New Voices from Uzbekistan

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Public Sector Innovations?
Examining Social Innovations in Governance in Uzbekistan

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Uzbekistan declared 2018 the year of Entrepreneurship and Support for Innovative Ideas and Technologies,[1] thereby signaling that innovation in all spheres of the economy and society was the government's priority. Governance-sector administrative reform aimed at advancing the role and status of civil servants, as well as introducing innovations in the public service and governance, have been declared as prerequisites for economic, political, and civic development. Accordingly, Uzbekistan is now striving to implement "best practices" of governance, including by introducing new, innovative methods for the provision of government services.

In the scholarly literature, Coe, Paquet, and Roy argue that in an era of globalization and development of new information and communication technologies, e-governance is increasingly the right approach to governance.[2] They recommend a more community-driven model of governance that would use information and communication technologies to initiate the economic, social, and political transition to smart communities.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has taken several steps toward such governance. Of these, electronic government services, centers of government services, the president's public receptions, the prime minister's public receptions, and the president's online reception are the best-known. Even before this, starting in 2012, the UNDP began supporting small-scale "social innovation" projects in local communities aimed at empowering individuals and fostering social innovation. These projects were designed to solve developmental problems by addressing issues such as water and electricity scarcity, fostering the inclusion of people with disabilities, and increasing the transparency and accountability of local public institutions.[3]

Despite these modernization efforts, however, numerous challenges are as yet impeding the dynamic development of the governance sector. This sector is managed in an old-fashioned way and changes are introduced only slowly.

Given this status quo, the current policy paper analyzes the policy reforms launched in the governance sector of Uzbekistan, discussing the trajectory, pitfalls, and opportunities of these

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[1] See "Uzbekistan Announces 2018 as Year of Support of Active Entrepreneurship, Innovative Ideas and Technologies," *UzDaily*, December 22, 2017, https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/42072.

[2] Amanda Coe, Gilles Paquet, and Jeffrey Roy, "E-Governance and Smart Communities: A Social Learning Challenge," *Social Science Computer Review* 19, no. 1 (2001): 80-93.

[3] UNDP, "Evaluation of Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan: Final Report," 2015, accessed July 17, 2019, https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/7433?fbclid=IwAR1ZfPTuUISiIJICFsY2wwdTRniF91hzldidGbews-KTUHUmTUhhO42EsJ8.

transformations on their way toward the provision of innovative, people-oriented public services. The study considers the recent public policy changes under Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021; it also scrutinizes the "social innovation" projects implemented by the UNDP in 2012-2014. After discussing these services, it assesses what changes should be introduced to make them more innovative, user-friendly, and solution-focused. The research question guiding this paper is as follows:

> *How have social innovations in governance progressed and what challenges have prevented them from making Uzbekistan's governance sector truly innovative?*

To answer this question, the paper draws on both qualitative data and analysis of documents and other available sources of information. The qualitative data include in-depth interviews with:
1. UNDP staff members in charge of social innovations in governance (local communities);
2. Public officials in charge of the introduction of social innovations; and
3. Local civil society leaders implementing social innovation projects in local communities.

The documentary analysis looks at available sources focused on governance reform and innovations in the governance sector in Uzbekistan, with a particular focus on texts by international organizations, civil servants, and experts in this area.

Defining and Analyzing "Social Innovation"

Social innovation is a difficult concept to define. Historically, the concept has been used by social scientists to explain transformational changes in a society.[1] Marques, Morgan, and Richardson identify different types of social innovation, which are distinguished by "the scale and scope of social change."[2] In more recent years, as Domanski and Kaletka observe, the scholarly debate has turned to define social innovation "either through social relations or [...] in terms of societal impact."[3] Some scholars emphasize that that the conceptual debate revolves around the word "social" rather than the word "innovation."[4] According to Phills, Deiglmeier, and Miller, "the term 'social' is used to explain 'improvement' in any way."[5] Here, "improvement" is understood to mean better ways of satisfying basic needs and better social relationships.

Another trend in the scholarly discussion of "social innovation" is to relate the term to other concepts. For instance, scholars have described "social entrepreneurship" as a sub-set of social innovation.[6] To find the links between social innovation and other societal phenomena, Evers, Ewert, and Brandsen conducted research to study the role of social innovation in social cohesion.[7] Domanski and Kaletka argue that, "the concept of social innovation cannot be limited to one focus, be it social entrepreneurship or social economy [...] widening the perspective is crucial for understanding social innovation."[8]

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[1] Benoît Godin, *Social Innovation: Utopias of Innovation from c.1830 to the Present* (Montréal: Project on the Intellectual History of Innovation, 2012); Pedro Marques, Kevin Morgan, and Ronald Richardson, "Social Innovation in Question: The Theoretical and Practical Implications of a Contested Concept," *Politics and Space* 36, no. 3 (2018): 496-512.

[2] Ibid., 501.

[3] Dmitri Domanski and Christoph Kaletka, eds., "Exploring the Research Landscape of Social Innovation," Social Innovation Community, Dortmund, Germany, June 2017, 21.

[4] See, for example, Adalbert Evers, Benjamin Ewert, and Taco Brandsen, eds., *Social Innovations for Social Cohesion: Transnational Patterns and Approaches from 20 European Cities* (Tübingen: WILCO Consortium, 2014).

[5] James A. Phills Jr., Kriss Deiglmeier, and Dale T. Miller, "Rediscovering Social Innovation," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2008): 17; Dmitri Domanski and Christoph Kaletka, eds., "Exploring the Research Landscape of Social Innovation," Social Innovation Community, Dortmund, Germany, June 2017, 21.

[6] SI-Drive, *Atlas of Social Innovation: New Practices for a Better Future* (Dortmund: European Commission, 2018).

[7] Evers, Ewert, and Brandsen, *Social Innovations for Social Cohesion*.

[8] Domanski and Kaletka, "Exploring the Research Landscape of Social Innovation," 21.

Thus, we can see that scholars have attempted to deploy the concept of "social innovation" in two main ways: 1) to apply the concept to explain social/societal phenomena, social relations, or social impact in different fields; and 2) to research the relationship between other concepts and "social innovation." Due to the lack of a generally agreed-upon definition of "social innovation," this paper will deploy Marques, Morgan, and Richardson's definition, which encompasses three main elements:

> First, social innovation actively promotes inclusive relationships among individuals, especially those that are or have been neglected by previous economic, political, cultural or social processes. In this sense, social innovation values the process of implementing a new idea as much as it does the outcomes of that implementation. Second, social innovation is explicitly about addressing need, whether it is in areas such as education, health, governance, or more broadly in dealing with social exclusion. Third, though this is not necessary, social innovation is often aimed at specific domains such as education, health, migration, and governance. It is not necessary because there are human needs that fall outside these domains.[1]

In addition, since the paper discusses social innovations supported by the UNDP in governance, it uses the definition of governance provided by the UNDP Oslo Governance Center:

> Governance is about the processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented. It is the result of interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society) and involves decisions, negotiation, and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how. The relationships between government and different sectors of society determine how things are done, and how services are provided. Governance is therefore much more than government or 'good government' and shapes the way a service or set of services are planned, managed and regulated within a set of political, social and economic systems.[2]

"Social Innovation" in Uzbekistan: Conceptualization and Results

The bureaucratic context of Uzbekistan is very complex. It is still transitioning from the Soviet (not citizen-centered) approach to a more user-friendly model of government services. The vast majority of services used by citizens are provided by government entities, which are usually the only service providers. The status quo does not encourage government organizations to compete for customers, with the result that there is little incentive to improve the quality of service provision.

To bring about change, the UNDP has encouraged increased decision-making by individuals and communities. It believes that more inclusive, human-centered, and community-driven governance solutions will shift the status quo and make it possible to address the most pressing issues and problems that individuals face. To this end, the UNDP began experimenting in Uzbekistan with "social innovations" in development in general and in governance in particular. These projects have been striving for greater inclusion, participation, and responsiveness through attempts to foster cooperation between local government (local organizations) and community leaders, and through the use of technology, including information and communication technology, as well as locally-designed engineering works.

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[1] Marques, Morgan, and Richardson, Social Innovation in Question," 500.
[2] United Nations Development Programme, "A User's Guide to Measuring Local Governance," 2009, accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/a-users-guide-to-measuring-local-governance-/LG%20Guide.pdf.

To be sustainable, and to diffuse across the government sector, these projects needed government support. In practice, however, "social innovation" projects in Uzbekistan lacked this support, as my informants highlighted.

Umid Gafurov, the leader of the "social innovation" project INFOBOX, indicated that, "In the case of the government, INFOBOX could help them to interact with local people via the internet: answer their questions, help solve their problems. This did not happen, though."[1] Ulugbek Musabekov, the leader of the "social innovation" project E-Diary, recalled that, "We tested our project in one school. It was possible because it was the school where I myself studied, and teachers know me there. To spread my project across the city, I would need additional support."[2] Emiliya Asadova from the UNDP pointed out that a lack of support from local organizations was a systemic problem for "social innovation" projects in Uzbekistan. She explained that, "In some cases, if local organizations did not want to pick it up, the project 'died.'"[3]

These challenges prevented the projects from becoming institutionalized and subsequently diffused across society.[4] Of the total, just two projects were institutionalized, five projects were closed, and 28 projects had only limited local impact.[5] On occasion, the leaders of small-scale "social innovation" projects have sought to cooperate with local organizations. Doston Kholosboev, the leader of the Peers Club "social innovation" project, noted that it was "established in cooperation with National Institute for Monitoring of Civil Society."[6] Lola Yuldasheva, the leader of the Fantasy Club "social innovation" project, mentioned that she worked with the local public school in her community to get a physical space for her courses for girls with disabilities. She described the space as "a nice place where girls can come and take courses."[7]

In the context of post-Soviet Uzbekistan, the concept of "social innovation" was not used to explain complex phenomena, their relations, or their impact on different fields, nor was "social" seen in terms of improving social relations in order to solve larger societal challenges. Instead, local organizations tended to substitute the concept of "social innovation" with other terms that a) are clearer to (better known by) the partner government organizations and individuals; and b) have social developmental overtones, because the projects were intended to have a development impact. Essentially, the concept was replaced in order to make it easier for partner organizations and individuals to understand what should be done to make a developmental change. In different cases, "social innovation" was substituted by the following terms:

- ***Social initiative or social project***

Since the UNDP's national partners see them as something directed toward development, they usually consider them as something that should bring social value to society and to people. As such, from the partners' perspective, regardless of what the UNDP called the project, it was a social initiative. Veronika Polyakova from the National Library explained that, "'Social innovation' is support of areas helping people, making public good. Because we live in society, 'social innovation' is a social initiative and a form of civic engagement."[8]

Project-wise, in the view of national partners, a "social innovation" should be a project that solves social issues. Husan Mukimov from the Center for Youth Initiatives observed that: "If it [social innovation] is about doing social projects to solve social problems, then we at the Center have been implementing such projects."[9] The national partners of the UNDP/UNV Project focused primarily on the social component of

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[1] Umid Gafurov, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, November 2017.

[2] Ulugbek Musabekov, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, November 2017.

[3] Emiliya Asadova, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, August 2017.

[4] UNDP, "Evaluation of Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan: Final Report," 3.

[5] Ibid., 12.

[6] Doston Kholosboev, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, November 2017.

[7] Lola Yuldasheva, personal interview with the author, via IMO Messenger, November 2017.

[8] Veronika Polyakova, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, August 2017.

[9] Husan Mukimov, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, August 2017.

"social innovation," completely leaving out the point about innovation. This meant that "social innovation" in Uzbekistan was reduced to a social initiative or social project. Social innovation certainly is about addressing social issues—but focusing solely on its social dimension results in an incomplete (and inaccurate) perception of the term.

- ***Civic engagement or community volunteering***

The UNDP was combining two major activities: the promotion of social innovation and support for volunteerism. Since these activities were organized in parallel, and sometimes even overlapped with each other, "social innovation" projects that were led by volunteers and local civil society leaders were considered civic engagement or community volunteering.

Emiliya Asadova from the UNDP explained for instance that, "Since we were also promoting volunteerism in the UNDP/UNV Project, our partners, especially from the National Library, thought that 'social innovation' was about community volunteering or some sort of civic engagement."[1] In other words, social innovation projects were regarded as an arrangement of community or volunteering activities. Although social relationships among the individuals were important components of social innovation projects, this was not all that they were about. For national partners of the UNDP in Uzbekistan, however, "social innovation" was about engaging with community, prompting them to substitute the term "social innovation" with terms that seemed to do a better job of explaining what was happening in the local context.

On the basis of this discussion of social innovation in Uzbekistan, two conclusions can be drawn. First, social innovation projects can be initiated by citizens. They can address the real needs of citizens/communities and can offer a new (innovative) solution to existing problems. They can be implemented locally but be intended to diffuse across the governance sector. Of course, these projects also needed government support, which they usually lacked (or received only intermittently). Second, the concept of "social innovation" was usually misunderstood as a social project or a community engagement initiative. In other words, it was implied and applied as something promoting social development, without sufficient attention to the innovation aspect, which changes the whole design and approach of any project introduced to the governance sphere.

New Initiatives in the Governance Sector: Real Innovations in Governance?

The Uzbek government has gradually been introducing electronic governance services for citizens. One of the primary instruments of electronic governance is the Portal of Interactive Government Service,[2] which provides 308 services from 2,437 government units.[3] The portal also regulates the "single window" *(odno okno)* centers, which started out providing 16 services for entrepreneurs and are now available for all citizens to use.[4] In addition, the Uzbek government has launched the Portal to Discuss Legislative Acts,[5] to increase its level of consultation with citizens, and the Portal of Utilities and Housing,[6] to facilitate the exchange of information between the owners of private apartments (houses), government entities providing housing and construction services, and legislators.[7]

Nevertheless, according to the UNDP, community and citizen involvement in government decision-making in Uzbekistan remains between the second (consulting) and third (involving) levels of public

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[1] Emiliya Asadova, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, August 2017.

[2] See my.gov.uz.

[3] See Sherzodkhodzha Khabibyllakhuzhaevich Khabibullaev, "Razvitie elektronnogo pravitel'stva v Uzbekistane," *D-Russia.ru*, March 13, 2017, http://d-russia.ru/razvitie-elektronnogo-pravitelstva-v-uzbekistane.html.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See regulation.gov.uz.

[6] See e-communal.uz.

