing women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to mobilize conservative women in support of the newly established authoritarian regime.¹⁷ Overall, the literature indicates that the connection between the type of government and women's rights is intricate and depends on several factors, including the regime's specific incentives and tactics.

Gender Equality

Nevertheless, the engagement of women in politics has an impact on the process of democratization, and it is influenced by it as well (Jaquette 2001).¹⁸ By examining gender-related factors and dynamics, we can gain a more profound comprehension of transitions towards democracy.

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of human rights, which emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of their gender, should have equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources and decision-making processes. Within the context of democratization, gender equality becomes even more significant as it strives to create inclusive and representative systems that reflect the diversity of society.

Promoting gender equality in democratization can have several positive effects. It can lead to more inclusive governance structures, where women have equal opportunities to participate in political processes, hold positions of power, and contribute to decision-making. It can also result in policies and legislation that address gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequality.

Furthermore, gender equality within democratization can have broader social and economic benefits. Research has shown that societies that empower women tend to experience higher levels of economic development, improved health and education outcomes, and greater overall well-being (M. Hill, E. King 1995; N. Hornset and I. Soysa 2021).^{19,20}

Significant contribution to the literature on the correlation between democracy and gender equality were investigated by Beer (2009). It proposes that democracy should be viewed as a historical phenomenon with long-term implications, and women's participation should be considered a significant aspect of democracy. The study discovers that nations with more

¹⁷ Arat, "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey."

¹⁸ Jaquette and Wolchik, *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe*.

¹⁹ Hill and King, "Women's Education and Economic Well-Being."

²⁰ Hornset and de Soysa, "Does Empowering Women in Politics Boost Human Development? An Empirical Analysis, 1960–2018."

established democracies and a longer history of women's suffrage have a higher percentage of female populations, a greater female-to-male life expectancy ratio, lower fertility rates, and higher female labor force participation rates. The article concludes that long-term democracy and women's suffrage provide new opportunities for women to promote their interests through mobilization and elections.²¹

Inglehart (2002) explores the connection between gender equality, cultural change, and the spread of democracy in his influential work. Inglehart argues that cultural shifts from traditional values to self-expression values are closely associated with the rise of democratic institutions. Self-expression values prioritize individual freedom, tolerance, trust, and participatory orientations. Inglehart's analysis reveals that societies with higher levels of self-expression values are more likely to exhibit democratic features. He emphasizes the importance of cultural change in fostering the values necessary for democratic systems to thrive. A central component of cultural change towards self-expression values is the promotion of gender equality. Inglehart highlights the correlation between support for gender equality and democratic attitudes. He contends that societies that prioritize gender equality also exhibit greater tolerance for diverse groups, which is conducive to democratic ideals. However, Inglehart acknowledges that gender equality is not the sole cause of democracy but rather an integral part of the broader cultural transformation that supports democratic values.

Furthermore, Inglehart posits that economic development plays a crucial role in driving cultural shifts towards self-expression values, which in turn foster democratic institutions. He suggests that economic development has a more significant impact on culture than the political system itself, indicating that cultural transformation is a crucial precursor to the emergence and consolidation of democracy.²²

He finds a positive correlation between economic development, as measured by real per capita GDP, and the level of democracy. More economically developed societies tend to exhibit higher levels of democratic institutions and civil liberties. Economic development gradually shifts societies from survival values to self-expression values, shaping the cultural landscape and creating conditions favorable to democratic ideals. However, Inglehart also acknowledges

²¹ Beer, Caroline. "Democracy and Gender Equality." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no. 3 (April 28, 2009): 212–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9043-2>.

²² Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. "Cultural Obstacles to Equal Representation." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 3 (2001): 126–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0054>.

that cultural factors, particularly traditional religious heritage, mediate the impact of economic development.²³

While Inglehart's work provides valuable insights into the relationship between gender equality, cultural change, and democracy, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations. One critique is the potential oversimplification of complex cultural dynamics, as culture is a multifaceted and evolving construct. Additionally, the causal mechanisms linking cultural change, gender equality, and democracy warrant further exploration. Future research could delve deeper into the specific processes through which cultural values influence democratic institutions and vice versa.

Indeed, achieving gender equality within the context of democratization can present formidable challenges. It necessitates confronting deeply entrenched societal norms, cultural practices, and structural barriers that perpetuate gender disparities. In the multifaceted region of Central Asia, marked by immense diversity and complexity, a rich historical legacy, and noteworthy geopolitical significance, these challenges intersect with various factors that shape its character.

The reality is that the relationship between women's rights and democratization is complex and often not straightforward. Promoting women's rights can also be seen as a foreign imposition and a threat to traditional cultural values. In many Central Asian societies, there is resistance to change, and women's rights can be seen as a Western concept that undermines local traditions and customs. Women who dare to challenge the established power structures within their own cultures often face accusations of being "Westernized" or lacking authenticity. As a result, their efforts to bring about change and improve the existing status quo are dismissed without any further justification. Consequently, these women's perspectives, which stem from their own cultural backgrounds rather than being influenced by Western ideals, are marginalized within their original culture.²⁴ Consequently, any fight for gender equality is condemned as fundamentally inauthentic. This raises the question of whether feminism is inherently a Western endeavor.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Guerrero, "International Women's Rights and the 'War of Cultures': Avoiding the 'Westernization' Debate."

This raises the question of relativist approach and the universality of human rights. Proponents of relativism argue that different moralities exist worldwide, challenging the idea of universal human rights standards.²⁵

The relativist approach often targets women's human rights, raising doubts about the universal applicability of contemporary definitions. Women's human rights seek to recognize and protect the rights of women, challenging patriarchal cultural and religious norms. While progress has been made, the relativist approach hinders the development and realization of women's human rights, perpetuating discrimination and denying equal rights. Women's rights continue to face challenges globally, despite the adoption of human rights covenants. "Relativist non-acceptance of the universal applicability of contemporary definitions of human rights, especially women's rights, is driven by claims about cultural authenticity and integrity in the face of Western domination and modernization." (Sachedina 2008, p.118).²⁶ In their study, Zhussipbek and Nagayeva (2020) shed light on the situation in Central Asian countries, where an informal relativist approach to human rights significantly contributes to gender discrimination and violence, including violations of the rights of kelins (married women). Retraditionalization plays a crucial role by reinforcing traditional practices and norms within families, thereby perpetuating the low status and marginalization of kelins. The revival of conservative interpretations of Islam further strengthens the relativist perspective, as certain interpretations are employed to justify the subordination of kelins. Additionally, a lack of awareness about human rights among family members and the presence of patterns of authority-subordination further contribute to the perpetuation of the relativist approach. "Claims of cultural authenticity should not justify the failure at protecting and implementing the fundamental human rights of any group of people."²⁷

The resurgence of non-consensual bride abduction in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, despite previous efforts to eradicate the practice and promote women's empowerment during the Soviet era, has been a subject of study by Cynthia Werner (2009). Her research investigates the changing dynamics of marriage practices and the increasing influence of patriarchy in post-

²⁵ Frick, *Human Rights and Relative Universalism*.

²⁶ Sachedina, *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights*.

²⁷ Zhussipbek, Galym, and Zhanar Nagayeva. "Human Rights of Daughters-in-Law (Kelins) in Central Asia: Harmful Traditional Practices and Structural Oppression." *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 2 (December 7, 2020): 222–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2020.1850423>.

Soviet Central Asia. Werner's study emphasizes the role of discourses centered on shame and tradition in exerting control over women's autonomy and sexuality.²⁸

Traditionally, the practice of bride abduction has diminished or ceased in many cultures due to the implementation of modern laws and evolving social norms. However, Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, has witnessed an opposite trend. Forced abductions have become more prevalent in these countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This contrasts with the global trajectory observed in various societies where such practices have declined.²⁹ The persistence of bride abduction in Central Asia highlights the need to understand the unique cultural, social, and political factors shaping gender dynamics in the region.

In Central Asia, a typical forced abduction involves the groom and his companions using force or deception to seize a woman and bring her to the groom's residence. Subsequently, the groom's female relatives exert pressure on the abducted woman to accept the marriage and write a letter to her parents. The resurgence of this practice in the region is surprising given that the Soviet state had previously banned it and implemented comprehensive legislation to advance women's emancipation several decades ago.³⁰

The persistence of patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender roles in Central Asia is one of the key issues that affect women's rights. These attitudes are deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric of the region and can be seen in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and politics. Traditional gender roles assign women primarily to domestic and caregiving roles, while men are expected to take on public and leadership positions. These gendered expectations and societal norms create barriers for women in engaging in politics and decision-making processes.

In her study, Urbayeva (2019) delves into the impact of patriarchy on women's well-being in Central Asian countries and examines the influence of the transition to a market economy on gender imbalances in labor markets and opportunity structures. The author argues that while women in the region are highly educated and make significant economic contributions through employment, their perceptions of gender roles remain ambiguous, and the extent to which opportunity structures and social mobility have influenced these views remains uncertain. The author highlights that women's perspectives on their roles are shaped by multiple factors,

²⁸ Werner, "Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition."

²⁹ Akiner, Shirin, and Mary Buckley. "Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia." (1997): 261.

³⁰ admin_bis. "Marriage by Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan: A Practice That Stands the Test of Time - Institut Du Genre En Géopolitique." Institut du Genre en Géopolitique, October 12, 2022. <https://igg-geo.org/?p=8974&lang=en>.

including their religious identities, socio-economic status, opportunity structures, and inequality.³¹

In most Central Asian countries, the qualities required for political leadership at the highest level are typically associated with men, thereby shaping women's political citizenship as subordinate or "second class".³² Feminist and gender research has demonstrated how national ideologies reinforce women's confinement to the domestic sphere, limiting their political participation and engagement with state institutions.³³ Post-Soviet states' national ideologies dictate specific forms of political involvement for women, often emphasizing their roles in areas such as education and healthcare.³⁴

Women's access to leadership positions remains significantly restricted compared to men. Women in Central Asian republics tend to occupy lower-ranking positions within state institutions. Furthermore, feminist movements and women's rights activism, which challenge established national gender norms, can be perceived as a threat to the concept of national authenticity and unity, as they question the notion of gender complementarity and women's subordinate status.

Guerrero (2011) studied the relationship between women and culture, challenging the notion of culture as a static and homogenous entity. He highlights that culture is just one element shaping an individual's identity, along with factors like education, job description, nationality, ethnicity, social class, gender, and age. By emphasizing this multidimensionality, the study suggests that cultural differences should not be essentialized or used to victimize or label certain groups.

The author argues that culture is a dynamic process rather than a fixed concept, undergoing historical development and changes over time. They criticize the tendency to depict Western women as successful and emancipated, while portraying Eastern women as frightened, uneducated, and oppressed. Such cultural myths oversimplify and distort the reality, ignoring the heterogeneity within cultures and the diverse experiences of women.

³¹ Urbaeva, "Opportunity, Social Mobility, and Women's Views on Gender Roles in Central Asia."

³² Cleuziou and Dierenberger, "Gender and Nation in Post-Soviet Central Asia: From National Narratives to Women's Practices."

³³ Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 1986. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780862322649>.

³⁴ Ibid.

Moreover, the text highlights the importance of women in constructing cultural identity but notes that women often have limited influence over the construction of myths surrounding them. Decision-making power, including defining culture and religion, primarily lies in the hands of male-dominated ruling classes. This power dynamic perpetuates existing stereotypes and excludes women from shaping the cultural and political mainstream.³⁵

The research also addresses the public/private distinction in legal matters and its impact on women's rights. Many women's rights violations occur in the private sphere, such as domestic violence or marital rape, which often go unexamined by authorities due to reluctance to interfere in private affairs. This reluctance to regulate practices disadvantaging women hinders their ability to seek official support and change their circumstances.³⁶

Women in Central Asia still face obstacles based on their gender when it comes to entrepreneurship. These women express frustration over a limited opportunity structure, where connections and financial resources are often necessary to secure good employment. Marriage and the traditional role of men as the primary breadwinners as factors that affect social mobility.³⁷ Additionally, young women emphasize the importance of kinship and friendship networks in obtaining desirable job opportunities. Most professional women, including doctors and teachers, are typically engaged in public sector employment where they receive considerably lower salaries.³⁸

Seguino (2000) explores the potential impact of gender inequality on the economic growth rate of semi-industrialized export-oriented economies, where women play a significant role in the labor force within the export sector. The main objective is to test the hypothesis that gender inequality, manifested in lower wages for women, has acted as a catalyst for economic growth through its influence on exports between 1975 and 1995. The empirical analysis reveals a positive correlation between GDP growth and gender wage inequality. Additionally, the evidence suggests that part of the relationship between gender wage inequality and growth is mediated by its positive effect on investment as a percentage of GDP. The findings indicate that gender inequality stimulates investment and enhances the productivity of investment,

³⁵ Guerrero, "International Women's Rights and the 'War of Cultures': Avoiding the 'Westernization' Debate."

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Petesch and Demarchi, "Gender, Mobility, and Middle Class in Europe and Central Asia: Insights from Qualitative Research."

³⁸ Ibid.

potentially through the impact of low wages for women on exports and, consequently, technology imports.³⁹

According to Coleman (2004), educating women can lead to various positive outcomes, including higher literacy rates and improved health, which can result in more knowledgeable and engaged citizens who can participate better in democratic processes. Educating women, particularly young girls, can also bring benefits to society, such as decreasing birth rates and increasing agricultural productivity. In low-income countries, primary education investments can be more advantageous than investments in secondary or higher education, and girls typically have limited access to education compared to boys. In India, educating girls has proved to be more successful in reducing birth rates than family planning programs. Overall, the paper suggests that investing in the education of women and girls can have substantial positive impacts on both individuals and society as a whole.⁴⁰

Similarly, Brym (2016) suggests that education can promote support for women's rights and democracy by increasing awareness and knowledge about these issues. For example, the study found that Tunisians with higher levels of education were more likely to support women's rights and democracy. Education can also help to promote critical thinking and independent decision-making, which are important for democratic participation.⁴¹

According to Kabeer (2005), educated women in rural areas of Bangladesh participate in a wider range of decisions than uneducated ones. The number of decisions increased from an average of 1.1 to 2.3 among women with secondary education. Women's participation in decision-making was positively associated with poverty reduction and economic growth in Bangladesh.⁴²

In essence, the path to gender equality within democratization is not without challenges. Deeply entrenched societal norms, cultural practices, and structural barriers perpetuate gender disparities and hinder progress. Resistance to change and the perception of women's rights as a Western imposition can pose significant obstacles. The relativist approach also raises questions

³⁹ Seguino, "Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis."

⁴⁰ Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff from Women's Rights." *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004): 80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033977>.

⁴¹ Brym, Robert, and Robert Andersen. "Democracy, Women's Rights, and Public Opinion in Tunisia." *International Sociology* 31, no. 3 (February 19, 2016): 253–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580916629622>.

⁴² Kabeer, "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1."

about the universality of human rights and challenges the development and realization of women's rights.

The complex relationship between women's rights and democratization necessitates a multidimensional approach. Cultural change, economic development, and education play critical roles in shaping gender dynamics and promoting gender equality. Efforts should focus on challenging patriarchal attitudes, addressing traditional gender roles, and dismantling discriminatory practices.

Women's mobilization

It is important to recognize that women's perspectives on what constitutes a fulfilling life may vary. Nevertheless, the feminist call for gender rights and equality is deemed crucial within the context of democracy. The presence of an active feminist movement that advocates for gender equality indicates a society's commitment to upholding democratic principles and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all.

