

Unveiling Girls’ Madrasahs in Kyrgyzstan

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by Aichurek Kurmanbekova

Aichurek Kurmanbekova graduated from the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University with a BA in Political Science (2008) and the OSCE Academy with an MA in Politics and Security (2014). She previously worked for the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Turkmenistan, local human rights group, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, as an election observation coordinator, and was a national UNV at the UNDP/UN Peacebuilding Fund, where she served as a specialist on gender-responsive civil society and community engagement in peacebuilding.

students. Today, according to the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), there are 121 registered religious educational institutions, including 110 madrasahs—almost twice the number that existed in 2013. However, according to a report from the Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations, “not all madrasahs are state registered, and the actual number of students in these Muslim schools is likely much higher.”¹

Despite the growth of religious schools in Kyrgyzstan, Islamic educational institutions face numerous issues: a shortage of trained *mudaris* (madrasa teachers); a lack of sustainable financial support; curricula that lack secular and vocational classes; an inadequate material base and shortage of teaching and methodological materials; and, most importantly, the lack of an official state license, meaning students do not get a recognized degree upon graduation. These shortcomings lead to isolation and an inability of madrasah students and graduates to integrate into the society.



“Aisha Siddika” women’s madrasah. Jalal Abad city, Kyrgyzstan, January 2020. Photo by the author.

Kyrgyzstan is a secular state with 80 percent of its population identifying as Muslim. In recent decades, Kyrgyzstanis have shown a growing interest in Islam, religious education, and the study of the Quran. The number of children studying in religious schools continues to increase every year. In 2013, the number of madrasahs in Kyrgyzstan reached 67—including 10 higher educational institutions—comprising a combined total of over 4,000

By 2019, girls made up one third of all students studying in Kyrgyz madrasahs. Girls are more vulnerable and limited in their decisions and future opportunities than boys who

study in madrasahs. Women in observant families are more often subject to pressure, constraints, and discrimination from their relatives or guardians.² Moreover, Noah Tucker claims that "...women are among the prominent ranks of jihadists who have left the country to join the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. Around 300 IS fighters are from Kyrgyzstan, including women and children.... women and children are subject to subservient roles in Kyrgyzstan, making them susceptible to radicalization."³ Salima Sharipova, head of the "Mother Umay" party, asks, "What can you expect from a woman who is uneducated and does not have a voice and rights in the family?" She continues, "Many Kyrgyz women are suffering from high unemployment and isolation, which make them vulnerable to jihadist recruiting."⁴

For this reason, it is imperative to pay attention to the religious education of girls and to ensure women are well educated and have job opportunities after graduation from religious schools. There has been some basic research on madrasahs in Kyrgyzstan, but very little on girls' religious schooling. In this paper I ask: Why do girls choose to study in madrasahs? What do they do after graduating from madrasahs? What is the range of perspectives regarding the future of girls' madrasahs in the country?

This paper is based on qualitative research, using both primary and secondary sources of data for analysis. For primary data, I interviewed gender and Islam experts as well as Kyrgyzstani religious leaders. In addition, I interviewed madrasah teachers, students, and SCRA administrators— a total of 15 individuals altogether. Secondary sources include: a) a literature review of academic papers and reports from International Organizations and local NGOs; b) a study of international and local laws and norms; and c) a desk review of online media and experts' articles.

Historical overview of Kyrgyzstan's religious education

The Prophet Muhammed says, regardless of gender, "the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim." Thus, "the scholars are the heirs of the prophets," he explained, implying that learning and studying are crucial for a communal life.⁵ Madrasahs have always played a crucial role in the lives of Islamic communities.⁶ In addition to providing religious education, they also supported vulnerable

members of society. Their aid included social services, free education, accommodations, and nutrition.