[7] See regulation.gov.uz.

participation developed by the International Association of Public Participation.[1] The UNDP contends that increased civic engagement is required to ensure citizens' cooperation with the government and further empower citizens to participate in the government decision-making process. This will enable Uzbekistan to move up the Citizen Engagement Index toward the fourth (cooperation) and fifth (empowerment) levels. By increasing civic engagement, citizens' satisfaction (based on the Life Ladder Index of the Gallup World Poll[2]) will increase, while corruption (based on the Control of Corruption Index of the World Bank's World Governance Indices[3]) will decrease.[4]

In this context, Gibson-Graham and Roelvink state that local social innovations should be used as an analytical tool for governance that draws attention to the people involved in decision-making, as well as to the forms in favor of such decision-making.[5] To resist prevailing modes of thinking and acting, innovative governance must involve a range of people, including "non-traditional actors."[6] But the issue is that limited public resources usually curtail innovation, which requires resources for experimentation. In his study, Potts addresses this issue, arguing that:

> The innovation deficit in public services] can be explained as an unintended consequence of the concerted public sector drive toward the elimination of waste through efficiency, accountability and transparency. Yet in an evolving economy this can be a false efficiency, as it also eliminates the "good waste" that is a necessary cost of experimentation. This results in a systematic trade-off in the public sector between the static efficiency of minimizing the misuse of public resources and the dynamic efficiency of experimentation. This is inherently biased against risk and uncertainty and, therein, explains why governments find service innovation so difficult. In the drive to eliminate static inefficiencies, many political systems have subsequently overshot and stifled policy innovation.[7]

Besides the efficient use of public resources, which follows the same logic as service provision in the private sector, a necessary aspect is the partnership between citizens, civil society, and government. This partnership could generate creative solutions for the provision of public services. Accordingly, the OECD emphasizes the need for the government to partner with citizens and civil society organizations: "Partnership of government with civil society and citizens can offer creative policy responses that enable governments to provide better public services in times of fiscal constraints. However, implementation of such partnership involves risks, which governments need to take into account for their effective implementation."[8] The OECD has also expressed concern "about how the different aspects of public sector governance can support innovation at all stages of its lifecycle, from identifying problems to generating ideas, developing proposals, implementing and evaluating projects, and diffusing them more widely throughout

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[1] See "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum," 2014, accessed July 17, 2019, https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf.

[2] See more at Gallup, "World Poll," accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.gallup.com/analytics/232838/world-poll.aspx.

[3] See World Bank, "Data Catalog: Control Of Corruption: Percentile Rank," accessed July 17, 2019, https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/control-corruption-percentile-rank.

[4] Ibid.

[5] J.K. Gibson-Graham and Gerda Roelvink, "Social Innovation for Community Economies," in *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*, ed. Diana MacCallum, Frank Moulaert, Jean Hillier, and Serena Vicari Haddock (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[6] Ibid., 29.

[7] Jason Potts, "The Innovation Deficit in Public Services: The Curious Problem of Too Much Efficiency and Not Enough Waste and Failure," *Innovation: Organization and Management* 11 (2009): 34.

[8] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Public Governance Reviews, "Together for Better Public Services," OECD, Paris, 2011, 7.

the organization."[1]

To empower citizens to participate in government decision-making, data on government activities and services should be available. Though Uzbekistan's Open Data Portal[2] is operational, it contains insufficient data—and available data is not updated in a timely fashion. Moreover, specific data about the activities of different government entities is still difficult to obtain. Conducting "social innovation" projects that would improve government services and make them more citizen-oriented depends on a more extensive use of open data.

On top of this, government agencies do not encourage relationships with citizens, even though these could illuminate the real problems that citizens experience on a daily basis and open the way for government and citizens to co-design solutions to these problems. Thus far, the government has permitted more online consultancy on different legislative acts but refrained from crowdsourcing ideas from citizens about what new and innovative measures could be taken to help them. The same is true of the design of government services, where the top-down approach to generating ideas and implementing projects continues to predominate.

In what follows, the paper discusses government-led changes and citizen-led "social innovation" projects in the governance sphere.

Agency for Government Service Provision under the Ministry of Justice and Centers for Government Services

A new government entity—the Agency for Government Service Provision—has been created on the basis of the President's decree "On reform of the national system of government service delivery." The motto of the agency is "Not that people should serve the government entities, but that government entities should serve the people." The agency's goal is to extend the "single window" services previously available to entrepreneurs to cover all citizens. Accordingly, centers of government service delivery have been attached to the Public Receptions of the President in every city and region. Fifty-eight government services will be made available at these centers in the period from 2018 to 2020, including permissions for individual construction works, household access to water and electricity, and receipt of various patents and archival documents.[3] In this way, the government seeks to enshrine the principle "documents are moving, not people."

The Agency for Government Services Delivery has already identified the following problems related to the work of the centers of government service delivery:[4]

- Centers of government services lack high-speed internet
- Low level of interagency integration
- Absence of electronic archives (many documents are in paper form)
- Government entities providing services and centers of government services do not have the required equipment (computers and technical devices) for providing innovative services
- License acquisition remains a complicated process that usually results in violations
- Individuals' low level of IT literacy prevents them from receiving online services

All the aforementioned problems are technical or caused by a lack of sufficient ICT capacity—and they do not address the whole scope of the problem with the quality of the government services. According to UNDP analysis, the problem is the very narrow definition of what constitutes "government service" in

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[1] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector," OECD, Paris, 2017, 11.

[2] Available at https://data.gov.uz.

[3] See https://egovernment.uz/ru/press_center/publication/razvitie-elektronnykh-gosudarstvennykh-uslug/ [currently unavailable].

[4] See "Chto izmenit'sia v sfere okazaniia gosudarstevennykh uslug?" *Kun.uz*, April 13 2018, https://kun.uz/ru/61405880.

Uzbekistan,[1] which should be connected to the larger topic of administrative reform. In fact, the UNDP finds that the system of delivery of government services has not changed yet:

> Government service should not be understood as the right that is provided by the government to the citizen. And for this to happen, the government service should be optimized, meaning that inter-agency government cooperation and management should be established. Yet the legislation has confirmed the initial understanding of government service as something regulated administratively.[2]

The UNDP notes that Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia that has not reformed its civil service and does not yet have a law "On the civil service."[3] On September 8, 2017, the President of Uzbekistan approved the Concept of Administrative Reform in Uzbekistan, under which the functions of the more than 100 government entities should be revised. However, political economy and development expert Yuliy Yusupov thinks that first of all the civil service should be seriously reformed, and then administrative reform should be delivered. Yusupov thinks that "nothing is done in this area. But to move reforms in other areas forward, first of all administrative reform should be carried out. (…) Civil servants should be appointed based on competitive selection."[4]

Another issue with government services that has not been discussed is that the list of services provided by the government is not complete. In other words, it is not clear how many services the government provides to citizens. This question should be answered even before attempts at the digitization of these services. Moreover, there is no comprehensive discussion of which services currently provided by the government should be eliminated entirely. In many cases, citizens receive identical services from different organizations; many of these could be either canceled or delegated to a single organ. The launch of centers of government services has begun this process, but it is sometimes still easier and quicker to seek a service through the relevant government agency rather than through the center.

In the case of public sector innovation, public managers are crucial actors applying social innovations in practice. A report by the UNDP Global Center for Public Center Excellence mentions three major features of social innovations for public managers:

> First, social innovation brings an experimental approach to public service. Experimentation entails an evidence-based approach, acknowledgement of the limits of current knowledge, multiple small bets about what might work, and acceptance that some attempts will fail but provide learning that builds towards future success. Second, social innovation requires distributed systems where innovation and initiative are dispersed to the periphery and connected by networks. Public managers must support and partner with social innovators: people who initiate and lead social innovation initiatives, and who can be found anywhere within the system, but tend to be semi-outsiders and boundary spanners. Third, citizens and service users can bring insights and assets to help public managers achieve their policy objectives. Social innovations are developed "with" and "by" users and not delivered "to" and "for" them. Co-design and co-production are common elements of social innovation. As a result, social innovation can build community capacity in addition to delivering direct

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[1] See "Administrativnaia reforma—cho ona vkliuchaet?" *Gazeta.uz*, March 14, 2019, http://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/03/14/reform.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] See "Itogi 2018: Iulii Iusupov o samykh vazhnykh reformakh v Uzbekistane za god i o tom, chto sdelano ne bylo," *Spot.uz*, December 18, 2018, https://www.spot.uz/ru/2018/12/18/yusupov/.

project impacts.[1]

Yet in Uzbekistan, citizens do not fully participate in the process of designing "innovative services." The focus is on technology, which, although it is certainly important, distracts from the more important point about innovation, namely that it should be user-friendly and hence users should participate in its design and co-creation. The end-users of services also know exactly what kind of government services they need and how these services should be designed to meet their needs.

Online and Offline Public Receptions of the President of Uzbekistan

The President of Uzbekistan's online receptions began on February 1, 2018.[2] The service was the successor to Shavkat Mirziyoyev's online reception as prime minister and later acting president of Uzbekistan, created on September 24, 2016,[3] on the same website: pm.gov.uz. Today, "pm" means *Prezidentga Murojaat* (Query to the President). The idea of the online reception is that citizens can:

- Obtain legal advice
- Contact the heads of state agencies
- Acquire information about people's receptions

Users can also indicate the local community (*mahalla*) where they are encountering a problem. This should help to rapidly address the problem, as well as generate data to analyze the problems and seek short- and long-term solutions to them. It is also possible to inform the government about persecution, making it possible for law enforcement to act immediately. Besides online receptions, offline receptions have also been introduced to effectively follow up on and solve citizens' problems.

The President's decree about these receptions was published on January 17, 2019.[4] It was reported that in the first two years of Mirziyoyev's presidency, over 2.5 million queries were sent, raising over 1.1 million different problems that have not been solved by local organizations. To supplement people's ability to address queries and complaints to the people's receptions, it was decided that the staff of receptions would visit local communities to identify the most pressing problems. Additionally, it was decided that the information system *Hudud (*Territory) would be integrated with people's receptions to make it possible to send queries online.

The receptions have been used quite effectively to establish dialogue with citizens and allow citizens to overcome bureaucratic barriers. Of late, however, there have been instances of abuses, with the receptions being abused to solve somewhat small and irrelevant issues, and even becoming an instrument for unfair complaints.[5] Most of the criticism this service has received has related to the fact that it has not offered a systemic solution to the problems but only dealt with their consequences.[6]

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[1] United Nations Development Programme Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, "Social Innovation for Public Service Excellence," January 1, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/capacity-development/English/Singapore%20Centre/GCPSE%20Social%20Innovation%20Summary.pdf, 4.

[2] See "V Uzbekistane zapushchena novaia versiia Virtual'noi priemnoi Prezidenta," Podrobno.uz, July 10, 2019, https://www.podrobno.uz/cat/tehnp/v-uzbekistane-zapushchena-novaya-versiya/.

[3] Khabibullaev, "Razvitie elektronnogo pravitel'stva v Uzbekistane."

[4] Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures for Further Improvement of the System for Addressing the Population's Problems," No. UP-5633, January 17, 2019, http://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/4166965.

[5] "Chto meshaet effektivnoi rabote narodnykh priemnykh Mirzieeva?" *Sputnik.uz*, May 4, 2017, https://uz.sputniknews.ru/society/20170504/5338882/Chto-meshaet-rabote-priemnyh.html.

[6] Ibid.

Such problems could be resolved if the government were to embed civil society organizations and social enterprises into the governance framework. Discussion of a new governance framework would certainly raise debates and resistance to the emerging innovative trend in governance. Many innovative elements are already being successfully implemented and used in governance systems in developing and developed countries.

Social enterprises have begun to play a truly innovative role in public welfare provision. Indeed, Leadbeater argues that, "Government needs a framework for social innovation in which social enterprise is likely to play a critical role. Social enterprise policy needs to be framed within a more comprehensive strategy for social innovation that is designed to deliver social impact by finding new ways to address unmet social needs."[1] According to Leadbeater, the outdated governance framework is not efficient enough to deliver social impact. This could be considered to conflict with the realities of welfare states, but welfare states have in fact been among the leaders in recognizing the need for social innovations in public service delivery, precisely because the old-fashioned system of service delivery has been failing to meet social needs.

Gibson-Graham and Roelvink emphasize the importance of linking social enterprises to governance mechanisms. They argue that "innovation in governance is actually a useful metric for evaluating social enterprises, as the scope of success and failure extends beyond quantifiable outcomes of particular projects to more general changes in participation, practices and values."[2] Thus, social enterprises play a role in the success of governance in general. They also note that "the success of innovative enterprises is not simply to be measured by their life span and growth but also by the 'seeds' and 'sediments' that may influence future practice."[3] Furthermore, they point out the need to change social relations and governance relations through innovation that would allow the government to act as a collective actor.[4]

Another set of criticisms relate to cases in which complaints submitted through the online service were repeatedly forwarded to government entities that had previously failed to deal effectively with the problem. This practice caused understandable frustration on the part of users of government services. In fact, it is still unclear to what extent citizens' queries have been appropriately responded to. Usually, the number of citizens' requests is publicly available, but this information does not indicate whether and how these requests have been satisfied. There is no guarantee that the agencies in charge of solving the issue raised by a citizen are dealing with it efficiently. To make it possible to monitor the process and the outcome, the data on all citizens' queries should be made publicly available. This would make online and offline government services to which citizens appeal through the online reception more effective and workable instruments, thereby increasing citizens' trust in the government.

Prime Minister's Receptions

The government has recently created prime minister's receptions to address the problems of entrepreneurs specifically.[5] The main goals of these receptions will be:

- Protecting entrepreneurs' rights and interests
- Resolving problematic issues and overcoming bureaucratic barriers (including issues related to land use, credits, getting legal permissions)
- Monitoring and analyzing systemic problems impeding the development of entrepreneurship, attracting foreign investment, and improving legislation

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[1] Charles Leadbeater, "Social Enterprise and Social Innovation: Strategies for the Next Ten Years," UK Cabinet Office, Office of the Third Sector, 2007, 14.

[2] Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, "Social Innovation for Community Economies," 29

[3] Ibid., 30.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "V 2018 godu pri narodnykh priemnykh poiavatsia Tsentry gosuslug," *UzReport*, December 13, 2017, https://www.uzreport.news/society/v-2018-godu-pri-narodnih-priemnih-poyavyatsya-tsentri-gosuslug.