Social movements possess the capacity to reshape gender disparities, social structures, and belief systems. Increasingly, feminist studies indicate that the presence of patriarchy and gender inequality correlates with national and interstate conflicts.⁴³ This implies that societies with a greater involvement of women in civil and political spheres can anticipate a reduction in violent domestic conflicts (Ulrike Ziemer 2020).⁴⁴ In certain cases, women's movements have played a vital role in promoting democratization, such as in the Chilean women's movement during the democratization process in the 1980s (Kelley Boldt, T. White 2011).⁴⁵

Women's movements have emerged as a powerful force in promoting democratization, shaping political landscapes, and challenging oppressive systems. Over the course of history, women have mobilized, organized, and advocated for their rights, demanding equal representation, political participation, and social justice. Their active engagement in democratization processes has proven to be a transformative factor, as they have pushed for inclusivity, gender equality, and the dismantling of patriarchal structures. A significant number of research studies have explored the role that women's movements have played in promoting democratization, highlighting their contributions in driving social progress, expanding political

⁴³ Hudson, Carpenter, and Caprioli, "Gender and Global Security."

⁴⁴ Ziemer, Ulrike, ed. *Women's Everyday Lives in War and Peace in the South Caucasus*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25517-6>.

⁴⁵ Boldt, Kelley, and Timothy White. "Chilean women and democratization: Entering politics through resistance as *Arpilleristas*." *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 2 (2011): 27-44.

representation, and fostering the principles of democracy. By shedding light on these vital contributions, we can better understand the complexities of democratization and the indispensable role of women in shaping democratic societies.

In her work, Alyssa McGary (2009) highlights the influence of the military's economic model on women's lives during Chile's transition. The implementation of this model resulted in economic hardships, rising unemployment rates, and the erosion of labor protections, which disproportionately impacted women. In response, women organized themselves into groups dedicated to self-education, self-empowerment, and political mobilization. The feminist movement in Chile emerged to address gender issues and challenge the authoritarian government's rule. The persistence and demands of these women contributed to the democratic transition. Similarly, in Argentina, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, initially a group of apolitical housewives, became a symbol of opposition to the military regime. They demanded answers about their disappeared children and brought international attention to the regime's human rights abuses.⁴⁶

The author draws upon Samuel P. Huntington's categorization of three paths to democratization: replacement, transplacement, and transformation. Replacement refers to a method where resistance efforts debilitate the government, leading to its overthrow and the establishment of democracy. Transplacement involves a mutual agreement between the opposition and the government to initiate democratic reforms. Transformation occurs when political changes are primarily concentrated within the government, driven by emerging factions initiated by the elite.⁴⁷

The analysis aligns with the concepts of replacement and transplacement in Huntington's framework. In Argentina, the regime was weakened by external events and domestic pressures, leading to its replacement. In Chile, a negotiated transition took place as the regime recognized the opposition's persistence and agreed to electoral votes, indicating transplacement.⁴⁸

Overall, the author highlights the instrumental role of women's movements in challenging and bringing down authoritarian regimes in Latin America. Their efforts not only contributed to democratization but also brought attention to gender issues and paved the way for a more inclusive and just society.

⁴⁶ "The Impact of Women's Movements of the Democratic Transition in Chile and Argentina – Ideas for Peace."

⁴⁷ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Alvarez (1990) focused on the role of women's political mobilization in the democratization process in Brazil during the 1980s. She observed how women's activism and demands for gender equality contributed to the broader struggle for democracy in Brazil. The article proposes that there are various ways in which women's rights and democratization intersect, including the following:

- Women's involvement in politics and decision-making can lead to governance that is more inclusive and representative.
- Gender equality can contribute to reducing social and economic inequalities, which can enhance political stability and aid in resolving conflicts.
- Promoting women's rights and gender equality can help advance human rights in general, which is a vital element of democratic governance.
- Women's activism and their advocacy for gender equality can challenge authoritarian regimes and encourage democratic values and practices.⁴⁹

In general, scholarly research highlights the significance of advocating for women's rights and gender equality in the democratization process. These measures are essential to achieve more inclusive and representative governance, mitigate corruption, encourage good governance, and foster human rights more broadly.

According to Shireen Hassim (2006), the South African women's movement achieved remarkable success during the transition to democracy. In contrast to other African countries, women in South Africa did not experience marginalization during this period. The text highlights how gender equality concerns were integrated into democratic discussions, resulting in increased political participation for women and the establishment of institutions to protect their interests. Notably, women's activism played a crucial role in ensuring the inclusion of gender equality provisions in the Constitution. Despite initial challenges and leadership shortcomings, the women's movement in South Africa managed to break away from a nationalist framework and advocate for its own feminist agenda. Hassim identifies three key factors that contributed to its success: the opportunities presented by the transition to democracy, the establishment of an independent organization known as the Women's National Coalition, and the prior struggle for equality within political organizations involved in negotiations. The transition to democracy provided feminists with the space to challenge traditional nationalist perspectives on women's roles and push for gender equality within a

⁴⁹ Alvarez, Sonia E. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics*, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780691023250>.

liberal democratic state. The Women's National Coalition served as a platform for voicing independent demands and gained strength through its autonomy, as well as the support of women within the African National Congress (ANC).⁵⁰

The exploration of new forms of protest and political participation by women is a subject that has garnered attention in the literature. Scholars have examined the inventive strategies employed by women to intervene in public discourse and increase their visibility during a politically arid period.

One notable example (Yeşim Arat, Şevket Pamuk 2019) of these innovative approaches was the organization of an open-air festival in front of a Byzantine church in Istanbul. This festival, viewed as a creative act of resistance, provided women with a platform to express their grievances and assert their presence in the public sphere. It served as a powerful demonstration of their determination to challenge societal norms and demand gender equality.

Another noteworthy initiative took the form of a temporary museum exhibition in 1988. This exhibition showcased the subjugation of women in daily life, shedding light on the oppressive structures that permeated society. By curating this exhibition, women sought to raise awareness and ignite discussions surrounding gender inequality, inviting viewers to critically reflect on the lived experiences of women.

In 1989, the purple needle campaign emerged as yet another inventive approach to address the issue of sexual harassment. Through this campaign, feminists distributed needles adorned with purple ribbons, transforming the traditional symbol of women's domestic work and income generation into a potent defense mechanism. By recontextualizing the needle as a tool for protection, the campaign not only aimed to empower women but also drew attention to the urgent need for societal change.⁵¹

The conception of Central Asia as a multifaceted region poses significant challenges for the formation of a region-wide women's movement. Simpson (2006) have noted that Central Asian 'traditions' were perceived to hinder the development of a robust civic realm following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such assumptions reinforce the perception of Central Asia as a transitioning and developing space, bounded by distinct cultural boundaries. Central Asia is characterized by its Asian, Eastern, post-Soviet, developing, and democratizing aspects, which complicate the unity and cohesion necessary for such a movement to emerge. Additionally, the

⁵⁰ *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*, 2006.

⁵¹ Arat and Pamuk, *Turkey Between Democracy and Authoritarianism*.

liberal view of civil society, espoused by democracy and development initiatives, tends to reject the Eastern elements of Central Asianness within the context of globalizing gender politics. Consequently, women in the region share similar experiences and problems stemming from strictly differentiated and hierarchical gender roles, as well as societal issues such as corruption, hospitality, and poverty, which are often attributed to their Central Asianness.⁵² The complex nature of the region's identity and the reinforcement of cultural boundaries create barriers to solidarity and collective action among women's organizations in Central Asia.

The literature indicates that these unconventional campaigns led by women played a significant role in challenging the prevailing power structures and amplifying women's voices in a politically restrictive era. By adopting creative methods of political participation, women were able to navigate the limitations imposed on them and assert their agency within the public sphere. These campaigns not only captured the attention of the public but also initiated crucial conversations about gender equality and women's rights.

The mobilization of women during democratization processes has emerged as a vital catalyst for the successful attainment of democratization. Throughout various historical contexts, women have demonstrated their significant impact in shaping democratic systems, promoting equality, and fostering social progress. By actively participating in political movements, advocating for their rights, and challenging oppressive norms and structures, women have played an indispensable role in dismantling autocratic regimes and paving the way for democratic transitions. Their mobilization has not only expanded the inclusivity and diversity of political representation but has also stimulated a broader societal transformation by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. Recognizing the invaluable contributions of women during democratization processes is crucial in understanding the multifaceted nature of democratic development and ensuring the sustainability of democratic societies in the future. Therefore, empowering and supporting women's mobilization is not only a matter of gender equality but an essential component for the progress, stability, and legitimacy of democratization efforts worldwide.

⁵² Simpson, "Local Strategies in Globalizing Gender Politics: Women's Organizing in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan1."

CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 Islamic Context

Central Asia boasts a rich and diverse history, with civilizations flourishing along the Silk Road and cultural exchanges taking place among various empires and nomadic tribes. However, traditional gender roles and norms have often limited the opportunities and autonomy of women in Central Asian societies. These norms, deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, have influenced the social, economic, and legal frameworks that shape women's lives.

The objective of this chapter is to shed light on the historical trajectory of women's rights in Central Asia by analyzing key events, practices, and ideologies that have shaped the status of women in the region. By examining historical developments, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and progress made in advancing gender equality.

Central Asia has been home to vibrant civilizations and powerful empires throughout history. Prior to the arrival of Islam in the region, various nomadic and sedentary cultures thrived, each with their own unique social and gender dynamics. Women generally held important roles within their communities, participating in economic activities, tribal governance, and cultural practices. Notable examples include the powerful Scythian women who played significant roles in politics and warfare.⁵³

The arrival of Islam in Central Asia during the 8th and 9th centuries CE brought about significant changes to gender relations in the region. Islam emerged as the predominant religion in the region. Notably, the southern region of Central Asia witnessed the earliest conversions to Islam which can be attributed to the high volume of trade along the Silk Road. This area, inhabited by the Tajiks and Uzbeks, embraced Islam nearly a millennium ago, reflecting the profound impact of the religion on their society and cultural fabric. For these southern Central Asian communities, Islam became an integral part of their identity and way of life long before the Russian Empire's annexation of the region. The arrival of the empire marked an attempt to exert influence over the spiritual practices of the local population. However, the region had already established a deep-rooted connection to Islam, which significantly shaped the religious and cultural landscape.

⁵³ Smith, M. A., Patrick Scott. "Scythian Women." World History Encyclopedia, June 15, 2021. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1783/scythian-women/>.

Conversely, the spread of Islam to the steppe regions in the north, inhabited by the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, experienced a more protracted trajectory. The influence of Islam reached these communities at a considerably slower pace compared to their southern counterparts. The unique geographical and cultural factors in the steppe regions may have contributed to the delayed adoption of Islam among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs.

Pre-Islamic religious cults gradually assimilated into Islam over time, resulting in a nuanced fusion of religious and traditional customs. Shamanism, characterized by ancient beliefs and practices, already had a strong presence in Central Asia. Even after Islam became the dominant religion, shamanistic traditions persisted, particularly among nomadic communities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This has led to the coexistence of Islamic beliefs with the continued significance of their former religious customs. This is sometimes referred to as “folk Islam.” Folk Islam does not play as large of a role in the spirituality of the Tajik people due to their considerably longer history with Islam (Hanks 2005, 362).⁵⁴

The religious landscape in Central Asia comprises an intricate web of practices and beliefs that continue to hold a significant place in the lives of women. Women in shamanistic traditions held crucial roles as mystics, priests, and traditional healers, challenging traditional gender norms and providing them with agency and influence. The significance of their nomadic customs has fostered an atmosphere that grants women greater autonomy. Beliefs centered around female spirits associated with fertility, ancestors, and household, as well as female saints like Ambar-ona and Bibi-Seshambe, are prevalent. Women often turn to amulets, undertake pilgrimages to sacred sites, and participate in women-centric rituals and vigils. These religious expressions, alongside perceived sexual segregation and social norms within Islam, have contributed to the perception of a distinct "women's religion" in Central Asia.⁵⁵

Islamic teachings introduced new norms regarding women's modesty, marriage, and family life. While some interpretations emphasized equitable treatment of women, others adopted more conservative views that limited their roles and rights. Practices such as seclusion, the adoption of the veil (parandja), arranged marriages, polygamy, and the practice of bride price (kalym) were prevalent, justified by sharia law with the intention of "protecting" women and upholding their moral and spiritual superiority as mothers, wives, and daughters. The

⁵⁴ Hanks, Reuel R. *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Global Studies (ABC-Clio) Ser., 2005.

⁵⁵ Tolmacheva, M. A. “The Muslim Woman in Soviet Central Asia.” *Central Asian Survey* 12, no. 4 (January 1993): 531–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939308400836>.

segregation of men and women played a significant role in reinforcing these gender roles and societal norms.

However, it is important to note that the extent of social ritualization of gender segregation varied across regions. Urban areas exhibited more apparent segregation than rural areas, and certain ethnic groups demonstrated different practices. For instance, among the Kyrgyz, women unusually prayed alongside men, while in other ethnic groups, separate mosques were designated for women.

In urban centers, young middle and upper-class women had the opportunity to receive an education in Islamic law, including studying the Quran and classical texts. They were even taught subjects like Persian and mathematics. Additionally, both rural and urban women attended primary schools led by mullahs, where they learned Islamic law, while community elders passed on religious legends and rituals to women. This educational exposure contributed to the spiritual growth of women, empowering them to become spiritual healers, soothsayers, and leaders within their communities.⁵⁶

Within the Islamic framework, certain women held honorary positions as otines, equivalent to mullahs, and their primary role was to disseminate religious teachings. These otines, who came from "religious dynasties," were responsible for providing religious education to women from birth to adulthood. The position was hereditary, highlighting the significance of lineage and family traditions in religious leadership among women.⁵⁷

The status of women today has been altered by this particular historical relationship with Islam. Islam plays a notable role in shaping the identity of culturally Muslim Central Asians. It is an integral part of their ethnic culture and traditions, serving as a moral compass at both the individual and collective level. Despite the era of official atheism that lasted over 70 years, Islam persisted in the lives of Central Asians and has been portrayed as a fundamental component of national identity. State discourses draw upon the region's Islamic history, emphasizing its suppression during Russian and Soviet rule.⁵⁸

Being Muslim and identifying as such is a significant aspect of the identity for Central Asians belonging to culturally Muslim ethnic groups. Islam also serves as the primary pillar of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Fathi, Habiba. "Otines: The Unknown Women Clerics of Central Asian Islam*." *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (March 1997): 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939708400967>.

⁵⁸ Fathi, Habiba. "Gender, Islam, and Social Change in Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (September 2006): 303–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930601022575>.

stability and a source of moral support in a society facing chronic socio-economic challenges. Moreover, it is seen as a guiding force in a political system plagued by numerous issues, including pervasive corruption and a lack of fundamental human rights.⁵⁹ These factors inevitably impact the overall morale of the population.

It is crucial to recognize that social and cultural factors have played a significant role in shaping attitudes towards women in Central Asia. Cultural practices, tribal traditions, and pre-existing social structures influenced the perception of women's roles and rights, which were then interpreted through the lens of Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, the revival of Islamic practice has had implications for the status of women. As Islam gains prominence, traditional gender roles and norms associated with the religion tend to reinforce patriarchal structures within Central Asian societies. This resurgence of Islamic values and practices has led to a reduction in the status and agency of women, as certain interpretations of religious teachings tend to restrict their rights and opportunities within social, economic, and political spheres. The re-emergence of Islam has presented challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.

1.2 Soviet Union Context

The 19th and 20th centuries brought colonial encounters to Central Asia, with the region falling under the influence of various external powers, including the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.