The first known mosque-type of madrasah in the territory of Kyrgyzstan was built in Osh in 1844 by Alymbek Datka, a prominent Kyrgyz politician from Kokand. Many highly educated individuals received their education there. Clergy (*moldo*) taught students poetry, geography, math, and astronomy.⁷ During the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the nineteenth century, a number of new madrasahs appeared on the contemporary territory of Kyrgyzstan. These schools taught Arabic writing, the Quran, and Sharia rules.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new religious educational movement, Jadidism, emerged. Aiming to reform Muslim schools, it advocated for a more secular curriculum and competed with traditional madrasahs.⁸ In 1914, the number of Islamic educational institutions in Osh Uyezd reached 88, enrolling 1,176 students. Graduates of madrasahs worked for the Muslim administration or in other madrasahs.⁹

Dramatic changes in Islamic education took place during the Soviet period. New types of Russian primary and secondary schools replaced Muslim educational institutions.¹⁰ In her research on religious education in Kyrgyzstan, Nazira Kurbanova notes, "Although the Soviet Union was largely successful in destroying Islamic learning and the knowledge of Islamic teachings, it did not eliminate the religiosity of the population's self-perception as having an Islam."¹¹

At the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were no Islamic educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Kurbanova argues that religious education in the country developed in two phases: 1) from 1993 to 2008, with the emerging and broadening of Islamic educational institutions and networks; and 2) from 2008 until today, consisting of the universal institutionalization of religious educational institutions.¹²

Religious education related legislation

The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic states that every child shall have the right to an education. General secondary education shall be compulsory and free of charge, and everyone shall be entitled to receive it from the state educational institutions. The

state shall exercise control over the activity of educational institutions.¹³ The freedom of religion provided by the Kyrgyz Constitution allows an individual to apply to a religious school only after completing compulsory secondary education.

In accordance with the Law on Education, compulsory education consists of general primary (*nachal'noe obchshee*) for grades 1 to 4 (ages 7-10) and general lower secondary (*osnovnoe obchshee*) for grades 5 to 9 (usually ages 11-15). This is the minimum educational requirement set by the state. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing curricula, setting national standards and educational policy, developing certification examinations, and awarding degrees.¹⁴ As religious education has been separated from the government, the Ministry of Education has no authority or responsibility to control religious educational institutions, including madrasahs.

The “Concept of State Policy in the Sphere of Religion for 2014-2020,” adopted on November 3, 2014, was the first attempt to regulate religious education. The document outlines major directions and principles of state regulations and determines the need of measures and regulations over religious organizations and associations. It advances official state visions and priorities for optimizing the relation between state and religious institutions, including religious educational institutions.¹⁵

The draft law on religious education and religious institutions was first presented in 2013. The document aimed to standardize licensing procedures, create minimum standards for religious educational institutions, organize educational activities, fortify the material and technical base of educational establishments, and register foreign educational establishments.¹⁶ “The draft law suggested that all religious educational structures should begin to structure their curricula so that secular disciplines make up approximately 30 to 40 percent of the entire curricula in order to make their diplomas acceptable by the state and provide a broader education for the Islamic intelligentsia.”¹⁷ However, the bill is still today under consideration. An SCRA representative pointed out that the draft law has already been sent to the Prime Minister’s Office for approval. “Hopefully, it will enter into force after the consideration and approval of Parliament and the President of Kyrgyzstan.”¹⁸

In fact, Kyrgyzstan’s democratic legislation has become a foundation for Islamic diversity.¹⁹ The state policy is liberal with respect to religious practices and beliefs. For instance, as the Bulan Institute points out, “the shortcomings in religious education have a negative impact on national security, the radicalization of society, and the spread of ideas of religious extremism.”²⁰ However, “Actions from the state alone are not enough to counter religious extremism,” said Zakir Chotayev, another SCRA representative.²¹ Indeed, other than checking for the existence of extremist propaganda, the state does not directly interfere in the general work or the content of the curricula of madrasahs.²²