For this purpose, the online portal business.gov.uz will be created. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this service, as it has yet to start operating and showing results. At present, therefore, the aforementioned recommendations for the design and implementation of similar services in Uzbekistan should be considered equally applicable to the prime minister's receptions.

Ministry of Innovational Development

Under President Mirziyoyev, the Ministry of Innovational Development was created in 2017 to support innovations in various areas of the economic, industrial, and social spheres.[1] Following this creation, a public discussion of the Concept of Innovational Development of Uzbekistan was conducted. In 2018, the Ministry of Innovational Development, the Center for Development Strategy, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation organized the First International Forum on Innovations in the Social Sphere, where social innovations were discussed with experts, government officials, and representatives of civil society organizations.

Despite the many efforts that the Ministry is making to introduce innovations, various problems are still inhibiting the spread of innovations across different sectors of the Uzbek economy and society. Professor Yulbarskhon Mansurov, the Deputy Minister of Innovational Development of Uzbekistan, has highlighted several problems:

> First of all, we are working to create an innovations ecosystem. This is not easy, and we sometimes have to push different actors to cooperate, to show that cooperation is beneficial. We have to make banks and scientists work together. We have to take care about patenting policy and copyright issues. Second, we have to deal with the problem of the scarcity of specialists in our Ministry. Basically, when we started, it was only the Minister and two Deputies. We have tried to invite one big expert, our compatriot, but we could not, for different reasons. […] Plus, many young people, almost 50 percent of our staff, have left the Ministry. […] Third, we already have the concept of innovational development of Uzbekistan, but we have not even started discussing it with other ministers. And we have to be among the top 50 most innovative states by the year 2030. […] This is where I lose sleep.[2]

Evidently, the Ministry is dealing with numerous problems in its efforts to support the innovational development of Uzbekistan. Though the government has determined priority innovations for introduction to different sectors and created a new ministry to regulate government innovation policy, many challenges remain to be addressed. Importantly, the status of the Ministry should be raised, enhancing its ability to implement the government's innovation policy. Actually, to become a truly innovative country, the whole government should innovate. To inject innovations, various institutional options have been already tried and tested in other countries. One option might be an agency advising the whole government on innovations. Another might be a governmental entity that deals with particular areas (e.g., education, infrastructure, entrepreneurship, etc.) that, if combined with other areas of government action, help to support innovations. The list of configurations and policy options is extensive. Uzbekistan should decide on an option appropriate for achieving the target the country has set for itself: to be among the top 50 most innovative countries in the world.

"Social Innovations" Led by Citizens

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[1] See http://mininnovation.uz/en.

[2] See "Chto ne tak s innovatsiiami i naukoi Uzbekistana? Interv'iu s zaminnistra Iu. Mansurovym," YouTube video, 47:27, uploaded by "Laboratoriia Biznesa," February 10, 2019, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sYs0dvGURQ.

In Uzbekistan in 2012-2014, the "Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan" project led by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) became the first—and to date the only—project supporting "social innovations." The UNDP applies two modalities for implementing development projects: 1) Direct Implementation Modality (DIM), and 2) National Implementation Modality (NIM). The project falls under the modality of Direct Implementation, meaning that it was implemented by the UNDP without a national partner (a ministry or local organization in Uzbekistan). The project was directly implemented by the UNDP Good Governance Unit jointly with the UNV Program in Uzbekistan. Cooperation with national partner organizations was based on Memoranda of Understanding. The project was an umbrella organization for 33 small-scale "social innovation" projects implemented locally.[1] One example of a "social innovation" project supported by the UNDP is described below to provide insight into how and why the UNDP pursued social innovation.

Infobox

"Infobox" is a mobile app containing information about Bukhara city. It is available to tourists and locals. The project was designed by a team of individuals from the local community in Bukhara city in accordance with the criteria of social innovation applied by the UNDP. The project aimed to address the issue of a lack of information about the city and its remarkable places. Since it was designed by locals from Bukhara, it corresponded with the human-centered design required of a "social innovation" project. The local population and tourists alike were struggling to access comprehensive information about the city and did not know how to get help from the local government if such help were to be needed.

The human-centered design of this "social innovation" project made it possible to invent a mobile app that provides information about Bukhara and to communicate with the local government to access its services when required. The UNDP supported local community leader Umid Gafurov in designing and implementing this project. The primary goal of the project was to map the tourist destinations in Bukhara and to provide information on how local authorities and agencies can be accessed by tourists and locals, if needed. This service was supposed to make Bukhara more tourist-friendly and boost tourism in the city, in turn creating more local jobs. The local authorities did not participate in this project and remain uninterested in scaling its results.

Other types of small-scale "social innovation" projects supported by the UNDP that have been introduced in the same way as Infobox include:
- New ICT projects to solve social problems
- New engineering/infrastructure projects
- Education/trainings and workshops to provide new skills for solving social problems
- New projects aimed at people with disabilities
- Film and arts as new means of solving social issues, etc.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The implementation of "social innovation" projects in 2012-2014 was the first attempt to introduce social innovations in the local context of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. These projects have been striving for greater inclusion, participation, and responsiveness through attempts at cooperation between local government (public organizations) and community leaders, and through the use of technology, including information and communication technology, as well as locally-designed engineering works.

These projects, however, suffered from a lack of support from policymakers. This prevented them from being institutionalized and later diffused across the government and society.

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[1] See the appendix for more information.

Another problem with "social innovation" in Uzbekistan was the misuse of the concept locally. The concept was usually substituted by other terms that were more familiar to local organizations. It was implied and applied as something promoting social or societal development, without sufficient attention to the innovation aspect. Thus, local organizations were not eager to apply new social innovations' predominantly human-centric approach to their projects. Subsequently, social innovation projects were co-designed by local organizations in the old-fashioned manner. An even bigger problem with the misuse of the concept of "innovation" or "social innovation" is that it might easily turn into an elusive buzzword. The danger of this, in practice, is that the concept will be applied frequently without producing any innovation.

Since 2017, innovations have been a priority at the governmental and presidential levels. A series of institutional changes (e.g., creation of the Ministry of Innovational Development) and legal adjustments (e.g., Concept of Innovational Development of Uzbekistan) have been developed and introduced. In the governance sector, changes have also been fostered intensively. Online and offline services, including the president's—and later also the prime minister's—receptions aimed at the provision of better-quality government services. Though they have been shown to solve several problems raised by citizens, systemic solutions have yet to be achieved. Unlike the "social innovation" projects conducted in 2012-2014, the new initiatives in governance were better institutionalized and scaled across the country due to government support. However, the generation and introduction of innovations (and social innovations) in governance remains the prerogative of the government; citizens, NGOs, and other non-governmental actors are insufficiently involved in the process.

Along with larger systemic reforms such as administrative reform, the adoption of the law "On Government Service," and an increase in the institutional role and authority of the Ministry of Innovational Development, other steps toward innovations (social innovations) in governance should be taken:

1) Data on government (national and local) activities and services should be made openly available to citizens and to "social innovation" projects in the governance sphere led by them. Accordingly, a Law "On open data" should be developed and introduced.
2) Citizen-/community-driven social innovation solutions in governance should be designed and generated. More civic participation in government decision-making should be encouraged. More citizen-driven social innovation solutions in governance should be supported.
3) To promote social innovation in governance, social enterprises should be involved in service provision for citizens. Public managers selected on a competitive basis should be employed. In other words, government service should be improved.
4) To improve government services: 1) a Law "On the civil service" is needed; 2) changes to the Law "On electronic government" should be introduced, to widen the spectrum of government services beyond mere digitization;
5) Finally, work to improve ICT literacy and the capacity of government service providers and consumers should continue. Technical and infrastructural problems in government service provision, already identified by the government, should be further addressed.

Appendix 1

Social Innovation Projects Supported by the UNDP in Uzbekistan

Areas	Projects/Description
ICT (for people from vulnerable groups)	"IT Masters": teaching IT skills to unemployed individuals to help them access better job opportunities; Muynak: a website for a small town experiencing environmental disaster and economic challenges, to boost local and international tourism; E-diary: an electronic diary for parents to follow the in-class grades and accomplishments of their kids at school; Infobox.uz: a mobile app containing information about Bukhara city, available to tourists and locals.
Engineering and infrastructure	"Mobile Electro-Station": an engineering construction allowing the generation of wind energy; "Enjoying Old Age" Resource Center: a physical space for elderly people to learn new skills and communicate with each other; "Shower and Water Supply": a water supply system enabling the efficient collection, storage, and distribution of water for hygienic purposes in rural areas (farms).
Education and trainings and workshops	Summer Camp and DIY Labs in Muynak: trainings and workshops on using the "Do-It-Yourself" mentality to solve local issues; Debate Tournament in Andijan: training youth in debating techniques and methods to strengthen their role in the local context; Training on reproductive health among Roma population: training based on peer-to-peer methodology to promote reproductive health among a thus far neglected part of population; Module "All the money under control": means of keeping funding accountable and manageable; Awareness campaigns on breast cancer prevention among women in Jizzakh: a new approach to promoting breast cancer awareness; "Inspired Teachers": a new methodology for preparing English teachers for local schools; "English guides": new guides on effective English teaching under supervision; Social Entrepreneurship skills: training on teaching social entrepreneurship skills; Constructor: a scheme increasing young people's interest in science through the development of design and construction skills; Peers club: a club of peers enabling skills and knowledge exchange, as well as coaching each other; Café Scientifique: a project promoting science through a non-traditional (outside the classroom) approach; Volunteer engagement (in the NatLib): educating volunteers for the National Library of Uzbekistan; sharing the culture and values of volunteerism.
Specifically aimed at people with disabilities	"Fantasy-Club" Initiatives: courses on beading and jewelry for girls with disabilities, plus a new approach to marketing the goods produced by the girls; "Mohir Hunarmand": teaching new skills to kids from orphanages (including kids with disabilities); "The week of football": a football tournament for people with disabilities; Translations of audio and video for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: creating publicly-available audio and video materials for people with disabilities;

	Taxi for people with disabilities with "Perekrestok" Taxi: a taxi redesigned specifically for drivers with disabilities.
Filming/Arts	"Afishka" Festival of auteur theory and social films: a festival of short movies on social issues; Film on TB prevention: movie that approached the tuberculosis problem in a manner unusual for the Uzbek context; Voice of Volunteers: radio program on pressing social issues, designed by volunteers; Theatre by children: children's theatre with a focus on describing and solving social problems; Video project about people living with HIV: new approach to raising public awareness of the problem of HIV in Uzbek society.
Others	Eco-bags with Korzinka.uz: producing eco-bags by social enterprises and selling them through the "Korzinka" supermarket chain; Promotion of local tourism in social networks (with LGSP project): new approach to promoting local tourism; Iact Volunteers platform: new online platform connecting those who need volunteers with those who wish to volunteer. Do It Yourself (DIY) Lab: conducting "Do-It-Yourself" methodology through lab works in different public places, to encourage problem-solving through local mobilization of human resources.

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Return Migration as a Brain Gain for Uzbekistan?
The Challenges of Attracting Highly skilled Uzbeks Abroad

Sherzod Eraliev

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With the leadership change in Uzbekistan in 2016, the government announced the launch of economic reforms. However, the country still faces a lack of skilled specialists who might implement these reforms.[1] The government made it clear that it would encourage its citizens trained abroad to return to Uzbekistan to share their international work competencies. One of the feasible and tangible steps the government took in this regard was the establishment of the expert council Buyuk Kelajak in May 2018. The expert council is a platform for discussing development strategies for Uzbekistan. Its nearly 300 members, originally from Uzbekistan, mostly live in developed countries and work in the fields of law, finance, medicine, governance, and academia, among others. The main goal of the council is to help develop reform programs in the political, economic, and social spheres in Uzbekistan, including creating a development model up to 2035.[2]

Another convincing sign of the new leadership's stake in Uzbeks living abroad is the establishment of the El-yurt Umidi Foundation for training specialists abroad and dialoguing with compatriots. The government has also adopted a concept document that declares one of its goals to be "attracting compatriots from among highly qualified specialists to work in senior positions in government management bodies, local executive authorities, and other state organizations of the Republic of Uzbekistan."[3] As part of this policy, several high-level positions were offered to Uzbek citizens. These included the posts of deputy minister of innovation development,[4] advisor to the finance minister,[5] chairman of the national chamber for innovative healthcare,[6] and deputy chairman of Xalq banki,[7] among others.

However, it is still early to talk about brain gain for Uzbekistan. Notwithstanding the ongoing call and declared incentives, Uzbek citizens who have achieved significant success in their fields, mostly thanks to the

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[1] See, for example, President Mirziyoyev's meeting with MFA staff and ambassadors on January 11, 2018: "Prezidentimiz tashqi siyosat masalalariga oid yig'ilishi o'tkazdi ("O'zbekiston24", 11.01.2018y)," YouTube video, 2:39, uploaded by "Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uzbekistan," January 13, 2018, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DskU5WKJ6JA.

[2] See the Buyuk Kelajak website, accessed May 3, 2019, http://uzexpertsovet.com/about-buyuk-kelajak/.

[3] "State Policy Concept of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Working with Compatriots Living Abroad," October 25, 2018, accessed May 9, 2019, http://lex.uz/docs/4022649, 4. A detailed analysis of the Concept is provided later in the paper.

[4] "Naznachen zamministra innovatsionnogo razvitiia," *Gazeta.uz*, August 7, 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/08/07/mininnovation/.

[5] "Sotrudnik HSBC stal sovetnikom ministra finansov," *Gazeta.uz*, September 18, 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/09/18/mf/.

[6] "Rovshan Izamov vozglavil Natsional'nuiu palate innovatsionnogo zdravookhoraneniia," *Uzdaily.uz*, September 25, 2018, https://www.uzdaily.uz/articles-id-39573.htm.

[7] "Farkhod Salamov naznachen zamestitelem Predsedatelia AK 'Khalk Bank,'" *Uzdaily.uz*, October 16, 2018, https://www.uzdaily.uz/articles-id-39902.htm.

education they received abroad, are in no rush to return to their home country. This paper therefore aims to answer following questions:

> *RQ1: What are the challenges facing Uzbekistan in its efforts to attract highly skilled Uzbek citizens currently based abroad?*
> *RQ2: How can Uzbekistan best utilize its diasporas abroad?*

I argue that the leadership change and the launch of (albeit limited) economic and political reforms in the home country may influence the return decisions of highly skilled migrants abroad. However, a very limited number of émigrés will likely return if offered incentives (for example, high-level positions with associated benefits). A government can encourage the return of its highly skilled citizens only by implementing full-fledged political and economic reforms and showing signs of economic growth. At the same time, for the majority of migrants, changes in the home country will not necessarily influence their decisions to return. Instead, social (culture, adaptation), personal (success/failure), and family issues are more likely to play the crucial role in their return decisions. A combination of institutional reforms and economic growth with career opportunities and social factors may catalyze them to return.