Russian empire conquest for Central Asia began between 1864 and 1895. It is important to note that the establishment of a distinct national identity in the region occurred only after the fall of the Soviet Union, as the concept of nationhood had not fully emerged at the time of Russian imperial conquest.

The decision to expand into Central Asia was driven by multiple factors. The region offered the Russian empire valuable resources and vast fertile land suitable for cultivating cotton, a crucial commodity for Russia.⁶⁰ Some argue that Russia's colonial pursuits were a means of showcasing its power and advancement to the international community, particularly as other nations were also engaged in colonial endeavors during that era.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice in Post-Soviet Central Asia."

⁶⁰ Sahadeo, Jeff. *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780253348203>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The establishment of the Soviet Union (USSR) in the early 20th century brought about significant changes in Central Asia, including the promotion of women's rights. The Soviet Union's approach to gender equality was rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, which emphasized the emancipation of all individuals from social, economic, and gender-based inequalities. This ideology sought to dismantle traditional gender roles and promote women's full participation in all spheres of life.

The Soviet attempt to bring Central Asia under its influence in the early 1920s aimed to modernize the region by eradicating local traditions and significantly reducing or eliminating the impact of Islam on the native population. The Soviet government aimed to impose its communist ideology in Central Asia. Lenin once said that Central Asian Muslim women in the Soviet Union “were the most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved” (Kocaoglu 2009, 171).⁶² Soviet policy specifically targeted the elimination of female subordination in society, what they described as the problem of “Women of the East.”⁶³ The Bolsheviks considered the liberation of women as a crucial part of building socialism and sought to challenge patriarchal and feudal customs that oppressed women. However, the Soviet policy towards Central Asian Muslims exhibited a conflicting attitude that ended up preserving rather than eradicating Islamic culture in the area. It is noteworthy that anti-Islamic measures implemented by the Soviets were largely unsuccessful, as Islam continued to serve as the foundational pillar of Central Asian society.

The 1920s witnessed a significant aspect of Muslim women's attire in Central Asia, characterized by the presence of both hijabs and veils, which held substantial religious and societal significance, symbolizing purity and adherence to tradition. However, the Soviet Union embarked on a deliberate campaign aimed at unveiling women, particularly in urban areas where veiling practices were more prevalent. The act of unveiling was intended to facilitate the integration of women into the workforce, promote their economic independence, and serve as a symbolic assault on Islamic culture, showcasing the perceived triumph of Soviet influence.

This period also witnessed a tragic incident in 1928 that underscored the profound consequences associated with this societal shift. Reports emerged regarding a distressing event in Uzun village, where a resident took the lives of his wife and mother-in-law. Their offense

⁶² Kocaoglu, Timur. "The Past as Prologue? Challenging the Myth of the Subordinate, Docile Woman in Muslim Central Eurasia." *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia* (2009): 169-208.

⁶³ DeYoung and Constantine, “Re-Gendered Education and Society in the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Central Asia.”

was their decision to discard the veil, an action perceived as a direct challenge to established cultural norms and religious beliefs.

Consequently, the state leadership actively participated in the campaign against the veil within the region, positioning the act of wearing it as synonymous with counter-revolutionary activities and framing the issue as a struggle for women's rights. This effort culminated in a significant decision by the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR in 1930. The decision stipulated those murders committed within the context of women's emancipation, especially among Eastern peoples, would be considered counter-revolutionary crimes, subject to the provisions outlined in Article 8 of the Regulations on State Crimes.⁶⁴

By the end of the same year, the veil had not only become uncommon but had altogether vanished from everyday life. This marked a critical milestone in the process of empowering women in Central Asia, as they unveiled their faces and gradually assumed fully integrated roles within society, at least during the existence of the USSR.

The contrasting dynamics between the significant role women played in upholding religious faith within their families and communities and the increasing opportunities available to them in public life underscored the complex and contradictory nature of women's experiences within the Soviet system.

There was a perception that Central Asian women adhered to traditional and conservative values, while Soviet women were seen as progressive and secular. The process of sovietization aimed to transform the former into the latter. However, those who successfully made the transition, particularly the secular intelligentsia, found themselves marginalized within their own society. They were viewed as complicit in implementing an unfamiliar ideology imposed by a colonizing nation.⁶⁵

The Soviets recognized the potential for increased economic outputs by involving women in the workforce. This inclusion of women was seen as a means to enhance productivity and contribute to the overall economic development of Central Asia. Moreover, women were considered a powerful political force whose support for the Soviet regime could serve the

⁶⁴ Черта. "Паранджа Как Символ Свободы. Как в СССР Женщин Принуждали Быть Равными Мужчинам — Черта," n.d. <https://cherta.media/story/parandzha-kak-simvol-svobody-kak-v-sssr-zhenshin-prinuzhdali-byt-ravnymi-muzhchinam/>.

⁶⁵ Corcoran-Nantes, Yvonne. *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9781842775370>.

interests of Soviet policymakers. The Soviet authorities saw the involvement of women as a way to bolster their political influence and consolidate their power in the region.⁶⁶

In their efforts to promote the Soviet narrative as liberators, the Soviets actively depicted Central Asian women as suppressed individuals in need of liberation. This portrayal served a dual purpose: firstly, it aimed to highlight the Soviet regime as champions of freedom for oppressed women and marginalized communities in Central Asia. Secondly, it was employed to establish and reinforce the Soviet identity. By presenting themselves as liberators, the Soviets sought to project the superiority of their socialist ideology to the international community.⁶⁷

The USSR implemented a comprehensive legal framework to protect women's rights in Central Asia. The 1918 Family Code was a significant milestone, granting women legal equality in marriage and divorce, abolishing polygamy, and recognizing women's rights to property and inheritance. Additionally, the 1920 Labor Code ensured equal pay for equal work and provided maternity benefits, aiming to safeguard women's economic rights and support their role as mothers.

In the realm of education, the Soviet Union made remarkable strides towards providing equal access for both boys and girls in Central Asia. The establishment of schools and universities expanded educational opportunities, enabling women to pursue higher education and professional careers. This shift was instrumental in challenging traditional gender norms that had previously restricted women's educational prospects.

Soviet policies were also geared towards integrating women into the labor force and promoting economic independence. Women were actively encouraged to enter diverse sectors such as industry, agriculture, healthcare, and education. State-sponsored campaigns aimed at promoting women's employment facilitated their access to professions that had traditionally been dominated by men. These efforts contributed to a broader vision of gender equality and empowerment in the region.

In terms of political participation, the Soviet Union actively encouraged women's engagement and recognized their rights as citizens. In the 1930s, Central Asian women were granted the right to vote and hold public office, which paved the way for their increased representation in political institutions. Women assumed leadership roles as members of

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*.

parliament, government officials, and party representatives, thereby challenging prevailing gender norms and contributing to a more inclusive political landscape.

To further advance women's rights and address gender-specific issues, the Soviet Union established women's organizations such as the Zhenotdel and the Communist Party. The Zhenotdel's activities provided opportunities for political recruitment, sponsorship of education and training, and the professional development of women in the labor market. These organizations played a crucial role in promoting women's rights, advocating for gender equality, and addressing the specific needs of women in Central Asia. They provided a platform for women's activism and facilitated their engagement in public life, creating opportunities for women to voice their concerns and push for change.

The Zhenotdel aimed to achieve universal literacy and provided comprehensive education and training programs. According to reports, the literacy rates among rural women in 1926 were recorded as follows: 9.1% in Kazakhstan, 4.6% in Kyrgyzstan, 0.3% in Tajikistan, 1.1% in Turkmenistan, and 1.0% in Uzbekistan. However, by 1939, the situation had significantly improved, with literacy rates among rural women in Kazakhstan reaching 63.3%, 60.5% in Kyrgyzstan, 63.3% in Tajikistan, 53.4% in Turkmenistan, and 57% in Uzbekistan. Women's clubs, literacy schools, and "red corners" were established to promote political education and consciousness-raising among women. These initiatives led to the emergence of indigenous female activists, and strong connections were established between urban and rural women's organizations. (ССЫЛКА)

Despite the progressive policies introduced by the Soviet Union, challenges in their implementation were encountered. Local customs deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions, and resistance to change hindered the full realization of gender equality. In some instances, discrepancies existed between the legal frameworks and the actual practices on the ground, necessitating further efforts to bridge the gap and ensure effective implementation.

For example, families refused to recognize Soviet law in personal matters such as marriage. They found ways to circumvent the laws, often with the complicity of local officials. Although Soviet laws banned under-age marriage, the practice persisted as families disregarded the requirement for medical examinations to confirm age. Women, especially mothers and elder sisters, would participate in official marriage ceremonies instead of young girls. Polygamy continued among privileged individuals, including some Soviet officials who privately adhered to Islamic traditions.

Other traditional practices like the payment of kalym and divorce procedures were also subverted. The kalym was no longer paid in cash but in the form of non-monetary gifts, enabling its continuation. Divorce, which was difficult for women to obtain under Islamic law, became more accessible under Soviet law. However, divorced women faced social ostracization and were often considered outsiders in their communities.

The Soviet Union attempted to undermine the influence of Islam by replacing traditional courts with Soviet courts and training women as judges. However, Islamic judges employed in the Soviet courts often subverted the system, delaying or dismissing cases.

Greater gender equality emerged in the 1960s with a new generation raised in the Soviet system. With the passage of time, younger generations, who grew up under the influence of Soviet policies, developed different values and aspirations. They were more inclined towards embracing modern lifestyles, consumerism, and Western cultural influences. This generational shift further contributed to the decline of traditional practices and the rise of a more secular and modern outlook. Another crucial factor on the decline in the popularity of Islamic and customary traditions in Soviet Union Central Asia is the fact that the Soviet government implemented policies that encouraged industrialization and urbanization in the region. As people moved from rural areas to cities, they were exposed to new lifestyles, ideas, and opportunities. The urban environment provided greater access to education, employment, and cultural diversity, leading to a shift away from traditional practices.

Furthermore, state atheism and secularism propaganda had a significant impact on the replacement of religious beliefs and practices with loyalty to the state and Marxist ideology.

However, critics argue that the Soviet approach to gender equality exhibited a tendency towards gender uniformity, at times overlooking the diverse needs and experiences of women. The ideal Soviet woman was envisioned as embodying various roles concurrently. This encompassed being a successful careerist, a diligent worker, a selfless mother, and a devoted wife. This conception of an exemplary citizen emphasized the collective duty of women towards the state, with motherhood regarded not as a matter of personal choice but as an obligation.

Despite the granting of civil rights to women in the Soviet Union, it is important to acknowledge that patriarchal gender norms persisted and cannot be solely attributed to Islam. While Soviet leaders presented women's emancipation as a model to be admired, the actual experiences of women were far more intricate. This was particularly evident in Central Asia, where women were expected to fulfill multiple roles simultaneously. In addition to their

participation in the labor force, they carried the burdens of childbirth and child-rearing, resulting in significant challenges as they sought to balance their professional and domestic responsibilities.

The emphasis on women's participation in the labor force, while significant, occasionally overshadowed other critical aspects such as reproductive rights and the burden of domestic responsibilities. While Soviet leaders claimed to promote women's emancipation as a model for others to follow, the reality was different for the women directly involved.

Indeed, the subjugation of women assumed an additional dimension, encompassing not only their exploitation within the confines of the family but also their exploitation within the realms of production and public service. The overwhelming majority of women found themselves employed in the national economy, yet their roles were predominantly confined to low-paying and non-prestigious sectors, including healthcare and welfare (82%), information and computing services (80%), public catering (71%), and trade (69%). Women occupying positions of authority, such as directors of factories or institutes, chairpersons of collective farms, or rectors of universities, constituted the exception rather than the norm. These concerns highlight the complexities and nuances inherent in pursuing gender equality within a larger societal context.

Therefore, it is inaccurate to solely attribute the restrictive attitudes towards women in Central Asia to Islam itself. The interplay of various historical, cultural, and religious factors shaped the region's societal norms regarding gender roles and women's rights.

1.2 Post-Soviet Transition

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asian countries gained their independence, marking a new chapter in the region's history. However, the transition to independent nation-states brought its own challenges for women's rights. Economic restructuring, political changes, and the resurgence of conservative ideologies presented obstacles to gender equality. Efforts to balance traditional cultural values with the aspirations for gender equality have been ongoing, with varying degrees of success across the region.

It's important to note that while Soviet socialist propaganda influenced the decline of Islamic and customary traditions, they did not completely eradicate them. Traditional practices and religious beliefs often persisted, especially in rural areas and among older generations. Additionally, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a resurgence of religious practices and a reconnection to cultural traditions in many Central Asian countries, alongside

the adoption of more modern elements. The impact of the Soviet revolution on Central Asian women's emancipation became a subject of debate after independence.

The political transition that unfolded in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse brought about notable shifts in policy frameworks, which had profound implications for women's rights in Central Asia. In certain instances, there was a regression from the progressive policies of the Soviet era, as newly formed governments prioritized national identity and traditional values at the expense of gender equality. This change in policy orientation fostered an environment that reinforced traditional gender roles, impeding the advancements made in women's rights during the Soviet period.

The post-Soviet economic restructuring exacerbated existing gender inequalities. The shift from centrally planned economies to market-oriented systems disproportionately impacted women, particularly those in vulnerable sectors. Job losses, wage disparities, and limited access to resources and capital further entrenched traditional gender divisions within the labor market, reinforcing women's economic dependence and perpetuating patriarchal norms.

After independence, the economic challenges faced by the state resulted in a decline in its capacity to offer child and maternity allowances. While medical care and education were previously provided free of charge, this changed after attaining independence.⁶⁸ The cost of education has emerged as a significant barrier for women's access to schooling. The policies implemented during the Soviet era, such as gender quotas that facilitated women's participation in the public sphere, were swiftly dismantled.

There has been a noticeable decline in women's engagement in formal politics. Although gender quotas were once viewed as a potential means to address gender disparities, their effectiveness in achieving substantial gender equality has come under scrutiny. Instead, the resurgence of traditional values and norms has emerged as a prominent factor influencing gender dynamics and discouraging women from participating in formal political institutions.

Even though there were significant social changes in Central Asian societies, certain aspects of pre-Soviet traditions, particularly in the cultural sphere, were preserved at the individual level. Patriarchal traditions remained prevalent, which had a noticeable impact on the lives of women. While the state intervened to eliminate overt forms of repression against

⁶⁸ Akiner, Shirin. "15 Between tradition and modernity: the dilemma facing contemporary Central Asian women." (1997).

women, certain conservative rituals and the overall patriarchal structure of Islamic practices continued to persist within the private domain.⁶⁹

The resurgence of cultural and religious practices in the post-Soviet era rekindled traditional gender roles. Societal expectations regarding women's behavior, dress, and familial responsibilities became more conservative, often relegating women to subordinate positions within the household. This backlash against perceived "Western" influences and the reassertion of traditional values posed significant challenges to women's rights, curbing their agency and impeding progress towards gender equality.

Central Asian women have not actively expressed their perspectives on their rights to a significant extent. During the Soviet era, their lack of engagement could be attributed to the absence of alternative choices, as they were expected to support official policies. However, even with increased awareness of available options, there has been limited initiative from them to gain more control over their lives and advocate for political, economic, and social demands. Some women's movements briefly emerged in the early 1990s, including Tumaris in Uzbekistan, associated with the opposition party Birlik, and the Muslim Women's Leagues. However, these efforts were short-lived and unsustainable.

Following independence, semi-official Women's Committees, modeled after the Soviet-era women's councils (zhensovet), were established throughout the region. These committees primarily focus on implementing official social welfare policies for women. There are also specialized organizations dedicated to mother and child healthcare, mostly staffed by women, which provide avenues for female participation in public affairs.