In order to open a madrasah, one must register it with the Ministry of Justice—which supervises religious institutions—and then get official approval from the SCRA.²³ Officially, all madrasahs are controlled by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), also called the Muftiyate. Consequently, the Muftiyate has become a “direct connection” between the state and the Muslim community. The state has delegated the SAMK to manage and oversee the activities of religious educational institutions.²⁴ According to one madrasah director, “Kaziyats (the Muftiyate’s territorial entities) control our work; they provide us with a curriculum. Sometimes we work with other state agencies and the State Commission on Religious Affairs.”²⁵

The SCRA facilitates and advocates for the inclusion of secular classes in religious educational institutions. It has also become progressively involved in the regulation of madrasahs since 2014. In cooperation with the Muftiyate, it has been monitoring the curricula of religious schools. The commission monitored approximately 34 madrasahs in 2015, and 74 in 2016. In 2019, the SCRA visited 60 madrasahs. “When we do our monitoring, we look into technical conditions, educational processes, and curricula. We attend classes, test teaching staff, and see their educational background,” said Zair Ergeshev, the director of the SCRA.²⁶

In addition to its monitoring duties, the SCRA is expecting to adopt a provision on reforming religious educational institutions, which was recently sent to the Prime Minister’s office as well. According to the document, madrasahs will receive the status of “secondary specialized educational institutions” and

will be obliged to introduce five secular disciplines: The History of Kyrgyzstan, Man and Society, The History of Religions, Kyrgyz language, and Kyrgyz literature. In addition to this, madrasahs “will have to pass a technical licensing, corresponding to material and technical standards,” said Zair Ergeshev.²⁷

The topic of state licensing and religious education standards is one of the most discussed issues among Kyrgyz officials, the religious community, and policy experts. In order to grant a state license, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic requires “all educational establishments to have an adequate material and technical base, adequately educated teaching staff, a building that meets all architectural requirements, a developed infrastructure of classrooms, the latest information and computer technologies, and libraries, etc. Each faculty should have at least two Doctors of Science and each chair at least two PhDs among their teachers and lecturers.”²⁸

As Nazira Kurbanova notes, “many of those who headed Islamic educational establishments knew only too well that they would not live up to these requirements and, therefore, would not be licensed.”²⁹ Mufti R. Egemberdiev argued that, “the law will not only fail to solve the problems, it will even multiply them.”³⁰ He argued that in order to develop “modern madrasahs,” the state should provide financial support to them. Today, the religious schools are self-sustaining and private, therefore, the government cannot provide funding to them.³¹ However, the Muftiyate has shown an interest in accelerating the collaborative work between the Ministry of Education and the SCRA in order to improve the quality of education and obtain licenses.

External Donors

While madrasahs do not receive any financial support from the state, they may get financial support from other actors such as foreign states. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey have been providing financial support to religious schools “in order to influence the form that Islam would take in the region... Turkey, although officially and formally a secular state, also subsidized religious education as a part of its effort to expand its own influence.”³² All sorts of Islamic charities have given money and dispatched teachers, and many madrasahs have been set up from Arab funds. In fact, according to a 2018 article about Kyrgyz madrasah funding, “...madrasahs would never say openly about their sources of financing support...”³³ It should be

noted that Kyrgyz private entrepreneurs also play an important role in funding religious educational institutions.

Another form of “influence” on Islamic schools’ curricula has come from the American Embassy in Kyrgyzstan. Since 2017, the Embassy has sponsored an ongoing vocational training project in various religious schools. The Public Foundation AVEP has been implementing the project in seven regions, covering over 28 madrasahs, including 11 girls’ madrasahs.³⁴ The vocational trainings consist of additional short-term vocational trainings that include eight types of classes. Women’s madrasahs have cooking, IT, and tailoring classes; men’s madrasahs have welding, furniture making, bee keeping, electrician training, and mechanic classes. Upon completion of their selected training, students receive a state certificate and job offer.