This paper consists of the following sections. First, I analyze the existing literature on return migration of highly skilled expatriates. Next, I describe my research methods. After that, I discuss the results of my interviews. The final section draws conclusions about the research findings and discusses avenues for further research.

Literature Review

In their efforts to understand the phenomenon of migration, scholars have focused mainly on three research areas: why people move, how people integrate into receiving societies, and how migration affects sending societies.

The impact of migration on sending societies is one of the less researched areas of migration studies. Moreover, only a few issues in this area have been investigated thoroughly. The impact of monetary remittances on sending societies is one of these topics. Remittances were initially viewed as a temporary and unreliable source of income that produced "remittance-dependence" in sending economies.[1] Another strand of literature highlights both positive and negative aspects of remittances.[2] There is no internationally agreed-upon definition of a highly skilled migrant. The IOM defines a highly skilled migrant as "a person who has earned, either by tertiary level education or occupational experience, the level of qualifications typically needed to practice a profession."[3]

There is increasing competition between the developed countries to attract talent.[4] In the race for talent, developed countries, including the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK, have adopted immigration policies to stimulate the flow of highly skilled people. In 2010, almost 28 million highly skilled migrants were living in OECD countries. Although OECD countries constitute less than one-fifth of the world's population,

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[1] Hein De Haas, "International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no.8 (2005): 1269-84.

[2] Hein De Haas, *Remittances and Social Development* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2007); Caglar Ozden and Maurice Schiff, "Overview," in *International Migration, Economic Development Policy*, edited by Caglar Ozden and Maurice Schiff (Washington, DC: World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1-16; Dilip Ratha, "Workers' Remittances: An Important and Stable Source of External Development Finance," *Economics Seminar Series Paper* 9 (2005); Dilip Ratha, "The Impact of Remittances on Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction," Migration Policy Institute Policy Brief, Washington, DC, 2013.

[3] International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration*, 2nd edition (Geneva: IOM, 2011).

[4] Ayelet Shachar, "The Race for Talent: Highly Skilled Migrants and Competitive Immigration Regimes," *New York University Law Review* 81 (2006): 148-206; Ben Wildavsky, *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

they host two-thirds of highly skilled migrants.[1] The emigration of highly skilled migrants, labeled "brain drain,"[2] was also initially perceived as a negative factor.[3] It was seen as a zero-sum game in which sending countries lost out as receiving countries sucked away the most talented members of their populations. Developing countries were investing their resources in training human capital, only for that human capital to leave and contribute to the economies of developed destination countries. This loss of skilled people undermined poor countries' chances of developing. Scholars have thus debated whether states should restrict the emigration of highly skilled citizens.[4]

Later on, scholarship started to pay attention to the potential gains of emigration by those with skills—"brain gain." As Meyer has stated, "the presence of highly skilled expatriates abroad should not be seen as a loss to the country but as an asset that can be mobilized."[5] Proponents of this view suggest that skilled migration may have positive effects in the long term. These effects include monetary and social remittances, the creation of networks, and even the return of highly skilled professionals.[6] The more recent literature goes even further, claiming that "the possibility for people to 'sell' their human capital abroad generates incentives to invest more in human capital, and a demand for higher quality, more internationally transferrable education, which ultimately also benefits those who do not emigrate."[7] Evidence also shows that highly skilled return migrants have an impact on economic development by acting as both investors and innovators in their home countries.[8] However, in some cases, migration of the highly skilled has resulted in "brain waste," where skilled migrants find themselves compelled to take low-skilled jobs in receiving countries.[9]

With the availability of data on different countries and the advancement of migration studies, a more neutral "brain circulation" model has recently been developed.[10] It presents complex linkages between highly

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[1] OECD, *OECD Factbook 2013: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics* (Paris: OECD, 2013).

[2] The term "brain drain" first appeared in 1960s to refer to the exodus of British scientists to the US. Some scholars used "human capital flight" as another term for "brain drain."

[3] Nadeem Haque and Se-Jik Kim, "'Human Capital Flight': Impact of Migration on Income and Growth," *IMF Economic Review* 42, no. 3 (1995): 577-607; William Carrington and Enrica Detragiache, "How Extensive Is the Brain Drain?" *Finance and Development* (IMF Quarterly) 36, no. 2 (1999), https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1999/06/carringt.htm; Michel Beine, Frederic Docquier, and Hillel Rapoport, "Brain Drain and Economic Growth: Theory and Evidence," *Journal of Development Economics* 64, no. 1 (2001): 275-89; Frédéric Docquier, Olivier Lohest, and Abdeslam Marfouk, "Brain Drain in Developing Countries," *The World Bank Economic Review* 21, no. 2 (2007): 193–218.

[4] Gillian Brock, "Debating Brain Drain: An Overview," *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 3, no. 1 (2016): 7-20; Gillian Brock and Michael Blake, *Debating the Brain Drain: May Governments Restrict Emigration?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[5] Jean-Baptiste Meyer, "Network Approach versus Brain Drain: Lessons from Diaspora," *International Migration* 39, no. 5 (2001): 91-110.

[6] Andrew Mountford, "Can a Brain Drain Be Good for Growth in the Source Economy?" *Journal of Development Economics* 53 (1995): 287-303; Oded Stark, Christian Helmenstein, and Alexia Prskawetz, "A Brain Gain with a Brain Drain," *Economic Letters* 55 (1997): 227-34; Yevgeny Kuznetsov, ed., *Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills: How Countries Can Draw on Their Talents Abroad* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006); Andres Solimano, *The International Mobility of Talent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[7] Hilel Rapoport, "Who is Afraid of the Brain Drain? A Development Economist's View," *CEPII Policy Paper* 14 (2017), http://www.cepii.fr/PDF_PUB/pb/2017/pb2017-14.pdf, 129.

[8] Britta Klagge and Katrin Klein-Hitpass, "High-Skilled Return Migration and Knowledge-Based Development in Poland," *European Planning Studies* 18, no 10. (2010): 1631-51.

[9] Armando Garcia Pires, "Brain Drain and Brain Waste," *Journal of Economic Development* 40, no. 1 (2015): 1-34.

[10] Annalee Saxenian, "From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation: Transnational Communities and Regional Upgrading in India and China," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 40, no. 2 (2005): 35-61; Damtew Teferra, "Brain Circulation: Unparalleled Opportunities, Underlying Challenges, and Outmoded Presumptions," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 9, no. 3 (2005): 229–250; Adrian Favell, Mirian Feldblum and Michael Peter Smith, "The Human Face of Global Mobility: A Research Agenda," in *The Human Face of Global Mobility*, edited by Michael Peter Smith and Adrian Favell (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008); Riccardo Crescenzi, Nancy Holman, and Enrico Orru,

skilled migrants, their home countries, and business relationships in which they are involved.[1] "Brain circulation" accounts for "the frequent back and forth movement of migrants, ideas, knowledge, information, and skill sets that is now a routine part of contemporary transnationalism."[2] Sending countries can thus benefit from "brain drain" even if their skilled citizens stay abroad.

Return migration of the highly skilled is one of the least explored topics in the migration literature. The IOM defines return migration as "the movement of a person returning to his or her country of origin or habitual residence, usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or may not be voluntary."[3] Biondo and Monteleoni define it as the flow of migrants who return to their home country after a period spent abroad for activities usually related to a job or to human capital accumulation.[4] At present, the literature focuses mainly on the return of low-skilled migrants;[5] research on the return of highly skilled migrants has only recently started to grow. Bobova argues that return migration is not the final stage of a journey, but a process in which countries of origin and destination are linked by social relationships that exist across geographical borders.[6]

Scholars have tried to determine what factors incentivize skilled migrants to return. Chacko argued that highly skilled migrants would return to their countries when economic growth occurred and professional opportunities became available.[7] Harvey observed that highly skilled migrants from developing countries hold a greater desire to return to their home countries than those from developed countries because of potentially better professional opportunities (growing markets, governmental incentives, etc.).[8] Institutional conditions impede as well as facilitate the return of highly skilled migrants.[9] Governments of sending countries may also influence highly skilled professionals' decision to return.[10] However, Kivisto and Faist have observed that some governments may not seek to encourage permanent return migration, but are more inclined to encourage temporary returns.[11]

"Why Do They Return? Beyond the Economic Drivers of Graduate Return Migration," *Annals of Regional Science* 59, no. 3 (2017): 603-27.

[1] Saxenian, "From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation."

[2] Favell, Feldblum, and Smith, "The Human Face of Global Mobility," 12.

[3] International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration,* 2nd edition (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2011), 86.

[4] Alessio Emanuele Biondo and Simona Monteleone, "Return Migration in Italy? What Do We Know?" University of Catania Working Paper Series, April 2010.

[5] See, for example, Yaohui Zhao, "Causes and Consequences of Return Migration: Recent Evidence from China," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 30, no. 2 (2002): 376-94; Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration: A Revisited Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants," *EUI Working Papers RSCAS* no. 2 (2004); Galia Sabar, "Africa - Israel - Africa Return Migration Experiences of African Labour Migrants," *Migration Letters* 10, no. 1 (2013): 57-70.

[6] Nadya Bobova, *There and Back Again: Post-Return Experiences of Highly-Skilled Belarusian Professionals* (PhD diss., University of Trento, 2016).

[7] Elizabeth Chacko, "From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Reverse Migration to Bangalore and Hyderabad, India's Globalizing High-Tech Cities," *GeoJournal* 68 (2007): 131-40.

[8] William S. Harvey, "British and Indian Scientists in Boston Considering Returning to Their Home Countries," *Population, Space and Place* 15 (2009): 1-16.

[9] Favell, Feldblum, and Smith, "The Human Face of Global Mobility"; Christian Dustmann, Itzhak Fadlon, and Yoram Weiss, "Return Migration, Human Capital Accumulation and the Brain Drain," *Journal of Development Economics* 95 (2011): 58-67; Nil Demet Gungor and Aysit Tansel, "Brain Drain from Turkey: Return Intentions of Skilled Migrants," *International Migration* 52, no. 5 (2012): 208-26.

[10] Luo Keren, Fei Guo, and Huang Ping, "China: Government Policies and Emerging Trends of Reversal of the Brain Drain," in *Return Migration in the Asia Pacific* edited by Robin Iredale, Fei Guo, and Santi Rozario (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2003), 88-111; Chin-lung Tsay, "Taiwan: Significance, Characteristics and Policies on Return Skilled Migration," in *Return Migration in the Asia Pacific* edited by Robin Iredale, Fei Guo, and Santi Rozario (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2003), 112-35.

[11] Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist, *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2010).

Economic and political considerations are not the only factors shaping the return decisions of highly skilled migrants. Education, labor market, and career opportunities, as well as family circumstances including marriage, childbearing, and elder care, can influence and shape migrants' decisions.[1] Return also depends on such factors as kinship relations, social ties, culture, and lifestyle. In my own research, for example, respondents articulated that parenting and family obligations played a significant role in their decisions (not) to return. It seems thus impossible to conclude that there is only one set of factors shaping the return decisions of highly skilled migrants. Rather, a combination of different factors—institutional, economic, and/or personal—affect the decision.

Most of the literature on migration in Uzbekistan sees it mainly as a sending country of labor migrants (mostly to Russia and Kazakhstan). Only a handful of scholars have focused on the social and economic impact of migration on Uzbekistan.[2] There is very limited research on the transnational lives of migrants and social change[3] or the impact of monetary[4] and social[5] remittances in Uzbekistan. Analyzing the emigration of highly skilled female migrants from Uzbekistan, Kayumova argued that "brain drain" should not be viewed as entirely detrimental to the country; on the contrary, this can transform into "brain gain" in the long run.[6] In light of the leadership change in Uzbekistan in 2016 and its evolving rhetoric toward its nationals abroad, the issue of "brain drain" and "brain gain" should be thoroughly studied. This research aims to partly fill that gap and contribute to the literature on the return migration of highly skilled migrants to their home countries.

Methods

The material for this paper was collected through in-depth interviews with 18 highly skilled Uzbek migrants. Four of the interviewees have returned to Uzbekistan at the government's invitation. Those who currently live abroad (in OECD countries) are university lecturers, researchers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, and specialists in international organizations. Respondents were chosen according to the following criteria:

- They obtained their first tertiary education in Uzbekistan;
- They have lived in foreign countries for at least three years; and

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[1] See, for example, Ronald L. Whisler, Brigittes S. Waldorf, Gordon F. Mulligan, and David Plane, "Quality of Life and the Migration of the College-Educated: A Life-Course Approach," *Growth and Change* 39, no. 1 (2008): 58–94; Melissa Kelly, "Using an Intersectional Life Course Approach to Understand the Migration of the Highly Skilled," in *Researching the Lifecourse: Critical Reflections from the Social Sciences*, edited by Nancy Worth and Irene Hardill (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 231-46; Anu Kou, Leo van Wissen, Jouke van Dijk, and Ajay Bailey, "A Life Course Approach to High-Skilled Migration: Lived Experiences of Indians in the Netherlands," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 10 (2015): 1644-63.

[2] Madeleine Reeves, "Migration, Masculinity, and Transformations of Social Space in the Sokh Valley, Uzbekistan," in *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia*, edited by Marlene Laruelle (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 307-31; Irina Malyuchenko, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Economic and Social Impact on the Societies of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Security Policy Briefs* 21, OSCE Academy, Bishkek.

[3] Rustamjon Urinboyev, "Migration, Transnationalism, and Social Change in Central Asia: Everyday Transnational Lives of Uzbek Migrants in Russia," in *Eurasia on the Move: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Dynamic Migration Region*, edited by Marlene Laruelle and Caress Schenk (Washington, DC: GWU Central Asian Program, 2018).

[4] Erica Marat, *Labour Migration in Central Asia: Implications of the Global Economic Crisis* (Washington, DC, and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2009); Farrukh Irnazarov, "Labor Migrant Households in Uzbekistan: Remittances as a Challenge or Blessing?" in *Uzbekistan: Political Order, Societal Changes, and Cultural Transformations* edited by Marlene Laruelle (Washington, DC: Central Asia Program, 2017), 62-71.