Individually, some Central Asian women exercise choice in their lifestyles and careers. A number of them have entered the private sector, becoming successful entrepreneurs. Regional Businesswomen's Associations have also emerged, albeit with a primary focus on general business concerns rather than specific women's issues. Some women pursue educational or professional opportunities abroad, occasionally for extended periods. In larger cities, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, younger women who have spent significant time studying or working away from home have distanced themselves from their families and kin networks in favor of a more independent existence, often delaying or rejecting marriage.

⁶⁹ Chenoy, Anuradha M. "Islam, women and identity in contemporary Central Asia." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1996): 516-518.

While these examples may seem relatively insignificant compared to developments in other parts of the former Soviet Union, they remain exceptional within the Central Asian region. The majority of women have not demonstrated a strong inclination to challenge the societal limitations imposed upon them. Outsiders often perceive this apparent lack of motivation as indicative of "backwardness" necessitating liberation for Central Asian women. However, Central Asian women themselves have a different perspective. They see themselves as integral parts of a connected whole, understanding that altering one aspect will impact the entire system. Although they recognize that their situation is not perfect and share grievances common to women elsewhere, they also perceive benefits, such as supportive communities alongside social constraints.⁷⁰

The emergence of violence against women, including domestic violence, emerged as a pressing concern in the post-Soviet period. The erosion of legal protections and the normalization of gender-based violence fostered a climate of impunity. Traditional norms that perpetuated notions of male dominance and control within relationships further increased women's vulnerability to various forms of abuse. The absence of comprehensive legislation, limited access to support services, and social stigma served as additional obstacles in addressing this critical issue effectively.

When examining women's rights in the post-Soviet period, it is imperative to consider the experiences of marginalized groups. Women from ethnic minorities, rural areas, and low-income backgrounds encountered intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion. Their struggles often intersected with gender-based discrimination, exacerbating the obstacles they faced in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

In the midst of a dynamic transformation, the movement for gender equality and female liberation emerged in Central Asia. This campaign aimed to secure equal rights for women in various aspects of life, such as the law, household, education, and employment. It's important to note that this struggle was not isolated, but part of a larger process and was reinforced by concurrent reforms. Practical measures were implemented to give substance to these new rights and provide women with opportunities. However, despite improvements in facilities and the increased visibility of Central Asian women in public life, traditional gender norms continued to dominate in private settings. The influence of Soviet-style modernity was accepted but adapted to accommodate traditional social order. Central Asian women found themselves torn between two conflicting impulses – some wished to reconnect with traditional domestic duties,

⁷⁰ Corcoran-Nantes, Yvonne. *Lost voices: Central Asian women confronting transition*. Zed Books, 2005.

while others sought greater personal independence and freedom of choice. Most, however, desired to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity, achieved slowly and sometimes painfully during the Soviet era. The current dilemma faced by Central Asian women, where they partially identify with both value systems but not entirely, can only be understood in the context of a rapid transition from a pre-modern to a modern society, which was externally imposed and not fully embraced internally.⁷¹

Since gaining independence, Central Asian countries have prioritized elevating the societal status of women, protecting their rights and interests, and enhancing their working and living conditions. All five Central Asian countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. The adoption of these laws and commitment to international norms on gender equality is driven by the pressure to integrate into the Western world and gain prestige in the international community.⁷² Consequently, the treatment of women has emerged as a prominent focus of public policy and strategic initiatives. In the present era of globalization, the preservation of women's rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests assumes an even greater significance. Particularly, the imperative to enhance the socio-economic and political engagement of women has become a pressing requirement of our time. Aware of the importance of being recognized globally, the newly formed nations adhered to global standards while formulating their constitutions. In this process, they all incorporated a provision affirming the equality of rights between men and women. This decision was not solely influenced by external pressures, but also stemmed from the Soviet system's influence, which had established legal gender equality and embraced various practices promoting gender egalitarianism.⁷³ However, the existence of laws protecting women's inheritance, right to divorce, and right to monogamy in these countries highlights the gap between theory and practice, indicating weak implementation of gender equality policies at the state level.⁷⁴ The enforcement of these laws often contradicts customary practices, leading to a disconnect between legal provisions and the lived experiences of women.⁷⁵ While Central Asian countries have implemented family law codes that align with international standards, these codes do not necessarily reflect the actual status of women's rights

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Güneş-Ayata, Ayşe, Ayça Ergun, Linda Racioppi, and Katherine O'Sullivan. "Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia." (2009): 209.

⁷³ Kamp, Marianne. "The Soviet legacy and women's rights in Central Asia." *Current History* 115, no. 783 (2016): 270-276.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

or account for the influence of kin groups in the region.⁷⁶ The use of family law codes as a measure of women's rights is deemed inadequate for understanding the complexities of women's experiences in Central Asia. To a certain extent, women's rights have experienced a decline following the collapse of the Soviet regime. Despite the official prohibition of polygamy in all Central Asian nations, there are indications of its resurgence throughout the region.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Kane, Danielle, and Ksenia Gorbenko. "States and women's rights in Central Asia." In *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*. 2011.

⁷⁷ Abashin, Sergei. "Nation-Construction in Post-Soviet Central Asia." *Soviet and post-Soviet identities* (2012): 150-168.

CHAPTER 2 CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

2.1 Gender inequality and discrimination

Complex and rapid changes, ecological and environmental shifts over the past 30 years have brought about some positive changes in certain areas of women's and girls' lives. However, we have also witnessed strong resistance, pushing back against significant achievements in women's rights and the broader advancement of development. Poverty, discrimination, and violence continue to overshadow the lives of women and girls. Insufficient representation in positions of power and decision-making still remains the norm.

The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranked the five Central Asian countries among the lowest when it comes to gender equality. In terms of economic participation and opportunity, only Kazakhstan is relatively close to achieving gender parity, with a score of 0.719. The other countries score significantly lower, with Kyrgyzstan score 0,700 and Tajikistan’s score of 0.663 being the lowest.

The regional gender gap would require 152 years to be completely closed. In the year 2022, Central Asia achieved the fourth-highest regional score among the eight regions, ranking closely behind North America, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷⁸

According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Central Asia is facing significant challenges in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. The report states that women in the region face discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives, including education, employment, and political participation.⁷⁹

Discriminatory social institutions significantly hinder women's ability to participate as equal participants within the family. The unequal distribution of household responsibilities and caregiving duties represents the most prevalent and severe form of discrimination against women within the family domain. The issue is insufficiently acknowledged in legislation, leading to women being frequently limited to their traditional roles in reproduction and caregiving. There is no explicit provision in any country granting women the same rights as men to be recognized as the head of the household. On average, women dedicate around five

⁷⁸ World Economic Forum. “Global Gender Gap Report 2022,” July 13, 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>.

⁷⁹ UNDP. “Annual Report 2019 | UNDP,” n.d. <https://annualreport.undp.org/2019>.

hours per day to household tasks, whereas men spend just over two hours on similar responsibilities.⁸⁰

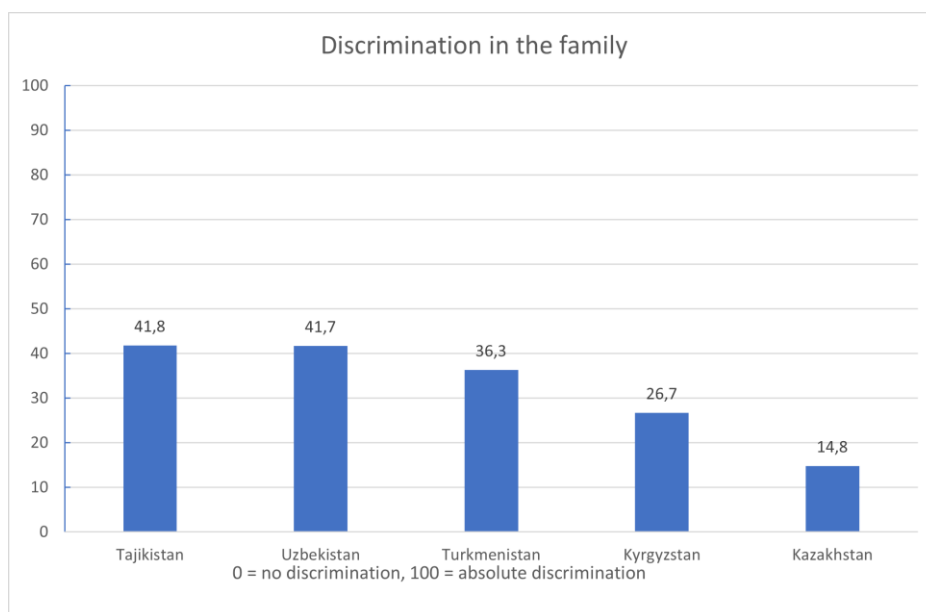


Table 1. Discrimination in the family

Interestingly, the table 1 rankings also indicate that countries within the same region, sharing similar Islamic and colonial heritage, display different levels of discrimination. This suggests that additional factors contribute to the variations in women's rights across nations.

Noticeable discrepancy observed between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan on one hand, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the other. Of particular interest is the assertion made by the authors that the reconsolidation of traditional gender roles has become an integral aspect of the emerging national identity in Uzbekistan (Gunes-Ayata & Ergun, 2009: 215).⁸¹

In Uzbekistan, where men are expected to assume the role of household heads and serve as representatives of their families in public settings. In this context, husbands are explicitly required to exercise dominance over their wives, with men holding the final decision-making authority in all domestic matters. Conversely, gender dynamics in Kazakhstan tend to be more egalitarian in nature. Women actively participate in family decision-making processes, frequently assuming the role of the primary breadwinner within households. Furthermore, both

⁸⁰ Europe and Central Asia | "Europe and Central Asia |," n.d. <https://www.genderindex.org/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/>.

⁸¹ Ayata, Ayşe, and Ayça Ergun Özbolat. 2009. *Gender Politics in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Perspective on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan*. <https://hdl.handle.net/11511/86989>.

men and women engage in open communication and appear together in public, often in mixed-gender groups (Sancak & Finke, 2007).⁸²

In Central Asian countries, women often struggle to pursue their calling as they are required to juggle domestic responsibilities and work. Moreover, only a few girls have the opportunity to study in fields such as engineering, information and communication technologies, construction, transportation, and extractive industries, which are sectors with higher wages. The gender pay gap in the region for performing the same job can range from 30% to 70%.

Women hold less than 30% of leadership positions in small and medium-sized enterprises and less than 20% in large companies. Overall, in the region, a smaller proportion of women compared to men among the working-age population are engaged in employment.⁸³

Women face numerous barriers when accessing leadership positions, with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan exhibiting the most significant gender disparities, as indicated by the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) developed by the OECD (Table 1). In these countries, men overwhelmingly dominate top management positions, with men holding 93% of such positions in Tajikistan and 88% in Uzbekistan. These figures highlight a substantial underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

Comparatively, Kyrgyzstan demonstrates a relatively higher representation of women in top management positions. Women hold 33% of these roles, while men account for 67%. Although there is still a gender gap, Kyrgyzstan showcases a more balanced distribution in comparison.

Kazakhstan follows a similar pattern, with men occupying 74% of top management positions, and women representing 26%. While there is progress towards gender equality compared to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, a notable gender gap remains in Kazakhstan as well.

⁸² Sancak, Meltem, and Peter Finke. "Konstitutsiya buzildi!: gender relations in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan." In *Everyday life in Central Asia: past and present*, pp. 160-177. Indiana University Press, 2007.

⁸³ World Bank Blogs. "Женщинам Центральной Азии: Спасибо За Вдохновение!," March 8, 2021. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/inspiring-women-central-asia-thank-you>.

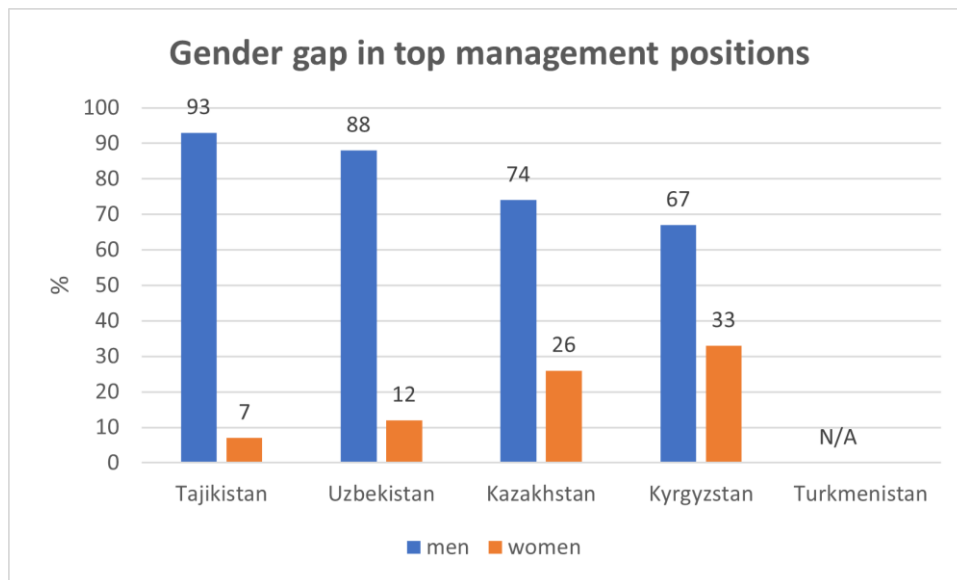


Table 1. Gender gap in top management positions

The term "glass ceiling" was coined in the 1970s to describe the intangible barriers, including attitudes and organizational practices, that hinder women from reaching top leadership positions. In the 1990s, the concept of "glass walls" was introduced, highlighting the gender bias that restricts women's involvement in areas deemed less significant, even if they hold leadership roles.

It was believed that with equal education, experience, skills, career aspirations, and working alongside men, women would have an equal opportunity to advance in their careers. However, studies have consistently shown a significant underrepresentation of women in top management positions. Despite the absence of overt barriers, women perceive an invisible and unbreakable "glass ceiling" obstructing their path to leadership.⁸⁴

This term accurately reflects the fact that obstacles preventing women from occupying high-level directive positions are often implicit, making it difficult to fight against them both officially and unofficially. These obstacles can include a simple numerical predominance of men among employees, unwritten rules, traditions, and norms of behavior, the cumulative result of relationships and contacts developed over many years, as well as long-standing and deep-rooted perceptions of the roles of women and men in society.

Stereotypes about women's aspirations, self-esteem, and biased evaluations of their abilities further limit their opportunities and create a psychological barrier to accessing

⁸⁴ Investopedia. "The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History, Effects, and Examples," October 19, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glass-ceiling.asp>.

managerial positions. Women tackling issues also face heightened public scrutiny, with a focus on appearance, marital status, and personal life, unlike male candidates. Such gossip and superficial assessments make it difficult to view women as serious professionals or politicians in practice.

The presence of discriminatory factors and distortions in the labor market results in women experiencing a greater degree of economic insecurity than their male counterparts. Despite the high levels of education among women in Central Asian countries, their labor market experiences differ significantly from those of men. Women tend to have a higher likelihood of working in informal sectors characterized by irregular working hours and unfavorable policies towards employees with family responsibilities.⁸⁵

The data presented in Table 2 reveals varying levels of gender disparities in labor force participation across Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan demonstrate relatively balanced representation between men and women, indicating fewer gaps in labor participation based on gender. However, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan exhibit more significant gender gaps, suggesting a disparity in the number of men and women participating in the labor force.