The initiative’s pilot schools have received highly positive feedback and have left a lasting impact on the graduates: “I was lucky to study in a good madrasah. We had vocational trainings and I picked up cooking trainings. I think this is important for me as a future wife and a mother. Men like those women who can cook well,” said Mahinur from Jalal Abad.³⁵ One of the interviewed religious leaders has also acknowledged the importance of vocational trainings, particularly for girls. “They don’t get a degree after graduating a madrasah, but at least they have applied skills. Women can use these skills to earn money. I know women who work in restaurants in Russia after graduating piloting schools.”³⁶ Unfortunately, less than a third of schools are covered by the U.S. Embassy project; the remaining two thirds of madrasahs are left out, continuing to lack both secular and vocational classes.

The U.S. support was extended until 2022. But the question of its sustainability should be raised, as neither the state nor religious schools are ready to invest in vocational trainings in Kyrgyzstan.

Why study in a madrasah?

Today, about 10,000 students receive a religious education in Kyrgyz madrasahs—among them 6,175 boys and 3,761 girls. According to data provided by the SCRA, there are 62 boys’, 25 girls’, and 23 mixed madrasahs in Kyrgyzstan.³⁷ Despite the issues related to religious education, the number of students continues to grow every year. Below, I discuss three

of the fundamental drivers that influence girls' decision to study in Islamic schools.

Parental influence

Based on the interviews conducted for this research, it is clear that, in most cases, parents make the decision to enroll their children in a religious school. A study by Search for Common Ground³⁸ in Kyrgyzstan reported that “students of religious schools feel pressure from parents to obtain religious education.” In the initial stages, girls are subject to more pressure than boys. At the same time, 90 percent of the graduates surveyed said that if they were older, they would have made the same choice and would not want to change anything in their lives.³⁹

“Some parents don't want their children to study in a place that contradicts Islamic beliefs,” says Chybak Azhy, a former Mufti and currently one of the most popular Kyrgyz religious leaders. “Darwinism contradicts Islamic doctrines; mankind is descendant of a monkey – this is wrong! Parents are afraid their children will believe in these teachings and turn away from Islam,” explained the former Muftii, who defends the idea that all schoolbooks should adhere to Islamic theology. Moreover, he believes that gender segregation in education is needed to attract religious families to secular schools.⁴⁰

Parents see the madrasah as the perfect school—not just to get “proper” religious knowledge, but as a protected and secure place isolated from alcohol, drugs, violence, and “bad behavior.” Sometimes migrant workers claim that the madrasah is the best place for their children, as they are under control, are taken good care of, and are isolated from bad influences. “In fact, the parents don't care if their children become a professor or a millionaire,” said Saliev. “They do not mind if their kids are influenced by stereotypes or ‘false’ dreams. Parents just are happy to isolate their kinds from alcohol, drugs, violence, and discrimination.”⁴¹

Social trends

Parents often believe that their daughters will become more religious, obedient, nice, kind, and “perfect brides and future mothers” if they attend an Islamic educational institution.⁴² Graduation from a religious school is indeed considered to be the highest criterion for a “perfect bride,” which is the main incentive for girls.⁴³ In fact, the notion of a “perfect bride” is directly related to the retraditionalization of gender

roles.

According to Noor O'Neill Borbieva, since Kyrgyzstan's 1991 independence, “Kyrgyzstani women have suffered disproportionately from poverty, domestic violence, unemployment, and underrepresentation in government. Brides are expected to defer to their husbands and in-laws on all matters. Their labor and offspring are the property of their husbands' families. Men are the heads of household and the providers, and women are the homemakers and caregivers.” The religious women are more radical in this view, believing that if they please their spouses, they will go to heaven: “a woman may work only if she can keep up with her domestic responsibilities.”⁴⁴