[5] Bakhrom Radjabov, "Social Remittances Created by Uzbek Students Studying in Kassel, Germany and Tsukuba, Japan," *Eurasia Cultura* 3 (2017): 57-88.

[6] Marina Kayumova, "Emigration of 'Crème de la Crème' in Uzbekistan: A Gender Perspective," in *Uzbekistan: Political Order, Societal Changes, and Cultural Transformations,* edited by Marlene Laruelle (Washington, DC: Central Asia Program, 2017), 52-61.

- They have achieved a certain level of success in their respective fields in foreign countries.

A significant number of respondents are members of the Buyuk Kelajak advisory council of Uzbek experts living abroad. Most interviewees are members of my personal network; others were approached via social networks. The pool was chosen in such a way as to maximize geographical diversity: respondents lived/are living in the US, Germany, Austria, Australia, the UK, Sweden, Finland, Kazakhstan, etc. Approximately one-quarter of respondents are female. Several of my contacts indicated that they were in the process of negotiating with the government of Uzbekistan and did not want to share details at this stage.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews help to explore "how they [interviewees] understand their world, i.e. what everyday concepts and interpretation they use to make sense of it."[1] The in-depth interviews were designed to allow respondents to expand on the narratives around their experiences. They focused on factors that may facilitate or impede the return of highly skilled migrants, as well as on their personal and professional aspirations and motivations. Respondents were allowed to pursue their responses fully. All in all, these conversations allowed me to collect data that "give an authentic insight into people's experience."[2]

Interviews in the US, Finland, and Sweden were conducted face-to-face. I interviewed other respondents in calls via Skype and other messengers. In view of time constraints, one respondent, a government official, asked to use interviews he gave to the media as his contribution to the research. Most of the face-to-face and phone interviews were recorded, though a few respondents preferred to speak off the record. When speaking about the problems associated with returning to Uzbekistan, some respondents asked that I not explicitly mention their jobs (or positions they were offered) nor give detailed information.

Background

There are no official statistics on how many people born in Uzbekistan are currently living abroad, but this number certainly reaches into the millions. In 2017, more than 1.8 million Uzbek citizens indicated labor as the purpose of their visit when entering Russia.[3] There are also large Uzbek migrant communities in Kazakhstan, South Korea, Turkey, the US, Europe, and the Gulf states. Although the majority of these people are labor migrants employed in low-skilled jobs, thousands of them have learned new skills and advanced their education. The new government of Uzbekistan is hoping that at least some of these highly skilled Uzbeks will return to help reform the country.

One of the first clear signs of this desire came during the Uzbek president's visit to New York to participate in UN sessions in 2017. Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with a group of Uzbek émigrés living in the US—doctors, professors, bankers, lawyers, and businessmen—and invited them to return to Uzbekistan, offering them high-level positions in the government with decent salaries and other benefits.[4] Since then, the government has adopted state policies on working with compatriots living abroad.[5] The State Policy Concept of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Working with Compatriots Living Abroad identifies three groups of compatriots: a) Uzbek citizens who live abroad for education, work, family, or other reasons; b) foreign citizens (and their descendants) who have left Uzbekistan and have cultural ties to Uzbekistan; and c) foreign citizens who identify themselves as Uzbeks and want to have relations with Uzbekistan. The Concept aims at, among others, the following goals:

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[1] Norman Blaikie, *Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation,* 2nd edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 120.

[2] David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text, and Interaction* (London: Sage, 2006), 118.

[3] "Polovinu iz zaregistrirovannykh v Rossii v 2017 godu inostrantsev sostavili priezhie iz Tsentral'noi Azii," *Ferghana News*, February 2, 2018, http://www.fergananews.com/news/28175.

[4] "Prezident Mirziyoyev vatandoshlarga nima dedi?" YouTube video, 5:51, uploaded by "@AmerikaOvozi," September 21, 2017, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K2MNA9HNCo.

[5] State Policy Concept of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Working with Compatriots Living Abroad.

- to attract highly skilled compatriots to work in senior positions in government management bodies, local executive authorities, and other state organizations;
- to issue multiple-entry and long-term visas, as well as residence and work permits, to foreign citizens;
- to implement fast-track programs for obtaining citizenship;
- to offer social and other benefits packages for those who agree to work in government positions.

It is interesting to note that the goal is not only to bring back highly skilled Uzbek citizens, but also, more broadly, to attract highly-trained professionals with foreign citizenship. The El-yurt Umidi Foundation for training specialists abroad and dialoguing with compatriots under the Cabinet of Ministers was designated as the government body responsible for implementing this policy. As mentioned in the introduction, several of my respondents have returned to Uzbekistan, taking high-level jobs in government agencies, including posts as deputy ministers.

"The Motherland Needs Us"

There are several ways in which highly skilled Uzbek compatriots can be hired in Uzbekistan. Usually, the President's Administration contacts Buyuk Kelajak to fill a vacancy. If someone in the expert pool is interested in the position, the job responsibilities and renumeration are discussed with him or her directly. Several interviews and meetings are organized at different agencies, depending on the level of the position. This can take six months or more. Depending on his/her skills and expertise, a candidate can negotiate salary, working conditions, benefits packages, etc. Not all the negotiations are successful, but several mid- to high-level positions have been filled through the pool of Buyuk Kelajak experts. These include the positions of deputy minister of innovation development, advisor to the finance minister, director of the capital markets agency, director of the Navoi free economic zone directorate, etc.

A few of the author's interviewees reported that they had been contacted by Uzbek government officials through its embassies but had to decline for various reasons. People who have returned to Uzbekistan since the leadership change gave different reasons for their decision. A thread that runs throughout almost all these answers is that respondents were impressed with the changes and wanted to be a part of them.

Reform in Uzbekistan was thus, for some, a serious catalyst in deciding to return. "I believe in the reforms the president initiated. This is an opportunity to take part in these processes so that they bear results in 5-10 years and I can be proud of myself. This is especially true given my previous activity in Uzbekistan," said one respondent. A specialist with extensive experience in strategic planning in Western Europe, he recently took up a position in the ministry for investment and foreign trade.

Some other people had more pragmatic reasons. "My friends were asking me why I was leaving my comfort zone, everything I had. I knew I would not have the salary in Uzbekistan I used to have in the US (which is so high because living expenses are so high there). I had no political experience at all. But I saw it [the job offer] as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If I didn't use this chance now, I might not have one in the future and I might regret it. The Motherland needs us now," said another returnee.

To Return or Not to Return?

As most interviews showed, not many people are eager to return to Uzbekistan, for different reasons. Corruption,[1] a lack of public administration reforms, old-style bureaucracy, absence of genuine interest by

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[1] Uzbekistan ranked 158th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2018—see Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018," accessed May 13, 2019, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018.

government bodies, and insufficient health and education services for children were the main issues returnees faced or expected to face when and if they returned.

The need to work long hours and on weekends was described as a problem by some of those who decided to return. A returnee with a PhD degree in law from a European country described his experience: "Although I was promised a high salary, I had to work for free for several months waiting for a security clearance. The work was difficult, we had to work long hours, and I was asked to come in most weekends as well. It's good that my family did not come with me immediately, otherwise I would not have been able to sustain myself."

Another respondent, who was appointed to a mid-level position in the government, answered similarly: "One needs to be patient if he or she wants to return to Uzbekistan. Some organizations are quick to implement changes; some are not… One may have to work for free for three or four months, working 12-14 hours a day, to prove that he or she is the 'right asset.' I had to go through these steps. Moreover, except for the Ministry of Finance, which is really interested in meritocracy, not all government organizations are eager to hire foreign specialists and ready to pay high wages."

Three respondents reported that they had been at a certain level of negotiations with representatives of the Uzbek government. From their accounts, I can conclude that government officials show different levels of enthusiasm in negotiating with potential returnees. One respondent did not see much enthusiasm when he approached them with a list of services he could provide, while another reported constant interest by government officials.

"I do not consider myself a high-caliber professional that the embassy or a government official would reach out to and ask if I want to return. I was happy when the government established the El-yurt Umidi Foundation and announced its strategy of bringing the highly skilled home. However, I could not find out what I should do if I plan to return to Uzbekistan. If you visit the El-yurt Umidi website, you may not find relevant and up-to-date information. They have a lot of information on sending Uzbek professionals for training (including MA and PhD studies), but not much on inviting those who already have this training to return," reported a respondent with more than five years of work experience in an international organization.

One respondent claimed that the government should be open and engaging in working with compatriots. In particular, he spoke about those Uzbeks who have lost their citizenship and do not necessarily acquired foreign citizenship. According to one report, starting in mid-2014 the Government of Uzbekistan deprived hundreds of its nationals living outside the country of citizenship without the latter's knowledge.[1] As such, it is currently almost impossible for these people to visit Uzbekistan.

There may also be people who cannot offer expertise and knowledge that is relevant to Uzbekistan's current needs. A person who was involved in government efforts to bring skilled people home said that not all candidates are necessarily suitable for the job that is being offered. He indicated that after people return and start work, it sometimes becomes clear that they either will not deliver the expected results or cannot withstand the stresses of the workload. Consequently, he said, several returnees ended up leaving again.

In my research, I found that the economic and political reforms, as well as the government's call for compatriots to return, may not be enough to attract highly skilled migrants. This is also confirmed by empirical evidence from several contexts.[2] Evidently, therefore, there are reasons why a skilled migrant will or will not return that go beyond changes in his or her home country.

Family issues are one of the factors that may shape skilled migrants' return decisions. Having children who are already enrolled in public education in the national languages of destination countries may be a serious reason to postpone one's return. One respondent reported that they had actually returned to

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[1] "Chetdagi minglab uzbekistonliklar uzlari bilmagan va istamagan kholda fukarolikdan makhrum kilinishi mumkin," *Minbar*, May 16, 2019, https://minbar.uz/post/fuqaro-kambagal-degani.

[2] See, for example, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, "Return Migration to Jamaica and its Development Potential," *International Migration* 37, no. 1 (1999): 193-207, or Russel King, "Generalization from the History of Return Migration," in *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair,* ed. B. Ghosh, (Geneva: IOM, 2000), 7-55.

Uzbekistan several years ago but had to migrate again because their children could not adapt to the local context. The quality of education and healthcare services for children was also an issue of concern for some highly skilled migrants.

Labor market opportunities and career prospects also play a certain role. One respondent said that he would have to work abroad for at least two more years in order to gain experience that would give him the "power," or leverage, to negotiate his terms with the government and get a higher position. "If I return right now, my knowledge may not be enough; they [the Uzbek government] may not take me seriously with my current status," he said.

For a small number of respondents, their return was due to a recognition that their initial migration from Uzbekistan had been a bad decision. One respondent who has lived in a destination country for ten years said, "My return to Uzbekistan is just a question of time. And it is not about political change in my country. I will return to Uzbekistan anyway."

Turning Brain Drain into Brain Gain

Another question that draws attention is whether a sending country should try to bring in as many of its highly skilled compatriots as possible. The cases of the Chinese, Indian, and Armenian diasporas show that highly skilled migrants do not have to return home in order to help develop their home country. As Kuznetsov notes, "expatriates do not need to be investors or make financial contributions to have an impact on their home countries. They can serve as 'bridges' by providing access to markets, sources of investment, and expertise. Influential members of diasporas can shape public debate, articulate reform plans, and help implement reforms and new projects."[1]

One example of this is so-called "diaspora bonds,"[2] where immigrants buy bonds issued by the governments of their countries of origin. These bonds can provide a source of funds for development projects. In recent decades, India and Israel have successfully raised over US$35 billion through diaspora bonds, while Armenia recently announced that it would issue such bonds.[3] However, diaspora bonds may only be successful for countries with large and wealthy diasporas abroad.

Countries like Uzbekistan, which have relatively small diasporas in Western countries, should seek benefits from other areas. First of all, as we saw in the previous section, a government cannot and should not seek to bring back all of its compatriots abroad: a migrant's decision to return home does not always depend on changes in the home country. Second, a compatriot's work in a destination country may play a positive role for both sending and destination countries.

"In order to serve Uzbekistan, one does not need to be there. I believe I can help my country even while I am here [in the USA]. I am going to initiate academic exchange programs with Uzbek universities. People know me here as a representative of Uzbekistan, so it is also good for Uzbekistan's positive image," said one respondent. I received almost the same answer from other respondents in academia. Another respondent is actively involved in the Uzbek Embassy's different initiatives (including tourism and culture promotion, work with the Uzbek diaspora, etc.), providing advice and using her connections in the destination country.

An Uzbek lawyer counsels Uzbeks, both those who are planning to immigrate and those who currently live in the destination country, on immigration matters. He also publishes articles in the Uzbek media on legal issues, thus contributing to legal literacy and discussions of legal reforms in the home country. No less important are the remittances that highly skilled immigrants send home, which might be used to pay the tuition fees of younger family members.

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[1] Kuznetsov, *Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills*, 3.
[2] Suhas L. Ketkar and Dilip Ratha, "Diaspora Bonds: Tapping the Diaspora During the Difficult Times," *Journal of International Commerce, Economics and Policy* 1, no. 2 (2010): 251-63.
[3] "Q&A: Why Armenia is Rolling Out Diaspora Bonds for Development," *Devex.com*, August 15, 2018, https://www.devex.com/news/q-a-why-armenia-is-rolling-out-diaspora-bonds-for-development-93275.

Conclusion

The literature on talent mobility changed its evaluation of the phenomenon, turning from a negative "brain drain" to a positive "brain gain." In recent years, the rise of transnationalism in migration studies and the availability of evidence from many contexts have given rise to the more neutral term "brain circulation." The connections between institutional changes in sending countries, highly skilled migration, and return migration are unsystematic and scattered in the theoretical literature. Moreover, there is very little known about the return migration of highly skilled individuals from Central Asian countries.

My interviews revealed which factors incentivize highly skilled Uzbeks to return and which pose an obstacle. For those who returned, patriotism, a sense of belonging, pragmatism, and opportunity were decisive factors. People explained that they were keen to be part of the changes in their home country. At the same time, the widespread old-style bureaucracy, corruption, a lack of real economic and political reforms (including public administration reforms), and low living standards were the main factors that made others hesitant to return. Some expressed hope that the government would speed up its economic and political reforms and that the level of bureaucracy would diminish soon.