While these gender gaps in labor force participation contribute to the overall issue of gender inequality, it is important to note that even in countries with relatively balanced representation, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, women still face a wage gap. Globally, women earn, on average, around 80% of men's earnings. In Central Asia, this wage gap is even more pronounced. In Tajikistan, working women earn approximately 60% of what men earn, while in Uzbekistan, the figure is 61%. In the Kyrgyz Republic, women earn about 75% of men's earnings, and in Kazakhstan, the gap is 78%.⁸⁶

These statistics highlight that regardless of the disparities in labor force participation due to discrimination, women in Central Asia consistently earn less money than their male counterparts. This suggests that gender-based discrimination and bias extend beyond labor force participation and directly impact women's earning potential, further exacerbating the issue of gender inequality in the region.

⁸⁵ 2020 GEM Report. "Progress towards Gender Parity in Education Is Undeniable - 2020 GEM Report," n.d. <https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/gender-report/progress-towards-gender-parity-in-education-is-undeniable/>.

⁸⁶ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/faster-growth-central-asia-must-confront-biased-perceptions-about-value-womens>

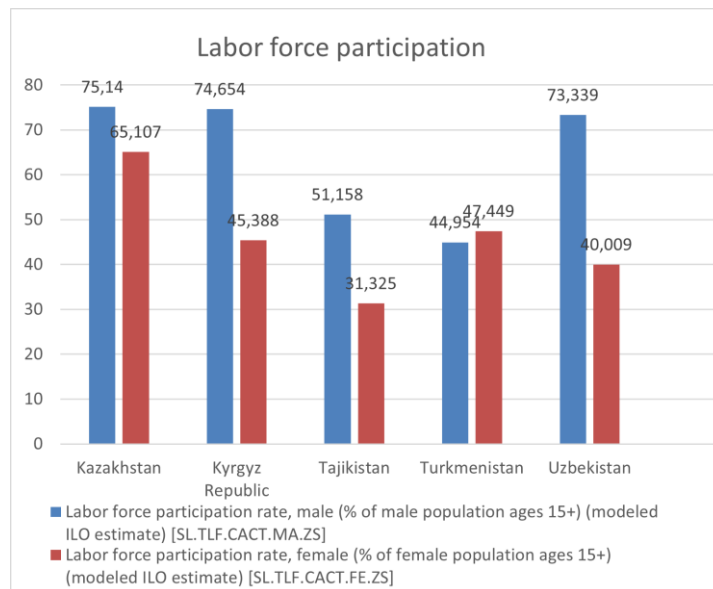


Table 2 Labor force participation

The full participation of women in society, including the opportunity to fully realize their potential, contributes to the diversification and dynamic development of the labor market. In countries with higher levels of gender equality, the per capita income and economic growth rates are higher, while in Central Asian countries, traditionally low-paid work and low female employment prevail. If women in Central Asia worked and earned on par with men, the increase in national income in these countries would range from 27% in Kazakhstan to 63% in Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, eliminating the gender pay gap for working women and men would lift over 700,000 people out of poverty.

One of the first steps in addressing these issues should be the elimination of legal barriers to equality, and the governments of several countries in the region are already taking measures in this regard. Last year, Uzbekistan became the first country in Central Asia, along with 95 other countries worldwide and almost all high-income countries, to introduce a mandatory requirement for equal pay for equal work for men and women. In all Central Asian countries, there are lists of legally prohibited professions for women. They primarily relate to the fields of metalworking, construction, metallurgy, and manufacturing. The list of prohibited professions can reach up to 400 occupations. For comparison, in Armenia, Georgia, most European Union countries, the United States, Canada, and other countries, such restrictions do not exist. In 2021, Kazakhstan abolished the list of "prohibited professions for women." Other

Central Asian countries, where women are still not allowed to engage in certain types of professional activities, should also lift all such restrictions.⁸⁷

2.1 Gender based violence

One of the main challenges that women in Central Asia face is gender-based violence. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, violence against women is widespread in the region, and the authorities often fail to take action to protect women from violence (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Another report by the UNDP states that one in three women in Central Asia has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (UNDP, 2019).⁸⁸

In Central Asia, the issue of domestic violence is highly prevalent. According to the OECD, Central Asian countries reported some of the highest GBV rates in the world, with over 20% of women reporting that they had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV).⁸⁹

According to Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottmoeller (2002), who conducted a comprehensive study on gender-based violence, various factors contribute to the likelihood of intimate partner abuse perpetrated by men. These factors operate at different levels, including the individual, family and relationship, community, and societal levels.

At the individual level, research has consistently highlighted several influential factors. One such factor is a history of childhood abuse or exposure to marital violence, which has been found to significantly increase the probability of an individual engaging in abusive behavior towards their partner. Additionally, the presence of an absent or rejecting father figure has been associated with a higher risk of perpetrating intimate partner abuse. Moreover, frequent alcohol consumption has been identified as a significant contributing factor at the individual level.

Moving to the family and relationship level, cross-cultural studies have pointed to specific dynamics that serve as strong predictors of abuse. Notably, male control of wealth and decision-making within the family has been consistently linked to increased instances of abuse.

⁸⁷ World Bank Blogs. “Оплата Женского Труда в Центральной Азии: Долой Дискриминационные Стереотипы,” March 7, 2023. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/faster-growth-central-asia-must-confront-biased-perceptions-about-value-womens>.

⁸⁸ UNDP. “Annual Report 2019 | UNDP,” n.d. <https://annualreport.undp.org/2019>.

⁸⁹ World Bank Blogs. “Reducing the Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Europe and Central Asia Requires Changing the Norms That Support It,” December 12, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/reducing-prevalence-gender-based-violence-europe-and-central-asia-requires>.

Furthermore, marital conflicts have emerged as a key factor that heightens the likelihood of intimate partner abuse across diverse cultural contexts.

Zooming out to the community level, researchers have underscored the importance of social factors in shaping the prevalence of intimate partner abuse. Women's isolation and lack of social support have been found to be associated with higher rates of violence. Moreover, the influence of male peer groups cannot be understated, as these groups often condone and legitimize men's violent behavior, thereby fostering an environment conducive to abuse.

Expanding further to the societal level, studies conducted worldwide have elucidated the contextual factors that contribute to the perpetration of intimate partner abuse. One such factor is the presence of rigidly defined and enforced gender roles, which create an environment where violence against women is more common. Moreover, societies that associate masculinity with qualities such as toughness, male honor, or dominance exhibit higher rates of abuse. Cultural norms that tolerate physical punishment of women and children, accept violence as a means to settle disputes, and foster the perception of men having ownership over women further contribute to the prevalence of abuse.⁹⁰

In Central Asian societies, traditional gender roles and norms play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of intimate partner abuse. Gender inequality and patriarchal structures are often deeply entrenched, which can perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to higher rates of abuse. Additionally, notions of honor and shame are influential factors in this region. The perceived threat to male honor or the need to maintain family reputation may lead to an increase in violence against women, particularly in cases of suspected infidelity or behaviors considered inappropriate within the cultural context.

The persistence of patriarchal values, both among the perpetrators and within the affected women themselves, poses a significant obstacle in addressing gender-based violence. Abusers, family members, health professionals, police, and judges often shift the blame and burden of violence onto the victims. Women are frequently questioned about their own actions that led to the abuse they experienced, and they are coerced into refraining from reporting the incidents due to various concerns such as the well-being of their children, public perception, and financial stability of their families. Gender biases are prevalent among numerous

⁹⁰ Heise, L, M Ellsberg, and M Gottmoeller. "A Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence." *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 78 (April 25, 2002): S5–14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292\(02\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292(02)00038-3).

individuals within the law enforcement and criminal justice system, which continues to be predominantly male-oriented.

A survey conducted in Turkmenistan revealed that 12% of women aged 18-59 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former spouse or partner. This means that approximately one in every eight women in the country who are or have been married or in a relationship have encountered such abuse. In Kazakhstan, the figure stands at 16.5%, while in Kyrgyzstan it is 26.6%, in Tajikistan it is 26.4%, and for Uzbekistan, the data is not available (N/A).⁹¹

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the number of domestic violence cases and increased the number of victims, including fatalities. For example, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, domestic violence incidents increased by almost 40% in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. In Bishkek alone, reports of domestic violence at the beginning of 2020 increased by 62% compared to 2019. In Tajikistan, over 10 cases received media coverage in 2019 involving women who committed suicide along with their children due to domestic violence. Similarly, in December 2020, three cases of suicide among women in Kyrgyzstan were registered, all motivated by domestic violence.⁹²

The issue of domestic violence in Central Asia is deeply entrenched within traditional norms and societal expectations, which perpetuate violence against women. Gender inequality and prevailing attitudes that reinforce male authority and female submission contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence. While laws exist to criminalize such acts, gaps in legislation and weak enforcement pose significant barriers to effective protection for survivors. The lack of robust provisions addressing domestic violence and inadequate response from law enforcement discourage reporting and create a climate of impunity.

Laws aimed at creating a safe environment for women often prioritize the preservation of family values over preventing violence and safeguarding women's rights.

Domestic and psychological violence have been decriminalized in five countries, resulting in such cases being considered under administrative articles rather than criminal liability. As a consequence, the punishment for the aggressor is often limited to a fine, which

⁹¹ Turkmenistan. "Turkmenistan," n.d. <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/turkmenistan>.

⁹² Борьба с насилием в отношении женщин в Центральной Азии: новые законы, старые практики. "Борьба с Насилием в Отношении Женщин в Центральной Азии: Новые Законы, Старые Практики," n.d. <https://paperlab.kz/borba-s-nasiliem-v-otnoshenii-zhenshchin>.

the victim herself is left to pay from the family budget. Statistics indicate that the perpetrators, who are predominantly unemployed, are frequently cohabitants or husbands of the victims.

In Kazakhstan, domestic violence has been addressed by the Criminal Code since 1997, which imposes penalties ranging from imprisonment of up to 7 years to fines and community service, depending on the severity of the offense. In 2017, several reforms were implemented, leading to the decriminalization of certain articles related to domestic violence, which were then transferred from the Criminal Code to the Code of Administrative Offenses. These changes resulted in reduced fines for domestic crimes and a maximum prison term of 15 days.

In September 2020, a draft law aimed at combating domestic violence and providing stronger protections for women survivors passed its first reading in parliament. However, it was later withdrawn in January 2021 due to the perceived need for further consultations. Subsequently, lawmakers proposed alternative legislation with provisions related to domestic violence. One proposal focuses on preventive measures, initiated by parliament members to strengthen the institution of the family. The other proposal, initiated by the Interior Ministry, seeks to revise, and amend provisions in the criminal and administrative codes.⁹³

In 2020, some changes were made to the "On the Prevention of Domestic Violence" law, which introduced measures to prevent domestic violence and replaced fines with court warnings. Additionally, the provision for reconciliation between the parties, which was previously unavailable if the perpetrator was prosecuted, was reinstated. The intention behind these changes was to strengthen preventive efforts and streamline the accountability process for offenders.

However, the reintroduction of the reconciliation article has had negative consequences for the protection and security of women in the region. This provision has impacted cases involving forced marriages, including those involving underage girls, domestic violence, and sexual coercion. As a result, many cases are not pursued in court and are prematurely closed under the pretext of "reconciliation of the parties." This situation is concerning, considering the high number of reported domestic violence cases in Kazakhstan, where only a small percentage actually reach the court system.

⁹³ Kazakhstan: Revise Draft Laws to Better Protect Women | Human Rights Watch. "Kazakhstan: Revise Draft Laws to Better Protect Women," March 7, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/07/kazakhstan-revise-draft-laws-better-protect-women>.

The lack of specific legislation addressing domestic violence as a distinct crime, coupled with the potential for cases to be closed through reconciliation, poses significant challenges to effectively combatting domestic violence and ensuring the safety and well-being of women in Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyzstan stands out as the pioneering country in Central Asia, having enacted a law specifically addressing domestic violence, namely the "Law on Protection and Defense against Domestic Violence" in 2017. This legislation represents a significant step forward in combating domestic violence compared to other countries in the region. Prior to its adoption, law enforcement agencies were only able to take action based on the victim's statement. However, the new law empowers them to intervene in cases of violence based on the testimony of witnesses or medical professionals.

The law introduces several crucial provisions to protect victims. It allows for the issuance of a three-day protection order, which can be extended to a month, effectively restraining the perpetrator from contacting the victim. Furthermore, the legislation mandates the implementation of a state-sponsored correctional program for offenders, alongside punitive measures. These initiatives reflect the state's prioritization of safeguarding women and children from violence and cruelty.⁹⁴

Despite these progressive measures, the incidence of domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan continues to rise steadily, suggesting that the official statistics do not fully capture the true extent of the problem. The issue of domestic violence remains a significant concern, and combating it remains a key focus of the state's social policy.

On an international level, Kyrgyzstan is recognized for its efforts to align with legal and democratic principles. However, in practice, deeply ingrained biased stereotypes regarding women persist, hindering the effective implementation of measures aimed at combating domestic violence.

Until 2019, Uzbekistan lacked laws protecting victims of domestic violence. In that year, the laws "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" and "On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" were adopted. The former emphasizes the unacceptability of discrimination based on sex in various areas and provides explanations

⁹⁴ UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. “Central Asian Countries Come Together to Combat Gender-Based Violence,” November 30, 2022. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2022/11/central-asian-countries-come-together-to-combat-gender-based-violence>.

of key terms related to gender equality. The latter ensures that victims of domestic violence receive assistance from law enforcement agencies, including free economic, social, psychological, medical, and legal support through centers or a free hotline. The law also allows victims to request a protection order and report violations. A protection order can be issued for a maximum of 30 days, providing security to women and children and preventing the consequences of domestic violence. Violating the protection order can result in fines or up to 15 days of administrative arrest for the perpetrator. Furthermore, the aggressor is prohibited from possessing or carrying civilian weapons while the order is in effect.

Since 2013, Tajikistan has implemented the law "On the Prevention of Violence in the Family." According to this law, a protective order can be issued to the perpetrator for up to 15 days upon the first complaint, prohibiting any violent actions against the victim. In case of repeated offenses, the perpetrator can be administratively detained for 15 days, and fines are imposed for violating the requirements of the protective order. However, like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, domestic violence is not criminalized by this law.

The underreporting of domestic violence incidents in Central Asia is a critical and pervasive issue, driven by various factors such as fear of retaliation, social stigma, and a lack of trust in the justice system. Victim-blaming attitudes prevalent in society further discourage survivors from seeking help or reporting their experiences. Economic factors also contribute significantly to the perpetuation of domestic violence, as many women in the region face financial dependency on their abusive partners, which limits their options for escape and independence. Limited access to education and employment opportunities further exacerbates their vulnerability.

In Central Asia, there is a lack of comprehensive support services for survivors of domestic violence, including shelters, counseling, legal aid, and rehabilitation programs. Insufficient resources hinder the provision of adequate assistance to survivors, further exacerbating their challenges.⁹⁵ To effectively address domestic violence, a multi-faceted approach is needed, encompassing legal reforms, improved enforcement, awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms, economic empowerment initiatives, and the establishment of comprehensive support systems.

⁹⁵ World Bank Blogs. "Решение Проблемы Насилия в Отношении Женщин – Важное Условие Для Ускорения Экономического Роста в Центральной Азии," November 25, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/tackling-violence-against-women-essential-economic-growth-central-asia>.