As explained in UN Women's recent research in Kyrgyzstan regarding women's marriage choice: “The position of a ‘daughter-in-law’ (*kelin*) in the husband's family was generally experienced as one of vulnerability, which was burdened with the need to prove one's versatility as a ‘good wife.’”⁴⁵ Rano Turaeva, studying the *kelin* phenomena, concluded that a “*kelin* comes to the family of her husband and does all the work around the household, including for her parents-in-law, their children etc. A *kelin* is supposed to respect all the family members of the household. *Kelins* should obey not only their husbands but also other elderly members of the family.”⁴⁶ Michaele Commercio argues that “Sympathy for retraditionalization is unfolding in the context of ongoing economic uncertainty that has plagued Kyrgyzstan since the Soviet Union's collapse...”⁴⁷

Isolation

Another factor pushing girls to choose religious schools relates to the inability of secular schools to accept girls' religious clothing and lifestyle. According to a government decree “On the introduction of Unified requirements for school uniforms in educational institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic,” a girl's school uniform consists of the following set of items: a blouse, vest, skirt, trousers, dress, apron, and a jacket made in the classical Kyrgyz style.⁴⁸ In accordance with this decree, teachers and school principals request their students to follow the common rules. Several cases of persecution, bullying, and psychological abuse by teachers, school principals, and students against girls wearing Islamic clothing have been recorded in

Kyrgyzstan within the last ten years. As an example, in 2018, a girl was denied attendance at her school's art class because she was wearing a scarf.⁴⁹ "If you want (to wear) a hijab, study in a madrasah," claimed the head of the school.⁵⁰ This situation often pushes them (and influences the decision of the parents) to quit a secular school in order to enroll in an Islamic institution.

Life in and after the madrasah

The freedom of religion provided in the Kyrgyz Constitution allows an individual to apply to a religious school only after completing compulsory secondary education. However, some madrasahs admit students who have not yet completed their secondary school. There are even reported cases of madrasahs admitting 7- and 8-year-old children: "Once, I saw a class half full of girls aged 10-11...this was in one of the madrasahs in Bishkek. I didn't see as many underaged children in men's madrasahs as in girls' ones. I can say that underaged students usually prevail in Uzbek-speaking madrasahs," Gulsana Abytova said.⁵¹ In the Osh region, it is especially common for parents to make their children drop out of schools even before the end of secondary school. "Individuals completely devote their lives to religion, and completely forget that kids need to have a secular education first. Therefore, madrasahs should expand the list of secular classes and give more opportunities to students."⁵²

Some girls think about their future more carefully and enroll in a madrasah only after graduating from a secular school. Kalipa for instance practiced distance learning at her secondary school in Aravan so that she would be able to attend a madrasah. She managed to get a school degree and enroll in university afterwards.⁵³ Aiperi and her friends made an agreement with a local college in Osh that allowed them to attend classes in the morning only and study in a madrasah in the afternoon.⁵⁴ But these cases are rare.

Many of the experts interviewed for this paper state that religious education is segregated from the state: neither staff nor students see themselves as part of a secular Kyrgyzstan, and they dream that one day the state will become an Islamic one.⁵⁵ One of the interviewed experts mentioned that girls studying in religious schools do not have a feeling of affiliation with the nation-state; the only thing they believe is

religion. "Our motherland is Jannat (i.e. eternal reward of Allah)," Gulsana quoted a madrasah student where she did trainings.⁵⁶

Indeed, my research suggests that parents who send their daughters to madrasahs often ignore their daughters' future inability to apply to a university and the likelihood of unemployment. Graduates of religious schools face problems with the recognition of their certificate of graduation. As a result, they have issues with further employment—or, due to the lack of a certificate of completion of school, they cannot continue their studies. "Certificates issued to the children by madrasahs are not recognized."⁵⁷ The Bulan Institute's research claims that only 5-7 percent of all madrasahs have secular classes in their curriculum.