Another group of respondents were skeptical about any possibility of return. They did not believe in the sincerity and success of the changes in their home country. They have made their decision to leave the country and have invested their time and capital in adapting to a destination country. The interviews also confirmed the notion that institutional and economic changes in the home country might not influence the return decisions of highly skilled migrants. In some cases, migrants' family circumstances (for example, childbearing or elder care responsibilities), social issues, and professional and personal reasons may either push them to return or prevent them from returning.

The research also confirmed that a sending country can benefit from its highly skilled compatriots even if they stay in destination countries. Such benefits could be reaped through the establishment of business networks, academic exchange programs between sending and destination countries, monetary and social remittances, the promotion of a positive image of the home country, and the use of compatriots as a cultural bridge.

Notwithstanding a certain level of interest among Uzbek compatriots in returning to Uzbekistan (and the actual return of a few of them) since the leadership change and the launch of economic reforms, Tashkent still needs to do more to encourage its compatriots to return home. The following recommendations could help Uzbekistan attract as many highly skilled people as possible and promote a positive image of the country:

- The government should adopt a law on public services and speed up public administration reforms, which should focus on reducing bureaucracy, promoting meritocracy, and fighting corruption;
- The El-yurt Umidi Foundation should be more active and consistent in its work with compatriots, providing up-to-date information and supporting compatriots post-return;
- Uzbek Embassies should be more active in working with Uzbek diasporas, including engaging with those people who have inadvertently lost their Uzbek citizenship.

Ziyarah Tourism
as a New Linkage for Tourism Development in Uzbekistan

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Tourism is a stable source of foreign exchange earnings and has a positive impact on the expansion of international relations, along with a significant role in national economies. This sector also promotes new multilateral networks, advancing the economic, social, legal, and political development of states. The announcement of 2017 as the "Year of Sustainable Development of Tourism" by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the elaboration of the first Universal Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics within the framework of the UNWTO have further enhanced this sector's role on the international scene.[1] The annual growth in the number of tourists and the tourism industry's substantial share of gross domestic product (GDP) of different states confirms the relevance of tourism in today's economy.

In Islam, *ziyara(h)* (Arabic: زيارة ziyārah, visit) or *ziyarat* (Persian: زيارت, ziyārat, pilgrimage) is a form of pilgrimage to sites associated with venerated figures in Islam, such as the Prophets, the Sufi *auliya*, and Islamic scholars.[2] Pilgrimage sites include mosques, mausoleums, and battlefields. Traditionally, this type of tourism was associated with Hajj and Umrah in Saudi Arabia. Today, however, *ziyarah* tourism is defined more broadly, as all forms of Islamic pilgrimage tourism, including not only the two holy destinations but also many new places where Muslim tourists can combine sightseeing with religious duties.

An outgrowth of this rise in *ziyarah* tourism has been a boom in halal products and services designed to cater specifically to Muslim taste and business travelers across the globe. The Muslim tourism market has witnessed rapid growth over the years and emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism market. In 2017, the number of Muslim tourists amounted to 131 million people and the income from Muslim tourism hit US$142 billion. It is expected that by 2020 the number of Muslim tourists in the world will reach 160 million people; by 2026, the revenue from this type of tourism will be US$300 billion.[3]

Uzbekistan is located at the crossroads of Central Asia, bridging north, south, east, and west. The republic, which has a rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage of more than 4,000 architectural and

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[1] See Stuart Mitchell, "UNWTO Code of Ethics for Tourism Becomes an International Convention," *Ethical Marketing News*, September 19, 2017, last accessed August 10, 2018, http://ethicalmarketingnews.com/unwto-code-ethics-tourism-becomes-international-convention.

[2] "Ziyarah—Oxford Islamic Studies Online," Oxford Islamic Studies, accessed August 6, 2018, www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.

[3] See "V stolitse proshla press-konferentsiiam posviashchennaia Zierat turizmu," Uzbek Tourism, accessed April 27, 2019, https://uzbektourism.uz/ru/newnews/view?id=216.

cultural-historical monuments, including 20 on UNESCO's list of world cultural heritage,[1] is currently looking to attract more foreign and national tourists and find its place in the global tourism market. Considering that the Hanafi madhhab followed in Uzbekistan also predominates in the rest of Central Asia, Pakistan, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, and Bulgaria,[2] Uzbekistan has good potential to attract pilgrimage tourists. Furthermore, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world: it is projected that there will be 2.2 billion Muslims by 2030.[3] As such, Muslim pilgrims who want to avoid "tourist traps" will increasingly seek out undiscovered destinations.

Through an analysis of ongoing reforms in the sphere of *ziyarah* tourism in Uzbekistan, this paper identifies numerous ways to develop Islamic pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. First, it explores two regional institutional frameworks—the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—and their potential role in improving *ziyarah* tourism in Uzbekistan. Next, it looks at the implementation of institutional and legal best practices in relation to Muslim-friendly tourism.

Potential of Islamic Pilgrimage Tourism in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has a unique heritage of Islamic culture and historical monuments. As such, it should be of great interest to tourists from Muslim countries and has strong potential to attract them. The country is home to important cities for the Muslim world, especially Bukhara and Samarkand. The names of such greats as Imam Al-Bukhari, Imam At-Termizi, Imam Al-Maturudi, Baha-ud-Din Naqshbandi, and Az-Zamakshariy, all from present-day Uzbekistan, are well-known. Baha-ud-Din Naqshbandi is now recognized as the "Sultan of Sufism,"[4] potentially making him an important draw for Sufi pilgrims. Samarkand possesses such unique tourism sites as Al-Bukhariy Mausoleum, the Tomb of St. Daniel (prophet of three major religions), Ruhobod Mausoleum (burial place of Sheikh Burhanuddin Sagardji, the spiritual mentor of Amir Timur), the Shakhi Zinda necropolis, etc. Tourism and management researchers have already organized a 7-day tour for pilgrims that visits more than 30 destinations from Tashkent to Bukhara.[5]

However, Uzbekistan does not yet have a well-developed brand for pilgrimage tourism. A survey conducted by foreign experts over several months in 2017 found that just 2.2 percent of total visitors in that period came for any pilgrimage-related activities.[6] This proves that most of the resources directed toward developing Uzbekistan's tourism industry are focused on historical and cultural issues rather than religious ones. In the Crescent Rating that ranks nations on halal tourism, Uzbekistan held just 29th place in 2017.[7]

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president in December 2016, there have been ongoing reforms and changes in the tourism sector. Already, more than 50 laws and bylaws have been adopted.[8] Upon the adoption

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[1] N. Faizibaeva, "Evropa kak odin iz vazhneishikh turisticheskikh tsentrov mira," *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia: politika, ekonomika, pravo* 4 (2012): 60.

[2] See "Kakova geografiia rasprostraneniia mazhabov vo vsem mire?" Islam Today, October 14, 2015, accessed April 27, 2019, https://islam-today.ru/veroucenie/vopros-otvet/kakova-geografia-rasprostranenia-mazhabov-vo-vsem-mire/.

[3] Onur Akbulut and Yakin Ekin, "Reflections of Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimage on Religious Stores in Mugla-Turkey," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 6, no. 3 (2018): 11.

[4] Bakhtiyor Navruz-Zoda and Zebiniso Navruz-Zoda, "The Destination Marketing Development of Religious Tourism in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 4, no. 7 (2016): 9-10. doi:10.21427/D7G01X.

[5] Ibid. See the Appendix, "Proposed 'Sufi Tour' Through Sufi Shrines in Uzbekistan."

[6] Centre of Business and Tourism Development (CBTD), "2017 Uzbekistan International Visitor Trend Survey Report," Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2018, accessed July 24, 2019, http://www.visitkhiva.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/surveyreport20180303-web.pdf, 30.

[7] "Halal Tourism in Uzbekistan? Sure!" Consulate of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Novosibirsk (via *Uzbekistan Today*), May 23, 2018, accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.uzbekistan.nsk.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10291:halal-tourism-in-uzbekistan-sure&catid=40:tourism&Itemid=91.

[8] See "Turizm v Uzbekistane—2018," report, Uzbek Tourism, accessed April 29, 2019, https://uzbektourism.uz/newnews/download?url=21.02.rus.pdf, 43-47.

of the "Action Strategy for Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan," dated February 7, 2017, tourism became a strategic sector of the national economy. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measurements for intensified development of the tourism industry in the Republic of Uzbekistan" and the continuation of these reforms[1] has been an important step toward further reforms in this sector. The most recent important policy document on this issue is the "Concept of tourism development in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2019-2025," produced by the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

So far, the majority of tourists coming to Uzbekistan (518,666 out of 549,454 in March 2019) were from the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Very few tourists come from the countries of the so-called far abroad.[2] Uzbekistan has yet to live up to its potential to attract Muslim tourists. Some public resistance must be acknowledged: increasing Muslim tourism is seen by some as increasing the risk of the development of radical Islam in the country. Yet this is a limited view, as reasons for radicalism are often homegrown and not related to international factors; moreover, Uzbek Islam is already being incorporated into the global Ummah by many other vectors.

Using the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to Develop *Ziyarah* Tourism

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has prepared a strategic roadmap for the development of Islamic tourism among its member states. The roadmap provides a methodological framework for enhancing cooperation between member-states in the field of tourism. Cooperation in Islamic tourism is comprised of five areas: data and monitoring; policy and regulation; marketing and promotion; destination and industry development; and capacity development to promote inter-Islamic cooperation and improve the ecosystem of Islamic tourism in OIC member-states.[3] Uzbekistan was admitted to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as an observer in October 1995. It became a full member of the Organization on October 2, 1996. Uzbekistan maintains a bilateral partnership for tourism development—the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation—with the United Arab Emirates.

The promotion of *ziyarah* tourism has been featured in several bilateral agreements over the past two years between Uzbekistan and other Muslim countries. For example, agreements on the organization of special pilgrimage tours in Uzbekistan have been made with Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey.[4] However, given that the OIC has 57 member-states, many new bilateral agreements could be signed, and the flow of tourists from Muslim countries remains modest.

Table 1. Distribution by country of the number of visitors who entered Uzbekistan between March 2018 and March 2019

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[1] See the Decree on Additional Measures for Improving the Development of the Tourism Sphere," January 5, 2019, accessed February 8, 2019, http://lex.uz/docs/4143188.

[2] See "Kolichestva inostrannikh turistov za mart 2018 i mart 2019," Uzbek Tourism, accessed April 28, 2019, https://uzbektourism.uz/ru/research.

[3] APP, "OIC Prepares a Roadmap to Promote Islamic Tourism," The Express Tribune, January 15, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1609017/1-oic-prepares-roadmap-promote-islamic-tourism/.

[4] This information was learned during the researcher's fellowship at the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan (November 2017-May 2018).
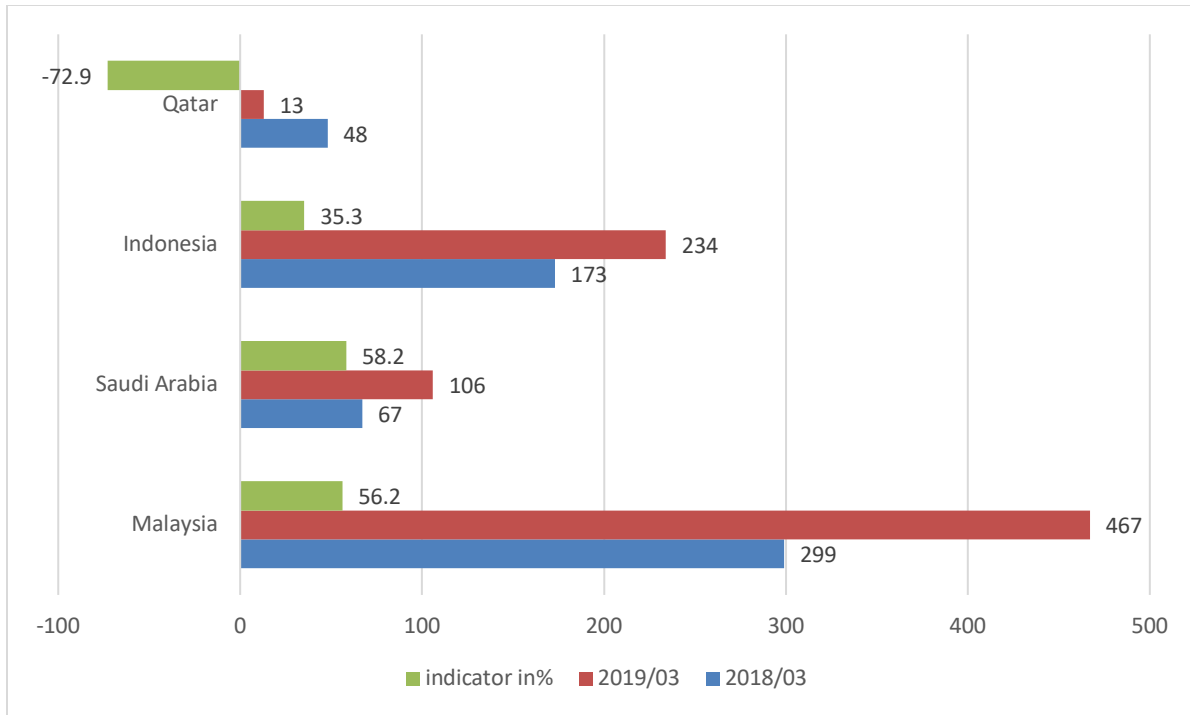
Source: The Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan,
https://uzbektourism.uz/ru/research.

The Uzbek authorities have also taken several other steps to develop *ziyarah* tourism, including, among others:

- The introduction of a visa-free regime for a period of 30 days for citizens of 64 countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates;
- The introduction of a "pilgrim visa" for up to two months for foreign citizens who come to make pilgrimages and study the cultural, historical, religious, and spiritual heritage and traditions of Uzbekistan; and
- The introduction of halal standards in catering and restaurants in Uzbekistan since February 2018.[1]

In February 2019, the Bukhara Declaration, which recognizes Uzbekistan as a center of *ziyarah* tourism, was signed within the framework of the First International Forum on *Ziyarah* Tourism. One of the participants, Azat Akhunov from Kazan Federal University, emphasized that Uzbekistan, with its historical and religious potential, could develop *ziyarah* tourism. In particular, he indicated, the country possesses unique destinations for followers of the Hanafi madhab and Sufism.[2]

The implementation of the "Muslim-Friendly Tourism" and "Islamic Pilgrimage Tourism" projects in the framework of the State Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan, with investment from the OIC and IDB (Islamic Development Bank), would encourage the growth of tourism from Muslim countries.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a *Ziyarah* Tourism Market for Uzbekistan?