The region exhibits a disconcerting pattern where states lack a unified stance on violence against women and fail to provide comprehensive protection for women's rights under the guise of preserving "traditional values." This phenomenon is prevalent throughout the region, with authorities adopting narratives that portray national "traditional values" and the concept of the "traditional family" as entities deserving protection against the perceived threats of globalization, including human rights and women's rights. As a result, the discourse surrounding these "traditional values," which historically and patriarchally permitted the subjugation of women, is positioned in opposition to laws and regulations designed to safeguard women from domestic violence and uphold their rights within the context of national identity.⁹⁶

For example, the state policy of Uzbekistan regarding the "Protection of the Rights and Legitimate Interests of Women" encompasses little more than measures aimed at "strengthening the institution of the family, improving the spiritual and moral atmosphere within families, and reducing the number of divorces." This is primarily intended to be achieved through extrajudicial settlement facilitated by the mediation of state authorities and local public committees, which are specifically authorized to "strengthen family relationships and counter various harmful influences that are alien to the national mentality."

The perpetuation of such narratives and the prioritization of "traditional values" over women's rights have significant implications for the region. The reluctance of states to confront the issue of violence against women and provide effective protection perpetuates a climate of impunity and inequality. Women, who should be the primary beneficiaries of legal and regulatory frameworks, are left vulnerable to various forms of abuse within the confines of their own homes. This contradictory stance of safeguarding "traditional values" at the expense of women's rights raises concerns about the commitment of these states to the principles of human rights and gender equality.

Moreover, the rhetoric surrounding "traditional values" often serves as a smokescreen for the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and practices that have historically oppressed women. By framing the preservation of these values as a defense mechanism against external influences, states not only undermine the importance of human rights but also maintain the status quo of gender inequality. This ideological clash between protecting "traditional values" and

⁹⁶ Amnesty International. "Статьи и Новости о Соблюдении Прав Человека | Amnesty International," n.d. <https://eurasia.amnesty.org/category/content/>.

implementing laws and regulations aimed at safeguarding women's rights highlights the complexity of addressing gender-based violence in the region.

Education plays a pivotal role in combating domestic violence and promoting a culture of respect and equality. However, women in Central Asia face significant barriers to education, with girls often being denied access to schooling or being forced to drop out at an early age, particularly in rural areas where traditional gender roles are more prevalent. By providing girls and women with quality education, they are more likely to develop critical thinking skills, become aware of their rights, and have the tools to challenge discriminatory practices. Education also promotes economic empowerment, enabling women to gain financial independence and reduce their vulnerability to abusive situations.

Furthermore, inclusive and gender-sensitive education can contribute to breaking the cycle of violence by challenging traditional gender roles and norms. It has the potential to foster attitudes of equality and respect among both women and men, encouraging them to reject violence and advocate for peaceful and egalitarian relationships.

The link between education and reduced violence is evident, as the least educated women in Central Asia experience higher rates of various forms of violence in their communities. For example, a study revealed that 96% of women with no high or primary education experienced physical violence, followed by psychological violence (99%) and even sexual violence (46%). This highlights the urgent need to prioritize education as a key tool in addressing domestic violence and creating a safer environment for women in Central Asia.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ismagilova, N. "Women in mind: Educational needs of women in Central Asia—General recommendations and strategies for development." (2002).

CHAPTER 3. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Women's Political Representation

Despite comprising half of the world's population, women continue to encounter significant obstacles when it comes to political participation, often facing marginalization in various aspects of life including politics, economics, and society as a whole.

International law plays a crucial role in ensuring equal opportunities for women to actively engage in the public and political spheres within their countries. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) specifically guarantees women's rights to stand for election and hold public office, participate in the formulation and implementation of government policies at all levels, and engage in non-governmental organizations and associations (as outlined in Article 7). This convention reaffirms the fundamental principle that progress, national development, well-being, and even peace within a nation are dependent on the inclusion of women in decision-making processes.

A recent analysis conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union indicates that the representation of women in parliaments has increased from 17% to 26.5% over the past decade. This upward trend highlights the growing prominence of women's involvement in politics, often referred to as the "feminization of politics."

Furthermore, research has established a connection between the gender of legislators and economic activity. Studies have shown that women legislators contribute to approximately 1.8% higher economic indicators annually within their constituencies compared to their male counterparts. Experts have also calculated that the presence of women legislators leads to an approximate 15% annual increase in overall well-being within their constituencies, surpassing the impact of male legislators. Scholars have identified a positive correlation between women's rights and GDP per capita.⁹⁸

Multiple studies have also demonstrated that women legislators are more inclined than their male counterparts to introduce bills specifically addressing women's issues, such as legislation related to education, childcare, and family healthcare.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Baskaran, Thushyanthan, Sonia R. Bhalotra, Brian K. Min, and Yogesh Uppal. "Women Legislators and Economic Performance." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3205883>.

⁹⁹ Barnes, Tiffany D., and Emily Beaulieu. "Women Politicians, Institutions, and Perceptions of Corruption." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 1 (June 4, 2018): 134–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018774355>.

Considering these findings, research suggests that women's participation in political life contributes to the achievement of gender equality and influences the range of political issues considered as well as the proposed solutions. Women bring new perspectives and dimensions to the policy agenda. However, it should be noted that there is limited evidence to suggest that an increase in women's representation leads to significant changes in policy outcomes.¹⁰⁰

All Central Asian countries acknowledge the importance of supporting women's participation in the political sphere. Indirect evidence of this is their adherence to key international legal mechanisms aimed at ensuring equal participation of women in the decision-making process, including the Sustainable Development Agenda for the period up to 2030, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (with Uzbekistan being the only country not to have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention). Thus, these countries declare their commitment to the goal of involving women in political life, their readiness to participate in international cooperation in this direction, and their willingness to take measures at the national level. Moreover, authoritarian regimes exhibit a voluntary inclination towards embracing gender quotas. This strategic maneuver serves a twofold purpose: firstly, to mobilize a larger base of voters, thereby solidifying their support for the regime.¹⁰¹ Secondly, these regimes utilize the adoption of gender quotas to establish a globally acceptable image, thereby leveraging their association with international benefits.¹⁰²

In the realm of political representation, women continue to face significant underrepresentation worldwide. This disparity is particularly evident in the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, where women's representation in political roles ranges from 20% to 27% (as illustrated in Table 3). In comparison, Uzbekistan exhibits a slightly more favorable landscape, with women occupying 33% of political positions.

¹⁰⁰ Devlin, C., and R. Elgie. "The Effect of Increased Women's Representation in Parliament: The Case of Rwanda." *Parliamentary Affairs* 61, no. 2 (February 5, 2008): 237–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsn007>.

¹⁰¹ Donno, Daniela, and Anne-Kathrin Kreft. "Authoritarian Institutions and Women's Rights." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 5 (September 10, 2018): 720–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018797954>.

¹⁰² Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Pär Zetterberg. "Gender Quotas and International Reputation." *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (September 7, 2020): 326–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12557>.

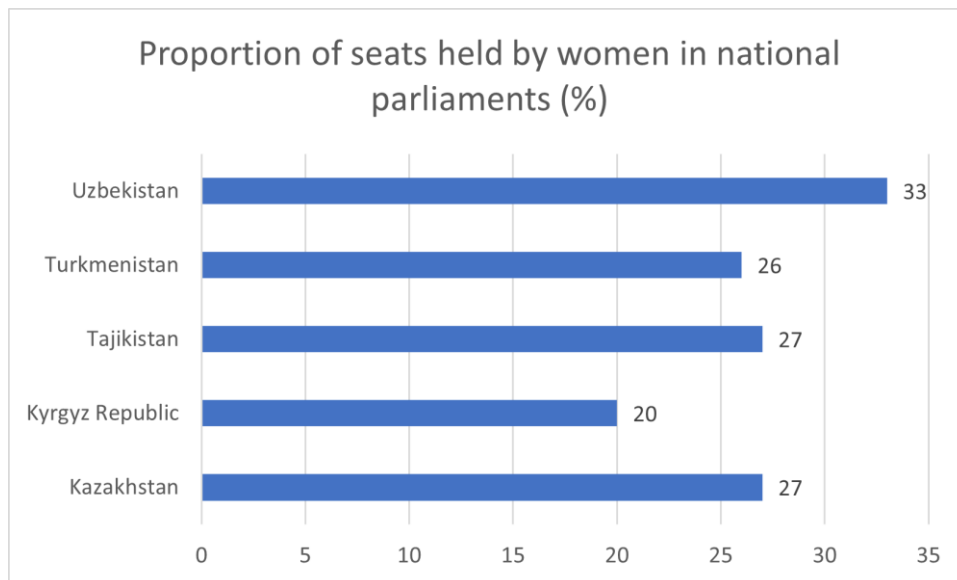


Table 3. Proportion of seats held by women in national Parliaments.

On a global scale, the average proportion of women in parliamentary positions stands at a mere 26.5%.¹⁰³ However, intriguing disparities emerge when comparing countries across different democracy indices.

A closer examination of Rwanda and the United States offers insights into the complex relationship between democracy and women's political representation. Despite Rwanda's classification as an authoritarian regime, it boasts a remarkable 56.30% women representation in parliament. On the other hand, the United States, considered a stable democracy, lags behind with only 16.9% representation in its Congress and Senate. This case study further strengthens the argument against a straightforward connection between democracy and women's political participation.

While democracy is expected to promote equal power relations between men and women, evidence suggests that countries regarded as highly democratic often exhibit lower levels of women representation. Instead, the findings emphasize the significance of political commitment by all countries to increase women's participation in politics. Gender equality should be upheld as an unequivocal goal of democracy.

Overall, this research highlights the necessity to reevaluate the assumptions concerning democracy and women's political participation. It emphasizes the significance of taking proactive measures, regardless of a country's democratic standing, to guarantee increased gender equality in politics. Political dedication emerges as a crucial catalyst for attaining

¹⁰³ World Bank Open Data. "World Bank Open Data," n.d. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

meaningful involvement and representation of women in decision-making processes, questioning conventional concepts of democracy, and promoting a more inclusive political environment.¹⁰⁴

While the representation of women in parliament may not directly influence the level of democracy in a society, the principle of gender equality plays a significant role in the democratization process.¹⁰⁵ Democracy and gender equality are mutually dependent, positing that as democracy expands, so do the opportunities for achieving gender equality, and vice versa.¹⁰⁶ This shift in perspective challenges traditional notions that viewed democracy as solely concerned with procedural fairness and electoral mechanisms. Instead, a more comprehensive understanding of democracy has emerged, encompassing a commitment to gender equality as an essential element of democratic governance.

The pursuit of gender equality signifies broader cultural shifts within industrialized societies. The correlation between democracy and various dimensions of women's well-being underscores the significance of gender equality in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society (Tripp, 2013).¹⁰⁷ Democratic systems offer opportunities for women's organizations to influence the state, while feminist movements strive to reshape the political landscape and challenge oppressive structures Htun and Weldon (2010).¹⁰⁸

This cultural shift, driven by changing social norms and values, can lead to a heightened emphasis on gender equality in various spheres, including politics. As societies undergo this profound cultural change, the support for gender equality becomes intertwined with the expansion and consolidation of democratic institutions.

Researchers have concluded that the increased presence of women in African parliaments gradually changes people's attitudes towards women in politics overall, creating a new political culture regarding the acceptability of women as political leaders. Due to the expanded presence of women in parliament, there is a growing respect from family members and communities, increased opportunities to speak out and be heard in public forums.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Mervis et al., "The Relationship between Democracy and Women Participation in Politics."

¹⁰⁵ Inglehart and Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values."

¹⁰⁶ Kantola and Verloo, "Revisiting Gender Equality at Times of Recession: A Discussion of the Strategies of Gender and Politics Scholarship for Dealing with Equality."

¹⁰⁷ Tripp, Ferree, and Ewig, *Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*.

¹⁰⁸ Htun and Weldon, "When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy."

¹⁰⁹ Tripp, "The Politics of Autonomy and Cooptation in Africa: The Case of the Ugandan Women's Movement."

3.2 Socio-economic Empowerment and democratic development

Empowering women by providing them with access to education and employment opportunities can have a causal effect on democratic development. As women become more aware of gender inequalities and recognize the importance of political participation, they advocate for gender equality and push for a political regime that is responsive to their needs.¹¹⁰

The Universal Declaration of Rights (1948) states that democracy is based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and participate fully in all aspects of their lives. However, women, who bear a disproportionate level of global poverty, face limitations in shaping their lives and society unless they gain access to and control over empowering resources. These resources encompass education, reproduction, and employment opportunities, among others.

The “feminization of poverty” a term that was coined in the 1970s by researcher Diana Pearce refers to the disproportionate representation of women among the world's poor. While poverty affects both men and women, women tend to experience poverty differently due to a variety of social, economic, and cultural factors. Women in Central Asia often bear the primary responsibility for unpaid care work, such as taking care of children, elderly family members, and household chores. This limits their ability to engage in paid employment and earn income, resulting in economic vulnerability. Moreover, women in Central Asia face challenges in accessing income-generating opportunities due to factors such as limited job prospects, gender-based occupational segregation, and lower wages compared to men. They are often concentrated in low-paid sectors and informal employment, which further perpetuates their poverty.

The exclusion of women from the labor force has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the persistence of autocratic regimes in certain Muslim countries (Ross, 2008).¹¹¹ In contrast, women's participation in the workforce is vital for democratic development, as it bestows individual autonomy upon women and disperses power concentration away from men in society. By actively engaging in formal employment, parliamentary roles, judiciary positions, and leadership positions, women's struggle for equal

¹¹⁰ Wyndow, Paula, Jianghong Li, and Eugen Mattes. "Female empowerment as a core driver of democratic development: A dynamic panel model from 1980 to 2005." *World Development* 52 (2013): 34-54.

¹¹¹ ROSS, MICHAEL L. "Oil, Islam, and Women." *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (February 2008): 107–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055408080040>.

rights becomes more visible in the public sphere. This heightened visibility weakens the influence of elites and creates opportunities for democratic development to occur.

The advancement of economic rights for women holds substantial significance in fostering female empowerment and improving the social status of women, as noted by multiple authors (Blumberg, 1984, 2007; Collins et al., 1993). Women's empowerment encompasses the gradual acquisition of increased control over a wide range of resources, including material possessions, human capabilities, intellectual capacities, and financial assets. It entails harnessing the immense potential of women and inspiring them to pursue lives characterized by dignity and fulfillment through self-assurance and competence. It is important to acknowledge that many women are currently engaged in activities that neither contribute to productivity nor provide financial benefits.¹¹²

Women's economic participation plays a significant role in shaping the social structure of societies. It leads to a transition from a hierarchical pyramid structure, characterized by a large lower class, to a diamond shape with a growing middle class. This transformation has been noted by several authors (Jowett, 2000; Sinha, Raju, & Morrison, 2007). Furthermore, women tend to display a greater inclination than men to save and reinvest their earnings in the health and education of their families. This pattern of investment not only expands the human capital base but also contributes to the growth of the middle class across generations. A robust middle class acts as a catalyst for political change, exerting pressure on existing power structures and demanding greater representation and accountability.

As women enter the workforce, they are often exposed to gender discrimination, which leads to an increased awareness of social inequalities. The workplace becomes a platform for women to interact with one another, share grievances, and strategize ways to overcome obstacles. These interactions may lead to the formation of unions or organizations that advocate for improved working conditions and challenge discriminatory practices. Consequently, the policy interests of working women differ from those of their male counterparts, resulting in a stronger push for change and political mobilization.¹¹³

Economic development plays a crucial role in transforming societies and perceptions of gender roles. It leads to the weakening of traditional values, a decline in fertility rates,

¹¹² Rahman, Shaik Shafeequr, and Nikhat Sultana. "Empowerment of Women for Social Development." *Published in Researchers World, a Journal of Arts Science & Commerce* 3 (2012).