As girls are usually isolated when studying in madrasahs, they do not know how to integrate into society after their studies. Most graduates of religious educational institutions get married during and after their studies; they do not work, having no choice but to take care of the household and raise children.⁵⁸ As told by one student, "Most of my schoolmates are staying at home, some got married and don't work so far."⁵⁹

Nevertheless, a number of young women understand the importance of secular education. They find ways to enroll in secondary specialized colleges to get a proper diploma and profession, most often as a tailor or cook. "I insisted my daughter should study in madrasah. However, I also urged her get a secular education, because every woman should know how to make money and be independent," said Aliya. Her daughter works in Turkey as an interpreter.⁶⁰ Therefore, the opinions and decisions of a husband and senior family members play vital roles in the life of young women. "I want to become a translator-interpreter one day. I don't want to waste my knowledge, but if my family doesn't want me to work, I will obey," admitted Kalipa.⁶¹

One of my interviewees, Gulina, noted that she would like to become a *mударise*. "I wish that madrasah curricula included more foreign languages, not only Arabic. I want to become an English teacher. I would like to contribute to the transformation of the madrasah educational system." Gulina wants her children to study in a madrasah. Moreover, she believes that "they (her kids) should enroll in a madrasah even before graduating secondary school—

in parallel with a secular school.” As this case demonstrates, some madrasahs accept minors. Similarly, in some cases, there are flexible institutions, such as the madrasahs as Naima and Toiiba in Bishkek, where the children can study at school and attend the madrasah simultaneously.⁶²

It should be noted that Mareike Winkelmann, in her research on madrasahs in New Delhi (India), asked the female student respondents what they wanted to do after graduation. The students’ “first response was usually that they wanted to get married, while several expressed a desire to teach either in this madrasa or elsewhere.”⁶³ In fact, in my research I found identical answers. Winkelmann concludes that “girls’ madrasahs open up a limited range of future trajectories in the professional sector.”⁶⁴

Future perspectives for religious education in Kyrgyzstan

In 2016, the Kyrgyz government launched the country’s first theology college at the Kyrgyz State University named after Ishenaly Arabaev. “The college furnishes a general education, along with studying the foundations of traditional Islam,” said Akmaral Gaibayeva, an SCRA employee.⁶⁵ It is an inclusive, mixed religious college in which both men and women can study. The first cadre of students graduated from the college in 2018. Four girls among them got married, and twenty continued their studies at religious universities. The Theology College has an official license from the Ministry of Education. Thus, the graduates receive a state diploma “that will enable them to continue their studies at any other university in Kyrgyzstan.”⁶⁶ The pilot project was financed by the Aiman Foundation for over three years, and since fall 2019, has been under the supervision of the Kyrgyz State University. The theology college students pay a tuition fee (about US\$200 per year), while the Kyrgyz State University has its own allocated funds.⁶⁷ “It’s good to have a college that teaches both religious and secular knowledge,” Mufti Toktomushev said. “Young people will emerge who can guide themselves superbly in secular life and have a deep knowledge of religion.”⁶⁸

As a matter of fact, the theological college is the first and the only religious school in Kyrgyzstan that combines a high-quality Islamic educational system with secular components. The SCRA has presented the college as a prototype for all religious educational

institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Those religious schools that do not correspond to the suggested model criteria should be closed, said one SCRA representative.⁶⁹

The Kyrgyz government clearly acknowledges the importance of improving the quality of religious education, including the granting of standardized state licenses. Nazira Kurbanova notes, “State accreditation and licensing will increase their prestige, put them on an equal basis with other educational establishments (either state or municipal), and change their status, which will make them eligible—within certain limits—for state support.”⁷⁰

However, much still needs to be done. The confrontation between religious and secular education should come to an end. The state, its international partners, and religious institutions should cooperate and pull together to ensure that all madrasah applicants have graduated from a secular secondary school. Moreover, female graduates’ employment after graduating from madrasahs should be monitored and encouraged by the government and religious leaders. Young women should be urged to continue education after graduating from a madrasah and have a profession in support of girls’ education. The reform of madrasahs should include the regulation of the whole system of religious education, including the implementation of secular classes and the introduction of vocational trainings so that girls can have a wider range of opportunities after graduation.