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[1] Uzbek Tourism, "V stolitse proshla."

[2] Akhunov Azat Marsovich, personal interview with the author, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, May 2019.

One of the main regional organizations, of which Uzbekistan has been a member since 2005, is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which brings together Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as (more recently) Pakistan and India, not to mention four observer states, six dialogue partners, and four guests. At present, its eight members account for 80 percent of Eurasia's landmass, 43 percent of the world's population, and a quarter of the world's GDP. In terms of geographic coverage and population size, it is the largest regional organization in the world.[1] Even in SCO countries that are not majority-Muslim, Muslims represent important minorities: 172 million in India, 14 million in Russia,[2] and 20 million in China, including 10 million Han Chinese Muslims. Moreover, China became the global leader in tourism spending in 2017, with a total outbound expenditure of US$258 billion, significantly higher than the second-ranked United States of America.[3]

Consequently, the SCO could be used to develop *ziyarah* tourism in Uzbekistan. Article 3 of the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2002) and Article 19 of the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborhood, Friendship and Cooperation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States (2007) state that the parties will endeavor to expand and develop equitable and mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of tourism with the purpose of formation of a common tourism space on the basis of the prevailing cultural-historical and economic relations.

Regional relations in the field of tourism are carried out on the basis of special norms common for different areas of cooperation and international legal norms on partnership and cooperation. International legal regulation of tourism within the framework of the SCO is defined by two basic norms:

1. "Strategies for the Development of the SCO until 2025," a document that lays out guidelines and parameters for the further development of the Organization,[4] including tourism.

2. The joint tourism development program developed by Russia Tourism, adopted by the leaders of the states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on June 24, 2016. The main goal of the document is to promote the expansion and development of equal, mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of tourism in order to form a common tourist space based on existing cultural, historical, and economic connections. These measures will contribute to the intensification of tourist exchanges, the growth of incomes received from this sphere by all the SCO member-states, the creation of new jobs, and the improvement of citizens' quality of life.

The tourism development program emphasizes the formation of a single tourism space and ensuring tourists' safety. The main task is to increase tourist flows and upgrade tourism services. For this purpose, member-states are invited to exchange experiences in the realization of public policy in this area, strengthen relations between their NGOs, organize tourist fairs, create new tourist routes, and regularly exchange information about the tourism market and resources. Member-states will develop cooperation within the framework of the leaders' meeting of national tourism administrations and will work out a corresponding document about collaboration in this area.[5]

As a full member of the SCO, the Republic of Uzbekistan supports the implementation of the SCO Development Strategy until 2025 and the joint program for the development of tourism, which was signed

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[1] See International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/shanghai-cooperation-organisation.

[2] See Alan Cooperman, Neikha Saigal, and Anna Schiller, "Religiia i natsional'naia prinadlezhnost' v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evrope," Pew Research Center, May 10, 2017, accessed May 16, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-Overview-Russian-FOR-WEB.pdf.

[3] See United Nations World Tourism Organization, "Strong Outbound Tourism Demand from Both Traditional and Emerging Markets in 2017," April 23, 2018, accessed May 16, 2019, https://media.unwto.org/press-release/2018-04-23/strong-outbound-tourism-demand-both-traditional-and-emerging-markets-2017.

[4] The strategy was developed in accordance with the Decision of the Council of the Heads of State of the SCO No. 3 from September 12, 2014, in Dushanbe.

[5] S.B. Usmanova, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoe regulirovanie turizma v ramkakh ShOS. Vstrechi trekh pokolenii Respublikanskaia nauchno-prakticheskaia konferentsiia* (Tashkent: TGIuU, 2017), 34-36.

in Tashkent.[1] The main partners of the Uzbek tour operators are travel organizations from Western Europe, South-East Asia, and the Pacific. They maintain direct links with the Uzbek side and use its services. The initiative of establishing a nongovernmental organization for the tour operators of SCO member-states—the Union of the Association of Tour Operators—has not yet been approved by the governmental bodies of Uzbekistan but would be a first step forward.

The creation of the Union of the Association of Tour Operators of the SCO member-states would increase competition among the tourism companies of Central Asia, which might lead to a decline in the incomes of Uzbek tour operators, as well as limiting revenues from the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan. At the same time, however, this type of cooperation would help to improve "close" relationships between the nongovernmental tourism sectors of member states. It would help to develop a face-to-face dialogue between tour operators. Competition between them would also lead to rapid improvement in the services of tour operators. It would be worthwhile to propose a visa-free regime (or short-term visa-free stay of at least 30 days) among the SCO member-states.

Malaysia as a Role Model for Becoming a Halal Tourism Hub

Halal tourism as a concept has had different names—including Sharia tourism and Muslim-friendly tourism—but none of these terms is universally understood.[2] Halal tourism is a unique term that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar in Uzbekistan. Halal means "permissible" according to Islamic teachings.[3] Since it has a majority-Muslim population, Uzbekistan recognizes the halal concept in foods and daily activities. However, it was not until 2017-2018 that Tashkent began to give special attention to organizing a halal tourism supply chain in the country. As a post-Soviet secular country afraid of Islamic terrorism and extremism, Uzbekistan did not pay sufficient attention to Islamic tourism before 2017. Certainly, today's Uzbekistan has the facilities to meet the fundamental needs of Muslim tourists (including mosques and prayer rooms at some hotels and stations) but these remain very limited.

The improvement of *ziyarah* tourism is directly connected to the development of a halal tourism infrastructure. The main components of Islamic tourism are considered to be:
- Halal hotels, some of the main indicators of which are: no alcohol or gambling; halal food only; Quran, prayer mats, and arrows indicating the direction of Mecca in every room; beds and toilets positioned so as not to face in the direction of Mecca; prayer rooms; conservative staff dress; Islamic funding; and separate recreational facilities for men and women.
- Halal transport (airlines), which feature cleanliness and nonalcoholic drinks;
- Halal food premises: foods served in a restaurant have to be halal. All animals must be slaughtered according to Islamic principles. No alcoholic drinks should be served.
- Halal tour packages: The content of the tour packages must be based on an Islamic theme. Islamic tour packages include visits to mosques and Islamic monuments, as well as special religious events during Ramadan.

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[1] The following are considered "drafts" and "studies" of the Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan:
- Draft Regulations of the SCO Member States Permanent Expert Group on Cooperation in the Sphere of Tourism;
- Draft Program for the Development of Cooperation on Tourism of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States, submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on July 14, 2015.
This information was learned during my fellowship at the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan (November 2017-May 2018).
[2] The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), "SESRIC Activity Report: Implementation of OIC Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism, 2016-2017," report submitted to the Tenth Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers of the OIC Member States, Dhaka, Bangladesh, February 5-7, 2018, accessed July 25, 2019 https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=1771&refID=1071.
[3] Mohammed Batour, "Muslim Travel Behavior in Halal Tourism," in *Mobilities, Tourism and Travel Behavior—Contexts and Boundaries*, ed. Leszek Butowski (InTech Open, 2018), 4, http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.70370.

- Halal finance: The financial resources of the hotel, restaurant, travel agency, and airline have to be in accord with Islamic principles. In general, Islamic finance requires sharing the profit and loss between all parties involved in an enterprise.[1]

The ongoing changes and reforms directed toward "halal" tourism in Uzbekistan show that several steps have been already taken. These include the introduction of halal certification,[2] the organization of trainings on halal tourism,[3] and the construction of halal hotels.[4] What should be done to further develop halal tourism? And how should it be organized? Learning about and implementing foreign best practices could be one way to find answers to these questions.

With more than 35 years of experience, Malaysia has successfully branded itself as an Islamic and halal hub. Since Uzbekistan is a secular state and lacks halal regulations of its own, it could base its legal regulations on those used by Malaysia. In Malaysia, the main legal acts relevant to halal food are considered to be the Food Act (1983) and the Food Hygiene Regulation (2009), which indicate that a "food handler" is a person who is directly involved in preparing food, comes into direct contact with food, or handles packaged or unpackaged food on the food premises. Clause 33 of the Food Hygiene Regulation also addresses the personal hygiene of a food handler while handling, preparing, packing, carrying, storing, displaying, and serving food to consumers.[5] In 2011, the country adopted the Trade Description Act, which was intended to combat fraudulent halal certification and fraudulent use of the halal logo in related industries.[6]

Malaysia's legal basis for halal tourism conditions includes several other documents, among them:
- Malaysia Standard 1500:2009, which regulates the personal hygiene, clothing, devices, utensils, machines and processing aids and the premises for processing, manufacturing, and storage of food (Clause 3.4)[7];
- Manual Procedure Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (MPPHM) 2014. This manual lays out halal procedures for hotel kitchens and restaurants. Point 6.2.2.4 mentions that to comply with halal requirements, an organization needs to appoint at least 2 Muslim people for each kitchen/premises and develop Halal Assurance System guidelines;[8]
- Halal Assurance System (HAS) 2012. It takes more precautions with halal control and assurance activities in logistics, transport, business procedures, and methods.[9] According to point 4.5, organizations or hotels that intend to have halal certification need to establish a four-member Internal Halal Committee (IHC) responsible for purchasing, developing, monitoring, and controlling the halal assurance system to ensure its effectiveness and have Internal Halal Committee meetings to discuss current issues related to Halal Assurance Management Systems,

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[1] M. Akyol and O. Kilinc, "Internet and Halal Tourism Marketing," *Electronic Turkish Studies* 8/9 (2014).

[2] See "Halal Certification in Uzbekistan for Unhindered Access to the Malaysian Market," *UzDaily*, August 20, 2018, https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/45359.

[3] See "Khalial' turizm: V Tashkente startoval trening s uchastiem mezhdunarodnykh ekspertov," Kun.uz, November 13, 2018, https://kun.uz/ru/news/2018/11/13/halal-turizm-v-taskente-startoval-trening-s-ucastiem-mezdunarodnyh-ekspertov.

[4] See "V Uzbekistane reshili sdelat' khalial'-otel'," *Sputnik* (via Repost.uz), May 14, 2018, https://repost.uz/halyal-hotel.

[5] See Nor Amrina Dahlan, Fadilah Abd Rahman, and Azlina Muhammad, "An Overview of the Halal Regulatory Framework for Halal Certification of Hotel in Malaysia," *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences* 6 (2016): 5.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See Department of Standards Malaysia, "Malaysian Standard MS 1500:2009-Halal Food Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage-General Guidelines (Second Revision)," 2009, accessed July 24, 2019, https://law.resource.org/pub/my/ibr/ms.1500.2009.pdf.

[8] See Halal Malaysia, "Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (semakan ketiga) 2014," 2014, accessed July 24, 2019, http://www.halal.gov.my/v4/images/pdf/MPPHM2014.pdf.

[9] M. Tieman, J.G. van der Vorst, and M.C. Ghazali, "Principles in Halal Supply Chain Management," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 3, no. 3 (2012): 217-243.

as stated in point 2.1 / 2.2 (HAS). Moreover, the Halal Critical Point (HCP) principle needs to be focused on monitoring and controlling the entire supply chain to avoid the risk of non-halal contamination. Further to this, continuous training is very important to ensure that the Halal Assurance System is well-maintained.[1] This training will strengthen committee members' skills and knowledge of the halal certification requirements.[2]

In the case of Uzbekistan, the government should provide more investments to implement these conditions in order to gradually attract Muslim tourists. The term "Muslim-oriented tourism" is more applicable than "halal" because, according to the religious understanding of the population of Uzbekistan, the latter term is only used for food, while "Muslim-oriented tourism" is a broader term that can be applied to products and infrastructure.

Previously, a draft Action Plan was adopted for voluntary certification of products and services under such labels as "halal," "kosher," and "vegan." The implementation of this certifications system will depend not only on the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for tourism development, but also on other governmental and non-governmental structures. In particular, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Architecture, the Committee of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, etc., should collaborate. This process demands coordination by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, specifically by its Coordination Council for Tourism Development. For this purpose, it is recommended to adopt the Bylaws (Decrees) of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on "Measurements for the Establishment of Muslim-Oriented Tourism Conditions in the Republic of Uzbekistan" and to elaborate a roadmap about them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the most important goals of developing tourism in Uzbekistan is to employ the working population, which is a prerequisite for economic growth and social stability. Tourism is among the world's most important export sectors and is labor- rather than capital-intensive, which means that it has a great capacity to create new jobs. In general, the development of tourism infrastructure could reduce unemployment, especially in provincial cities. Considering that people will be employed in numerous sectors—including hotels and restaurants, handicraft-making, small businesses, etc.—it will help develop the private sector and small-scale entrepreneurship that does not require high skills.

In light of the aforementioned factors and the important geostrategic position of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, the following suggestions are recommended to develop cooperation in this sphere:
1. Strengthen partnership with the OIC to improve *ziyarah* tourism in Uzbekistan by:
    - Signing Memorandum of Understanding between the OIC and the Republic of Uzbekistan for the development of *ziyarah* (pilgrimage) tourism in Uzbekistan;
    - Establishing an institutional mechanism for the realization of the Memorandum in the form of an Interagency Committee with representatives from multiple government ministries and agencies.
2. Sign a special agreement on a visa-free regime between SCO member-states. This agreement will influence subsequent developments in the framework of the SCO, including:
    - The creation of a nongovernmental tour operators' and tourism associations organization—the Union of the Association of Tour Operators of the SCO Member-States—

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[1] W.S.W. Zulkifli, S.A. Rahman, K.W. Awang, and Y.B.C. Man, "Developing the Framework for Halal Friendly Tourism in Malaysia," *International Business Management* 5, no. 6 (2011): 295-302.

[2] See: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, "Guidelines for Halal Assurance Management System," 2012, accessed July 24, 2019, www.halal.gov.my/v4/images/pdf/halalassurancesystem.pdf.

and the elaboration of its institutional-legal framework through a discussion between member states;

- The adoption of a special roadmap to develop prospective types of tourism, including *ziyarah* tourism.

In connection with the development of pilgrimage tourism, Uzbekistan should strengthen its legal regulations by introducing international standards and special terms and conditions that will support the development of Muslim-oriented tourism in Uzbekistan. The following recommendations are made to develop the legal and institutional framework for *ziyarah* tourism in Uzbekistan:

1. Amendment of the Law on Tourism to include the term "Islamic pilgrimage tourism" or "*ziyarah* tourism." This would be the first step toward the creation of a legal foundation for *ziyarah* tourism development in the country. Specifically, it is suggested that *ziyarah* be added as a variety of tourism in the article of the new draft of the Law on Tourism that discusses "the forms and varieties of tourism";
2. Adoption of the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Establishment and Maintenance of Muslim-Oriented Tourism, including standards for halal certification, training of qualified personnel, and requested infrastructure;
3. Establishment of a Muslim-oriented Internal Working Group for Tourism under the State Committee for Tourism Development and the Committee of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
4. Organization of Islamic Tourism Promotion Centers under the Embassies of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Muslim countries that might send tourists.