¹¹³ Iversen and Rosenbluth, "The Political Economy of Gender: Explaining Cross-National Variation in the Gender Division of Labor and the Gender Voting Gap."

urbanization, and increased participation of women in education and the workforce. The status of women and their role in society improve as a result of economic growth. Higher levels of prosperity contribute to freedom from basic needs and fears by enhancing access to healthcare, nutrition, and social guarantees. Economic development also fosters the growth of the urban middle class and provides a social foundation for strengthening democratic institutions and civil society.

Facilitating women's access to education and employment can have significant implications for the advancement of democratic development. By enabling women to gain education and enter the workforce, the benefits of political engagement can be amplified, and the foundation of support for democracy can be broadened. Coleman (2004) emphasizes the multiple positive outcomes associated with educating women, such as higher literacy rates and improved health. Educated women are better equipped to become informed and engaged citizens, actively participating in democratic processes.

Moreover, educating girls indirectly contributes to the progress of democratic development by yielding additional socio-economic advantages beyond those achieved through educating boys. Several studies highlight these benefits, including a decrease in fertility rates, a reduction in child mortality, and an increase in female labor force participation.¹¹⁴ These socio-economic gains resulting from educating girls play a crucial role in promoting democratic development and strengthening democratic societies.

According to the International Labour Organization, Europe and Central Asia experienced a 14 percent decrease in working hours during the second quarter of 2020. Globally, this resulted in the loss of approximately 400 million full-time jobs. In 2022, the labor force participation rate of women was 48.5% and 64.3% for men. According to the International Labor Organization, Central Asia is expected to experience higher unemployment rates in 2023, similar to what Europe is facing due to the consequences of the war in Ukraine. More than three million people are expected to lose their jobs, in addition to 208 million people who are already unemployed. This is about 5.8% of the global workforce and women bearing a disproportionate

¹¹⁴ Wyndow, Paula, Jianghong Li, and Eugen Mattes. "Female Empowerment as a Core Driver of Democratic Development: A Dynamic Panel Model from 1980 to 2005." *World Development* 52 (December 2013): 34–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.06.004>.

impact. Concurrently, there has been a concerning increase in unpaid care and domestic responsibilities.¹¹⁵

The Central Asian countries have declared their commitment to achieving gender equality and expanding women's economic opportunities. However, women face social and economic barriers like stereotypes, false beliefs, mindset, and much more, and effective tools to expand women's economic opportunities have not yet been established: there remains a significant gap in employment and wages, labor discrimination persists, and women's access to financing is limited. Despite government programs, laws, and populist statements, it is difficult to overcome barriers in career advancement in politics, government administration, the distribution of economic resources, and so on. Women in Central Asia have to assert their social and political rights while facing active resistance from men insisting that women should adhere to conservative ancestral traditions. There is a lack of commitment in Central Asian countries to challenging patriarchal norms and gender roles. To make progress in this area, it is important to strengthen civil society, which will promote socio-economic development and civic political activism.

Overall, women's socio-economic empowerment has significant implications for social structures, political change, and the overall development of societies. It influences the formation of a growing middle class, fosters awareness of social inequalities, and contributes to the mobilization of women for policy change. Economic development, in turn, leads to transformations in perceptions of gender roles, urbanization, and improvements in the status of women. Democratic institutions further enhance the positive impact of economic development by promoting self-expression, well-being, gender equality, and trust among individuals.

3.3 Women's Mobilization and NGOs

Globally, there has been a significant increase in civil society, characterized by the proliferation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and various social movements with diverse objectives and sizes. The presence of a robust civil society has been acknowledged as instrumental in challenging authoritarian regimes (Mainwaring, 1989).¹¹⁶ Scholars such as Waylen (1994), Baldez (2003), and Moghadam (2003) have emphasized the pivotal role played

¹¹⁵ UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. “Across Europe and Central Asia, Women Confront Economic Impacts of the Pandemic,” October 30, 2020. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/across-europe-and-central-asia-women-confront-economic-impacts-of-the-pandemic>.

¹¹⁶ Mainwaring, Scott. *Transitions to democracy and democratic consolidation: theoretical and comparative issues*. No. 130. University of Notre Dame, Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1989.

by women's movements in Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East during the 1970s and 1980s, as they actively contributed to the advancement of democratic ideals by challenging societal norms, advocating for gender equality, and amplifying women's voices in political processes.¹¹⁷

The women's movement serves as a platform for women to gain valuable experience, socialize, and achieve self-realization by challenging societal norms, expanding their horizons, and actively participating in shaping inclusive and gender-equitable societies. It actively contributes to shaping new gender ideologies, challenging cultural stereotypes, and creating a more inclusive society. Through their pursuit of equality and increased opportunities, women acknowledged the necessity of a more progressive political structure that would protect and ensure the freedoms they aspired to achieve (Arat, 1994; Safa, 1990).¹¹⁸

Central Asia's historical context has often marginalized women, relegating them to traditional gender roles and limiting their participation in public life. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region underwent profound political and social transformations, presenting a unique blend of challenges and opportunities for women's rights. The dismantling of the Soviet system allowed for reimagining gender roles and sparked movements advocating for greater gender equality, but it also exposed women to new vulnerabilities and intensified societal struggles. In this context, women's mobilization emerged as a powerful force for democratic change.

The socio-economic conditions prevailing in Central Asian countries at the end of the 20th century, characterized by high unemployment rates, inadequate wages, and deteriorating quality of life, acted as catalysts for a surge in social activism. Faced with these challenges, individuals and groups mobilized to address systemic issues, advocate for social justice, and empower marginalized communities, including women. This period witnessed the establishment of numerous civil society organizations dedicated to safeguarding a range of shared interests, encompassing legal, social, economic, creative, and spiritual concerns. Among these organizations, women's groups emerged as one of the most prominent, advocating for the specific needs and interests of women in the region.

The arrival of international NGOs in the 1990s provided an opportunity for the active promotion of women's rights and opportunities in Central Asian states. However, it is important to note that the growth of women's NGOs in the region was primarily driven by abundant

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Safa, Helen Icken. "Women's social movements in Latin America." *Gender & Society* 4, no. 3 (1990): 354-369.

foreign funding rather than being a reflection of local movement trends. Indeed, in many respects, a focus on civil society has been the best option for U.S. foreign assistance when dealing with the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia.¹¹⁹

In accordance with their goals, activities, and impact on societal development, women's organizations can be conditionally divided into four groups. The first group includes women's organizations that can be defined as historical or traditional. They have been revived based on women's organizations that operated in different historical periods in various territories of Central Asia with the goal of protecting women's rights. Typically, these are mass associations of citizens consciously formed to achieve long-term goals, with their own statutes and a corresponding level of structuring. The creation of the second group of women's organizations was a response to social problems. This is the largest group of socially oriented women's organizations. The third group of women's organizations includes businesswomen's organizations that engage in economic activities. The fourth group consists of organizations that seek to address specific local problems that contribute to the development of education and women's self-realization. Gender centers, which study the role of women in society, can be defined as the fifth group of women's organizations.¹²⁰

Women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face a multitude of challenges that impede their effectiveness and influence. These challenges include limited access to financial resources, gender-based discrimination in funding allocation, cultural and religious barriers that undermine their credibility, and political instability, which threatens the continuity and sustainability of their work. Such obstacles can impede the ability of women's NGOs to adequately address the needs and rights of women in their respective countries.

Furthermore, authorities in Central Asian nations continue to exert pressure on civil society, with a noticeable escalation of repression in recent years. This occurs within a global context of deteriorating protection for fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, association, and assembly, along with the widespread suppression of independent viewpoints. These authorities employ new restrictions on NGOs, justifying their actions through claims of maintaining law and order, while simultaneously stigmatizing or criminalizing the work carried

¹¹⁹ Ruffin, M. Holt, and Daniel Waugh. *Civil Society in Central Asia*, 1999. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780295977959>.

¹²⁰ Чжицзы, Шаньчуань. "ЖЕНСКИЕ НЕПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННЫЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ В РАЗВИТИИ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ АКТИВНОСТИ ЖЕНЩИН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ." *Социально-политические науки* 13, no. 2 (2023): 173-177.

out by these organizations. Consequently, any modest progress achieved in Central Asia may be reversed, resulting in adverse social, political, and economic consequences.

The visibility of women activists and their invaluable work in Central Asia remains a pressing issue. Despite their significant contributions to advocating against violence, pushing for the adoption of laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment, and mobilizing for gender equality, women activists often face challenges in gaining recognition and support. Some activists are compelled to work covertly, grappling with anxiety and fear for their safety due to constant threats and persecution.¹²¹ In Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is at the forefront of women's activism. They have had and continue to have a positive influence on the development of feminist movements in Kazakhstan and other countries in the region. However, not everything is well there either.

Civil society serves as the primary catalyst for driving social transformations; however, civil society organizations and activists often encounter considerable pressure and constraints within the context of many Central Asian countries. Authorities impose restrictions on the functioning of NGOs, justifying these actions as necessary for maintaining law and order, while simultaneously marginalizing or even criminalizing the critical work carried out by these organizations. For a long time, the concept of civic engagement was narrowly understood, implying that it could only exist with state financial support and constant state surveillance. This narrow perception has contributed to the characterization of civic engagement as low within Central Asian nations, leading to a lack of trust in non-governmental organizations and limited opportunities for grassroots citizen mobilization.

Nevertheless, there is a shifting perception regarding civic engagement. For instance, during the transfer of power in Kazakhstan in 2019, when the first president Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down and was succeeded by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, continuity in leadership triggered a wave of protests and catalyzed the development of political activism and movements in the country.

Analyzing the realities of Central Asia through the lens of international development, Charles Baxter concluded that NGOs have laid the groundwork for further progress in the Eurasian region by acting as independent and politically influential innovators in the social sphere. Baxter also highlights that the emergence of third sector organizations in the region was

¹²¹ Зульфия. “Женский Активизм в Беларуси и Центральной Азии: Тренд Или Необходимость?” CABAR.asia, September 22, 2020. <https://cabar.asia/ru/zhenskij-aktivizm-v-belarusi-i-tsentralnoj-azii-trend-ili-neobhodimost>.

often precipitated by radical changes in society. Social movements led by vulnerable groups were compelled to fight for their rights, and the crisis conditions they faced spurred them into action. Baxter's research shows that civil society often assumes a "female face," a trend that holds true across various countries. During times of restructuring, many women emerged as leaders in organizing collective assistance for the population.

CONCLUSION

The Central Asian countries possess a distinct historical and cultural heritage that exemplifies the convergence of diverse influences. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, this region's history is characterized by fascinating historical, cultural, and religious connections.

Islam holds significant cultural and societal importance in many Central Asian countries, particularly following the Islamization that occurred during the Middle Ages. It has deep historical and cultural roots in the region, and for many individuals, being Muslim is an integral part of their identity.

Additionally, the impact of the former Soviet era has played a substantial role in shaping the political, social, and economic systems of Central Asian nations. Communist ideology and practices have exerted influence over the organization of state power, the economy, education, and various other facets of life for an extended duration. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, these countries continue to navigate their path, striving for social, political, and economic transformation.

Presently, there exists a noticeable reluctance to challenge patriarchal norms and gender roles within Central Asian countries. Strengthening civil society becomes crucial in advancing in this realm, as it fosters socio-economic development and encourages civic and political activism.

Women's empowerment assumes an active role in democratic development and represents a pivotal aspect of modernization. The progression of women's roles within Central Asian countries can significantly impact democratic development and the transformation of authoritarian regimes. Women's participation in politics and civil society contributes to the diversity of opinions, the consideration of interests from various population groups, and the establishment of a more inclusive and representative decision-making process.

One of the primary objectives is to raise societal awareness regarding the benefits of gender equality and women's rights. This can be accomplished through educational initiatives, information campaigns, public debates, and similar endeavors. Additionally, inspiring women to transform their perspectives on gender roles and strive for greater equality and participation in public and political spheres is of utmost importance.

The development of civil society plays a pivotal role in achieving these objectives. Support for independent women's organizations, forums, and networks that focus on gender

equality issues is instrumental. These organizations can provide training, workshops, and resources to empower women, enhancing their skills and confidence, while actively engaging them in decision-making processes at all societal levels.

For the Central Asian countries, the development of an effective model for civil society organizations, their structure, and efficient management represents a significant priority. These organizations possess the capabilities to address current socio-economic challenges. Women's civil society organizations are one form of establishing optimal communicative interaction between individual social institutions and government bodies to implement democratic changes in society. In the present context, it has become imperative to determine the role of women in social and political relations, power structures, the economy, science, and social associations. The activities of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the dynamics of their development contribute to the improvement of legislation and legal mechanisms, ultimately enhancing the position of women and fostering the development of a socially oriented civil society.

Simultaneously, collaborating with the government and other stakeholders to create a conducive environment that supports and encourages gender equality is vital. This may involve developing and adopting relevant legislation, promoting access to education and healthcare, eliminating discriminatory practices, and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.

Advancing gender equality is a long-term process that necessitates efforts from all stakeholders, including civil society, government, international organizations, society as a whole, and women themselves. Consequently, positive changes in consciousness and active participation from women can lead to progress in achieving a more equitable and just society.

Gender equality and women's participation in political and social life can play a pivotal role in the democratic development of Central Asia. Women's inclusion in decision-making processes and political activities contributes to a broader range of opinions and perspectives, thereby promoting comprehensive societal development.

Moreover, the active involvement of women in civil society and politics contributes to raising awareness and improving the overall level of education within society. Women can serve as catalysts for positive change, influencing public opinion and advocating for important issues such as social justice, healthcare, education, and human rights protection.

Furthermore, transforming and modernizing culture and attitudes towards gender roles are essential aspects of achieving gender equality. This process involves challenging outdated stereotypes and prejudices concerning the roles of men and women in society.

Creating a space for open dialogue and discussion on gender issues is vital to raise awareness and foster understanding of inequality and discrimination. Education, cultural events, media, and other communication channels can facilitate this by expanding boundaries and reevaluating obsolete notions of gender roles.

Special attention should be given to educating and nurturing the younger generation to foster their understanding of equality and cultivate respect for the rights and opportunities of all individuals, regardless of their gender. Incorporating gender awareness into educational curricula and materials contributes to developing a conscious and tolerant attitude towards gender issues from an early age.

Furthermore, supporting and promoting positive examples of women who have achieved success in various fields, including politics, business, science, art, and more, is vital. This helps challenge stereotypes and encourages the perception of women as active participants in society, capable of achieving greatness and assuming leadership roles.

The process of transforming culture and attitudes towards gender roles takes time. However, with systematic efforts and broad societal consensus, a more equal and inclusive society can be cultivated, where everyone enjoys equal opportunities and rights, irrespective of their gender.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2020 GEM Report. "Progress towards Gender Parity in Education Is Undeniable - 2020 GEM Report," n.d. <https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/gender-report/progress-towards-gender-parity-in-education-is-undeniable/>.

admin_bis. "Marriage by Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan: A Practice That Stands the Test of Time - Institut Du Genre En Géopolitique." Institut du Genre en Géopolitique, October 12, 2022. <https://igg-geo.org/?p=8974&lang=en>.

Akiner, Shirin. "15 *Between tradition and modernity: the dilemma facing contemporary Central Asian women.*" (1997).

Alvarez, Sonia E. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics*, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780691023250>.

Amnesty International. "Статьи и Новости о Соблюдении Прав Человека | Amnesty International," n.d. <https://eurasia.amnesty.org/category/content/>.

Arat, Yeşim, and Evket Pamuk. *Turkey Between Democracy and Authoritarianism*, 2019. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781139022385><https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139022385>.