Recommendations

To the Kyrgyz Government

- ✓ Adopt a legal framework that regulates access to religious education and religious schools’ certification, allowing graduates of madrasahs to take a nationwide test (ORT) and receive a diploma after madrasah graduation in accordance with established state standards.
- ✓ Adopt a provision that sets minimum hiring requirements for madrasah staff (i.e. secular and religious education, working experience, etc.) and requires all madrasah staff to attend upgraded trainings, including trainings on empowering women and gender equality.
- ✓ Ensure that all madrasah applicants have graduated from a secular secondary school.

✓ Support initiatives that introduce vocational trainings in madrasahs and build the technical skills that female students will need for future employment and/or self-employment opportunities.

✓ The National Statistics Committee should collect and make publicly available statistics on the number of madrasahs in Kyrgyzstan, including annual attendance, number of girls and boys studying in religious schools, as well as statistics on their professional engagement after graduating from madrasahs.

To Kyrgyzstan's International Partners

✓ Urge the Kyrgyz government in private and public meetings to ensure the regulation of the

situation with religious schools, particularly girls' madrasahs, and support the government in its effort to do so, including through financial and technical means.

✓ Share best practices that can help guarantee a high quality of secular classes in madrasahs while still corresponding with Islamic values, as well as expanding the diversity of vocational trainings.

✓ Continue to expand the U.S. Embassy's initiative in Kyrgyzstan to introduce vocational trainings in madrasahs; ensure its sustainability.

✓ Support the Kyrgyz government as it seeks to improve systematic data collection on girls' madrasahs

¹ "Religious education in Kyrgyzstan: madrasah system in urgent need of reform," Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations April, 2017, <http://bulaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Report-on-REUs-in-English.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ "Kyrgyzstan Counters Extremism by Educating, Empowering Women," Muhiddin Zarif and Behzod Muhammadiy, February 29, 2016, accessed November 29, 2019, <http://www.voanews.com/east-asia/kyrgyzstan-counters-extremism-educating-empowering-women>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. Afsaruddin, "Muslim Views on Education: Parameters, Purview, and Possibilities," *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 44. (2005): 143-178.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Kolichestvo medrese ugrozhaet kachestvu obrzovaniia?" *Azattyk*, March 29, 2018, accessed September 18, 2019, <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-religion-bulan-madrasah/29132424.html>.

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ T. Jeremy Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia," *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 3 (2003): 389-410.

¹² Nazira Kurbanova, "Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and Caucasus* 15, no. 1 (2014): 90-103.

¹³ "Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic," Article 32, December 28, 2016, accessed November 27, 2019, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202913?cl=ru-ru>.

¹⁴ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Education", Article 40, July 2019, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1216?cl=ru-ru>.

¹⁵ "Concept of state policy in the sphere of religion for 2014-2020," November 14, 2014, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/68294>.

¹⁶ "Kanybek Osmonaliev razrabotal zakonoproekt o religioznom obrazovanii v Kyrgyzstane," *Knews*, September 19, 2013, accessed October 17, 2019, <http://knews.kg/2013/09/19/kanyibek-osmonaliev-razrabotal-zakonoproekt-o-religioznom-obrazovanii-v-kyrgyzstane/>.

¹⁷ Kurbanova, "Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan".

¹⁸ Zair Ergeshov, personal interview with the author, September 29, 2019.

¹⁹ Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia".

²⁰ "Religious education in Kyrgyzstan: madrasah system in urgent need of reform".

²¹ "Kyrgyz schools to combat extremism with religious culture classes," *Karavanserai*, November 10, 2017, accessed November 29, 2019, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2017/10/11/feature-01.

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- ²⁴ Noor O’Neill Borbieva. “Empowering Muslim Women: Independent Religious Fellowships in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Slavic Review* 71, no. 2 (2012): 288-307.
- ²⁵ A director of a madrasah, personal interview with the author, October 1, 2019.
- ²⁶ Zair Ergeshov, personal interview with the author, September 29, 2019.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Kurbanova, “Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan”.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ “Kolichestvo medrese ugrozhaet kachestvu obrzovaniia?”.
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