Arat, Yeşim. "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey." *Politics & Gender* 18, no. 4 (August 27, 2021): 911–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x21000192>.

Ayata, Ayşe, and Ayça Ergun Özbolat. 2009. *Gender Politics in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Perspective on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan*. <https://hdl.handle.net/11511/86989>.

Barnes, Tiffany D., and Emily Beaulieu. "Women Politicians, Institutions, and Perceptions of Corruption." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 1 (June 4, 2018): 134–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018774355>.

Baskaran, Thushyanthan, Sonia R. Bhalotra, Brian K. Min, and Yogesh Uppal. "Women Legislators and Economic Performance." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3205883>.

Beer, Caroline. "Democracy and Gender Equality." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no. 3 (April 28, 2009): 212–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9043-2>.

Blumberg, Rae Lesser. "The Invisible Obstacle to Educational Equality: Gender Bias in Textbooks." *PROSPECTS* 38, no. 3 (September 2008): 345–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-009-9086-1>.

Brym, Robert, and Robert Andersen. "Democracy, Women's Rights, and Public Opinion in Tunisia." *International Sociology* 31, no. 3 (February 19, 2016): 253–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580916629622>.

Buckley, Mary, ed. *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, 1997. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780521563208>.

Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Pär Zetterberg. "Gender Quotas and International Reputation." *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (September 7, 2020): 326–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12557>.

Charrad, Mounira M. *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780520073234>.

Chenoy, Anuradha M. "Islam, women and identity in contemporary Central Asia." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1996): 516-518.

Cleuziou, Juliette, and Lucia Direnberger. "Gender and Nation in Post-Soviet Central Asia: From National Narratives to Women's Practices." *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 2 (March 2016): 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1082997>.

Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff from Women's Rights." *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004): 80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033977>.

Collins, Kathleen. *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, 2009. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510014><https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510014>.

Corcoran-Nantes, Yvonne. *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9781842775370>.

Corcoran-Nantes, Yvonne. *Lost voices: Central Asian women confronting transition*. Zed Books, 2005.

Devlin, C., and R. Elgie. "The Effect of Increased Women's Representation in Parliament: The Case of Rwanda." *Parliamentary Affairs* 61, no. 2 (February 5, 2008): 237–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsn007>.

DeYoung, Alan J., and Elizabeth A. Constantine. "Re-Gendered Education and Society in the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Central Asia." *International Perspectives on Education and Society*, May 19, 2009, 255–99. [https://doi.org/10.1108/s1479-3679\(2009\)0000010011](https://doi.org/10.1108/s1479-3679(2009)0000010011).

Did you know?: The Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia through the Trade Routes | Silk Roads Programme. "Did You Know?: The Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia through the Trade Routes | Silk Roads Programme," n.d. <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/did-you-know-spread-islam-southeast-asia-through-trade-routes>.

Donno, Daniela, and Anne-Kathrin Kreft. "Authoritarian Institutions and Women's Rights." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 5 (September 10, 2018): 720–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018797954>.

Donno, Daniela, and Anne-Kathrin Kreft. "Authoritarian Institutions and Women's Rights." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 5 (September 10, 2018): 720–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018797954>.

Donno, Daniela, Sara Fox, and Joshua Kaasik. "International Incentives for Women's Rights in Dictatorships." *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 3 (July 14, 2021): 451–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211024306>.

Europe and Central Asia |. "Europe and Central Asia |," n.d. <https://www.genderindex.org/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/>.

Fathi, Habiba. "Gender, Islam, and Social Change in Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (September 2006): 303–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930601022575>.

Fathi, Habiba. "Ottines: The Unknown Women Clerics of Central Asian Islam*." *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (March 1997): 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939708400967>.

Frick, Marie-Luisa. *Human Rights and Relative Universalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-10785-7>.

Guerrero, Marion. "International Women's Rights and the 'War of Cultures': Avoiding the 'Westernization' Debate." *ICL Journal* 5, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 379–99. <https://doi.org/10.1515/icl-2011-0305>.

Hanks, Reuel R. *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Global Studies (ABC-Clio) Ser., 2005.

Heise, L, M Ellsberg, and M Gottmoeller. "A Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence." *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 78 (April 25, 2002): S5–14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292\(02\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292(02)00038-3).

Hill, M. Anne, and Elizabeth King. "Women's Education and Economic Well-Being." *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 2 (July 1995): 21–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714042230>.

Hornset, Norunn, and Indra de Soysa. "Does Empowering Women in Politics Boost Human Development? An Empirical Analysis, 1960–2018." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 23, no. 2 (July 14, 2021): 291–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1953450>.

Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. "When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy." *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (March 2010): 207–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592709992787>.

Hudson, Valerie, R. Charli Carpenter, and Mary Caprioli. "Gender and Global Security." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, March 1, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.441>.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. Vol. 4. The Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Ser., 1993. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780806125169>.

Inglehart, Ronald, and Wayne E. Baker. "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values." *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (February 2000): 19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657288>.

Investopedia. "The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History, Effects, and Examples," October 19, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glass-ceiling.asp>.

Ismagilova, N. "*Women in mind: Educational needs of women in Central Asia—General recommendations and strategies for development.*" (2002).

Iversen, Torben, and Frances Rosenbluth. "The Political Economy of Gender: Explaining Cross-National Variation in the Gender Division of Labor and the Gender Voting Gap." *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00166.x>.

Jalušič, Vlasta, and Milica G. Antić. "*Women-Politics-Equal Opportunities.*" *Prospects for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2001.

Jaquette, Jane S. "Regional Differences and Contrasting Views." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 3 (2001): 111–25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0049>.

Jaquette, Jane S., and Sharon L. Wolchik, eds. *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe*, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1604/978080185838310.56021/9780801858376>.

Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 1986. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780862322649>.

Kabeer, Naila. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1." *Gender & Development* 13, no. 1 (March 2005): 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332273>.

Kamp, Marianne. "*The Soviet legacy and women's rights in Central Asia.*" *Current History* 115, no. 783 (2016): 270-276.

Kane, Danielle, and Ksenia Gorbenko. "*States and women's rights in Central Asia.*" In American Sociological Association Annual Meeting. 2011.

Kantola, Johanna, and Mieke Verloo. "Revisiting Gender Equality at Times of Recession: A Discussion of the Strategies of Gender and Politics Scholarship for Dealing with Equality." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1, no. 1–2 (July 2018): 205–22. <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510818x15272520831139>.

Kazakhstan: Revise Draft Laws to Better Protect Women | Human Rights Watch. "Kazakhstan: Revise Draft Laws to Better Protect Women," March 7, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/07/kazakhstan-revise-draft-laws-better-protect-women>.

Kelley, Boldt, and Timothy White. "'Chilean Women and Democratization: Entering Politics through Resistance as Arpilleristas.'" *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, no. 24 (2011): 27–44.

Khan, Saima. "Women Empowerment: Key to Socio-Economic Development." *International Journal of Women Empowerment* 4, no. 1 (December 31, 2018): 5–7. <https://doi.org/10.29052/2413-4252.v4.i1.2018.5-7>.

Kocaoglu, Timur. "The Past as Prologue? Challenging the Myth of the Subordinate, Docile Woman in Muslim Central Eurasia." *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia*, 2009, 169–208.

Kuhns, Mirgul, Pierre-Olivier Bussi eres, Dr. Rishi Gupta, and Amna Zaman. "Central Asia Needs to Promote Women Politicians." *Modern Diplomacy*, February 10, 2022. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/10/central-asia-needs-to-promote-women-politicians/>.

Luong, Pauline Jones, ed. *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780801488429>.

Mainwaring, Scott. *Transitions to democracy and democratic consolidation: theoretical and comparative issues*. No. 130. University of Notre Dame, Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1989.

Massell, Gregory J. *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Vol. 1370. Princeton Legacy Library, 2015.

Matland, Richard, and Kathleen Montgomery, eds. *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780199246854>.

Mervis, Zungura, Nyemba Eve, Mutasa Florence, and Muronza Caroline. "The Relationship between Democracy and Women Participation in Politics." *Journal of Public Administration and Governance* 3, no. 1 (March 31, 2013): 168. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v3i1.3516>.

Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. "Cultural Obstacles to Equal Representation." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 3 (2001): 126–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0054>.

Ottaway, Marina, and Thomas Carothers, eds. *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*. Global Policy Books, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780870032127>.

Petesch, Patti L., and Giorgia Demarchi. "Gender, Mobility, and Middle Class in Europe and Central Asia: Insights from Qualitative Research." *Gender, Mobility, and Middle Class in Europe and Central Asia: Insights from Qualitative Research*, October 16, 2015. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/3b7ccc53-15e0-534d-b2b8-d8cb39221180>.

Rahman, Shaik Shafeequr, and Nikhat Sultana. "Empowerment of Women for Social Development." Published in *Researchers World*, a Journal of Arts Science & Commerce 3 (2012).

Ro'i, Yaacov, and Alon Wainer. "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice in Post-Soviet Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (September 2009): 303–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930903421863>.

ROSS, MICHAEL L. "Oil, Islam, and Women." *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (February 2008): 107–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055408080040>.

Roy, Olivier. *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. NYU Press, 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780814775554>.

Ruffin, M. Holt, and Daniel Waugh. *Civil Society in Central Asia*, 1999. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780295977959>.

Sachedina, Abdulaziz. *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights*, 2009.

Safa, Helen Icken. "Women's social movements in Latin America." *Gender & Society* 4, no. 3 (1990): 354-369.

Sahadeo, Jeff, and Russell Zanca, eds. *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, 2007.

Sahadeo, Jeff. *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780253348203>.

Seguino, Stephanie. "Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis." *World Development* 28, no. 7 (July 2000): 1211–30. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0305-750x\(00\)00018-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0305-750x(00)00018-8).

Simpson, Meghan. "Local Strategies in Globalizing Gender Politics: Women's Organizing in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan1." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 1 (April 2006): 9–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000600738608>.

Sinha, Nistha, Dhushyanth Raju, and Andrew Morrison. "Gender equality, poverty and economic growth." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4349 (2007).

Smith, M. A., Patrick Scott. "Scythian Women." World History Encyclopedia, June 15, 2021. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1783/scythian-women/>.

The Impact of Women's Movements of the Democratic Transition in Chile and Argentina – Ideas for Peace. "The Impact of Women's Movements of the Democratic Transition in Chile and Argentina – Ideas for Peace," n.d. <https://www.ideasforpeace.org/content/the-impact-of-womens-movements-of-the-democratic-transition-in-chile-and-argentina/>.

Tolmacheva, M. A. "The Muslim Woman in Soviet Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey* 12, no. 4 (January 1993): 531–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939308400836>.

Tripp, Aili Mari, Myra Marx Ferree, and Christina Ewig, eds. *Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, 2013. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814770207.001.0001>.

Tripp, Aili Mari. "The Politics of Autonomy and Cooptation in Africa: The Case of the Ugandan Women's Movement." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 1 (March 2001): 101–28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x01003548>.

Turkmenistan. "Turkmenistan," n.d. <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/turkmenistan>.

UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. "Across Europe and Central Asia, Women Confront Economic Impacts of the Pandemic," October 30, 2020.

<https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/across-europe-and-central-asia-women-confront-economic-impacts-of-the-pandemic>.

UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. “Central Asian Countries Come Together to Combat Gender-Based Violence,” November 30, 2022. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2022/11/central-asian-countries-come-together-to-combat-gender-based-violence>.

UNDP. “Annual Report 2019 | UNDP,” n.d. <https://annualreport.undp.org/2019>.

UNDP. “Annual Report 2019 | UNDP,” n.d. <https://annualreport.undp.org/2019>.

Urbaeva, Jildyz. “Opportunity, Social Mobility, and Women’s Views on Gender Roles in Central Asia.” *Social Work* 64, no. 3 (May 30, 2019): 207–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swz011>.

WANG, YI-TING, PATRIK LINDENFORS, AKSEL SUNDSTRÖM, FREDRIK JANSSON, PAMELA PAXTON, and STAFFAN I. LINDBERG. “Women’s Rights in Democratic Transitions: A Global Sequence Analysis, 1900-2012.” *European Journal of Political Research* 56, no. 4 (March 17, 2017): 735–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12201>.

Waylen, Georgina. “Women and Democratization Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics.” *World Politics* 46, no. 3 (April 1994): 327–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950685>.

Waylen, Georgina. “Women’s Mobilization and Gender Outcomes in Transitions to Democracy.” *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 5 (May 2007): 521–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005285750>.

Waylen, Georgina. *Engendering Transitions: Women’s Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*. Gender and Politics Ser., 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780199248032>.

Welzel, Christian, Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart. “Gender Equality and Democracy.” *Comparative Sociology* 1, no. 3–4 (2002): 321–45. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156913302100418628>.

Werner, Cynthia. “Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (June 2009): 314–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2009.01555.x>.

Werner, Cynthia. “Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (June 2009): 314–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2009.01555.x>.

Women’s Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority, 2006.

World Bank Blogs. “Reducing the Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Europe and Central Asia Requires Changing the Norms That Support It,” December 12, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/reducing-prevalence-gender-based-violence-europe-and-central-asia-requires>.

World Bank Blogs. “Женщинам Центральной Азии: Спасибо За Вдохновение!” March 8, 2021. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/inspiring-women-central-asia-thank-you>.

World Bank Blogs. “Оплата Женского Труда в Центральной Азии: Долой Дискриминационные Стереотипы,” March 7, 2023. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/faster-growth-central-asia-must-confront-biased-perceptions-about-value-womens>.

World Bank Blogs. “Решение Проблемы Насилия в Отношении Женщин – Важное Условие Для Ускорения Экономического Роста в Центральной Азии,” November 25, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/tackling-violence-against-women-essential-economic-growth-central-asia>.

World Bank Open Data. “World Bank Open Data,” n.d. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

World Economic Forum. “Global Gender Gap Report 2022,” July 13, 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>.

Wyndow, Paula, Jianghong Li, and Eugen Mattes. “Female Empowerment as a Core Driver of Democratic Development: A Dynamic Panel Model from 1980 to 2005.” *World Development* 52 (December 2013): 34–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.06.004>.

Zhussipbek, Galym, and Zhanar Nagayeva. “Human Rights of Daughters-in-Law (Kelins) in Central Asia: Harmful Traditional Practices and Structural Oppression.” *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 2 (December 7, 2020): 222–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2020.1850423>.

Ziemer, Ulrike, ed. *Women’s Everyday Lives in War and Peace in the South Caucasus*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25517-6>.

Борьба с насилием в отношении женщин в Центральной Азии: новые законы, старые практики. “Борьба с Насилием в Отношении Женщин в Центральной Азии: Новые Законы, Старые Практики,” n.d. <https://paperlab.kz/borba-s-nasiliem-v-otnoshenii-zhenshchin>.

Зульфья. “Женский Активизм в Беларуси и Центральной Азии: Тренд Или Необходимость?” CABAR.asia, September 22, 2020. <https://cabar.asia/ru/zhenskij-aktivizm-v-belarusi-i-tsentralnoj-azii-trend-ili-neobhodimost>.

Черта. “Паранджа Как Символ Свободы. Как в СССР Женщин Принуждали Быть Равными Мужчинам — Черта,” n.d. <https://cherta.media/story/parandzha-kak-simvol-svobody-kak-v-sssr-zhenshhin-prinuzhdali-byt-ravnymi-muzhchinam/>.

Чжицзы, Шаньчуань. “Женские Неправительственные Организации В Развитии Социально-Политической Активности Женщин Центральной Азии.” *Социально-политические науки* 13, no. 2 (2023): 173-177.