Trends in Internationalization of Higher Education in Uzbekistan: The Proliferation of Foreign University Branches and How They Fit into the Broader Higher Education Sector

Dilnoza Ubaydullaeva

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According to a 2014 World Bank study,[1] the tertiary education system in Uzbekistan is one of the least efficient in the world. Although Uzbekistan has one of the highest shares of recent school graduates interested in pursuing higher education globally, the tertiary education system can absorb just 10 percent of its more than 500,000 applicants per year. The same study found that "[t]ertiary enrolment, at around 9 percent, is low by regional and international standards, and contrasts with nearly universal enrolment in primary and secondary levels in Uzbekistan." For comparison, neighboring Kazakhstan has 53.25 percent enrollment in higher education.[2]

Table 1. University admissions rate for the 2017-2018 academic year

Number of applicants	Number of admitted students	Admission rate (%)
729,707	65,875	9.03

Source: State Testing Center website, www.dtm.uz, 2019

Official data on the exact number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan is confusing. On its main webpage, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MHSSE) claims to have 91 local higher education institutions and 8 foreign university branches.[3] However, on its official news channel on Telegram,[4] the Ministry issued a statement dated May 10, 2019, in which it confirmed that there were 85 local higher education providers and 17 foreign university branches.

The country does not currently have any universities in the overall Times Higher Education World University Rankings (even in the 801-1,000 bracket).[5] Recent media discourse[6] indicates that the MHSSE has

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[1] World Bank, "Uzbekistan: Modernizing Tertiary Education," 2014, accessed July 10, 2019, http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/236211484721686087/Uzbekistan-Higher-Education-Report-2014-en.pdf.

[2] Data from Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking, "Study in Kazakhstan," accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/where-to-study/study-in-kazakhstan#survey-answer.

[3] Data from Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MHSSE), accessed July 10, 2019, https://edu.uz/uz/otm/index.

[4] Official Telegram channel of the MHSSE, May 2019, accessed July 10, 2019, https://web.telegram.org/#/im?p=@eduuz.

[5] Data from Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking, "Study in Uzbekistan," accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/where-to-study/study-in-uzbekistan#survey-answer.

[6] Press Service of MHSSE, "The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education Signed Cooperation Agreement with the International Ranking Agency," February 27, 2019, https://edu.uz/uz/news/view/1155.

begun discussions with the Times Higher Education Rankings on adding Uzbek higher education institutions. Obviously, before being ranked, the Uzbek higher education institutions must first meet the requirements of international ranking systems. They currently lack liberal admissions policies, market-based fees, and reputable international faculty members. Most importantly, higher education in Uzbekistan is completely detached from the needs of the economy in terms of skilled labor. While countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have chosen to internationalize their higher education sectors, in Uzbekistan the authorities have been cautious as far as internationalization is concerned.

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president in September 2016, the authorities have shown interest in reforming higher education. Deputy Prime Minister Aziz Abduhakimov gave an interview to a local news agency clarifying the government's higher education policy. Among other things, he stated that "the Government [of Uzbekistan] is working on a concept for turning Uzbekistan into the education hub of Central Asia within the next 10 years."[1] According to Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021, "improving the quality and effectiveness of higher education institutions through the introduction of international standards of training and assessment of the quality of teaching, gradual increase in admission quota" is one of the top priorities.[2]

Recent reforms in the sector include a presidential decree issued on September 6, 2018, allowing online education at tertiary institutions. The same month, for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, the government allowed local universities to admit an additional number of students after the university entrance exams were completed.[3] Applicants who failed the entrance exams but achieved at least one-third of the maximum possible score on the exam can now gain admission by paying extraordinarily high fees ranging from US$10,000 to US$35,000 in the first year of enrollment. From the second year of enrollment onward, these students pay the usual fees (approx. US$1,000-2,000).

Among the most noticeable changes in the higher education sector in Uzbekistan is the proliferation of branches of foreign universities. Such branches were recently exempted from all taxes,[4] which is expected to attract more players to the market. Indeed, universities from the US, Russia, South Korea, India, and China have already taken advantage of these favorable conditions to cash in on the high demand for tertiary education. The number of such branches almost tripled in recent years, from 7 in 2016 to 19 as of May 2019 (see Appendix 1).

While foreign universities are not new to the Uzbek higher education system, it should be noted that the Karimov government was very cautious about letting foreign universities in. It took 20 years to open the first seven branch-campuses, while the current government allowed seven new foreign universities to open branches within the space of three months. While the above-mentioned changes are long overdue, recent developments show that there is a lack of a well-thought-out reform strategy in the sector, and the proliferation of foreign university branches seems to be the least-planned of these developments.

This article analyzes how the growing number of foreign university branches in the country fit into the broader trend of Higher Education (HE) reforms in Uzbekistan and what challenges as well as opportunities this trend may create. This research is important as it opens up a conversation about potential reforms in HE and suggests reforming the old Soviet-style HE management and governance. It seems clear that Uzbekistan wants to reform its higher education system, however the government does not have a clear

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[1] See an interview of Deputy Prime Minister Abdukhakimov to *Gazeta.uz*: "Za 10 let Uzbekistan dolzhen stat' obrazovatel'nym khabom Tsentral'noi Azii," *Gazeta.uz*, September 18, 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/09/18/education/.

[2] See "Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 Has Been Adopted Following Public Consultation," *The Tashkent Times*, February 8, 2017, http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/541-uzbekistan-s-development-strategy-for-2017-2021-has-been-adopted-following-.

[3] See "Uzbekistan Sets Super Tuition Fees for Universities," *UzDaily.uz*, August 16, 2018, https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/45314.

[4] See "Foreign Universities Receive Tax Benefits Until 2023," *UzDaily.uz*, December 31, 2017, https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/42191.

strategy or publicly available selection criteria on the basis of which it establishes branches of foreign universities.

The subject has not been studied by academics thus far. Until recently, Uzbekistan was closed to the majority of academic research. Iveta Silova, a prominent scholar of Central Asian education studies, studied private tutoring across the entire region but could not access Uzbekistan.[1] Most of the academic articles that exist on the education system of Uzbekistan in particular are focused on rudimentary reforms in the higher education sector and limited to description.[2] The remainder likewise have clear shortcomings. While Ruziev and Burkhanov claim that the introduction of a centrally administered testing system to higher education admissions in 1994 replaced the corrupt Soviet-style oral and written examinations conducted in individual universities in Uzbekistan, they fail to note that the centralized testing system has been found to be no less corrupt than the old system.[3] Another group of scholars studied the redevelopment of higher education in post-Soviet Central Asia in comparative perspective,[4] but they failed to provide a comprehensive study of Uzbekistan's higher education internationalization policy in the post-independence period.

There is, however, a good body of social research by international organizations on HE in Uzbekistan[5] that, based on various factual evidence, lays out concrete steps toward modernizing and liberalizing the HE sector. That being said, their findings are limited to recommendations on how to improve tertiary education, and thus neglect to study how the Uzbek Government's reliance on opening foreign university branches is affecting the country's higher education sector as a whole. The current literature on HE in Central Asia in general, and in post-Soviet Uzbekistan in particular, fails to cover Uzbekistan's model of "imported internationalization" of HE in the form of foreign university branches and how this affects the national tertiary sector.

The present research does not focus on the overall or individual performance of any foreign university branch in Uzbekistan. Nor does it aim to assess the academic or non-academic achievements of students graduating from branches of foreign universities. Analysis of the curriculum or governance of an individual institution is outside the scope of this research. Instead, this paper looks at how the trend of

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[1] See Iveta Silova, "Private Supplementary Tutoring in Central Asia: New Opportunities and Burdens," UNESCO-IIEP, Paris, 2009, 47. See also Iveta Silova and Gita Steiner-Khamsi, eds., *How NGOs React: Globalization and Education Reform in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 2008).

[2] Kobil Ruziev and Umar Burkhanov, "Uzbekistan: Higher Education Reforms and the Changing Landscape since Independence," in *25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries: Reform and Continuity*, ed. Jeroen Huisman, Anna Smolentseva, and Isak Froumin (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Kobil Ruziev and Umar Burkhanov, "Higher Education Reforms in Uzbekistan: Expanding Vocational Education at the   Expense of Higher Education?," *Higher Education in Russia and Beyond* 8, no. 2 (2016).

[3] See recent media articles on corruption in the testing system administered by the State Test Centre in the cases of Tashkent Oriental Studies Institute and the State Pedagogical University: "OTMga kirish imtihonida yordam berishga va'da qilgan shaxslar qo'lga olindi," *Gazeta.uz*, July 28, 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/oz/2018/07/28/pora/; Zamdekana Gospeduniversiteta zaderzhana po podozreniiu v poluchenii vziatki," *Gazeta.uz*, July 13, 2017, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/07/13/guvd/.

[4] John C. Weidman and Brian Yoder, "Policy and Practice in Education Reform in Mongolia and Uzbekistan During the First   Two Decades of the Post-Soviet Era," *Excellence in Higher Education* 1, no. 1&2 (2010); Jose Joaquin Brunner and Anthony Tillett, "Higher Education in Central Asia: The Challenges of Modernization–an   Overview," World Bank, Washington, DC, 2007.

[5] World Bank, "Uzbekistan: Modernizing Tertiary Education", 2014; UNDP, "Higher Education in Uzbekistan: Structure Development and Reform Trends," 2009, http://www.uz.undp.org/content/uzbekistan/en/home/library/un_in_Uzbekistan/policy-brief--1--2009---higher-education-in-uzbekistan--structur.html; Asian Development Bank, "Education Reforms in Countries in Transition: Policies and Processes: Six Country Case Studies," 2004, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281294309_EDUCATION_REFORMS_IN_COUNTRIES_IN_TRANSITION_PO LICIES_AND_PROCESSES_SIX_COUNTRY_CASE_STUDIES_COMMISSIONED_BY_THE_ASIAN_DEVELOPMENT_BANK_IN_ AZERBAIJAN_KAZAKHSTAN_KYRGYZ_REPUBLIC_MONGOLIA_TAJIKISTAN_AND/link/55e0977a08aecb1a7cc4c28d/d ownload.

opening foreign university branches at a rapid pace while being slow to reform the stagnant national sector may affect the country's tertiary education sector, looking at what challenges and opportunities this may create. It argues that sustainable higher education reform in Uzbekistan needs to go beyond the current reliance on opening branches of foreign universities.

In order to support this argument, the paper will first look at how HE providers in Uzbekistan reached their current stagnation. Second, it will use discourse analysis of the current government policy (official documents, statements, legislation) as well as semi-structured interviews with tertiary education teaching staff and specialists on establishing foreign university branches to answer its research question. The interviews were held with current teaching staff at two local universities (for the privacy and safety of respondents, the names of the universities are not mentioned) and with the management and teaching staff of two leading foreign university branches in Uzbekistan. Interviews were also held with an anonymous Uzbek government official and with an American Councils for International Education expert working on Uzbekistan's HE internationalization project.

Higher Education in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan emerged as an independent state with its own model of transition from the Soviet-style planned economy to a market economy. The country's HE was profoundly affected by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as higher education "was more fully integrated across the Union" than some other sectors.[1] As Uzbekistan was no longer receiving funding from Moscow for social programs as well as education and research,[2] it had to consider restructuring its education system in a way that aligned with its political and economic agenda. Among other socio-economic reforms, transition-era reforms included the reorganization of the structure and curriculum of HE institutions. While Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan opted for "mass higher education enrollment," Uzbekistan seemed to prefer to keep HE an "elite" system with lower enrollment rates.[3] Throughout this process, the Uzbek government maintained complete control over the HE sector; the reforms that took place were of "top-down" nature.[4]

On its path to redevelop the education system, the Government of Uzbekistan adopted a first Law on Education in 1992. In 1997, the "National Program for Personnel Training"—another legal basis for the operation of the education system, which represents a long-term strategy of reinforcing the education system—was adopted. Uzbekistan introduced a National Quality Assurance system known as State Standards for Higher Education (*Oliy ta'limning davlat ta'lim standartlari*)[5] in 2001, but the system as a whole remains under strict government control.[6] Uzbekistan has not given up on improving the accessibility of higher education but has done it in its own peculiar way: it increased the number of national tertiary education providers, but did not necessarily want the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, or Eastern European modes of internationalization and privatization of the HE sector. For instance, the number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan increased from 43 in 1989 to 78 by 2015.[7] However, this success has been undermined by the increase in the size of the population, which has grown from 20 million in 1990 to 31 million in 2015. The net result is that access to higher education has in fact declined. Indeed, demand for

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[1] Brunner and Tillett, "Higher Education in Central Asia," 8.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ruziev and Burkhanov, "Uzbekistan: Higher Education Reforms."

[5] See Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers "Олий таълимнинг давлат таълим Стандартларини тасдиқлаш Тўғрисида [Oliy talimning davlat talim standartlarini tasdiqlash togrisida]" No. 343, August 16, 2001, https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=15087_o'zbekiston_respublikasi_vazirlar_mahkamasining_16_08_2001_y_343-son_oliy_talimning_davlat_talim_standartlarini_tasdiqlash_to'g'risidagi_qarori&products=1_zakonodatelstvo_respubliki_uzbekistan.

[6] See Alex Krouglov, "Transforming Higher Education in Uzbekistan: From Quality Control to Quality Assurance Culture," in *The Rise of Quality Assurance in Asian Higher Education*, ed. Mahsood Shah and Quyen Do (Elsevier, 2017).

[7] Ruziev and Burkhanov, "Higher Education Reforms in Uzbekistan," 1.

higher education is almost ten times higher than supply, leading to very high corruption at the administrative level of the higher education system in Uzbekistan.[1]

Perhaps the biggest impediment to the de-Sovietization of higher education in Uzbekistan has been the government's approach to reforms. Uzbekistan's "gradualist approach to transition was unique in terms of the pace, sequencing, and prioritization of reforms, resulting in the so-called 'Uzbek model'[2] of economic development."[3] The impact of this approach on higher education can be summarized as state dirigism (in particular, tertiary education as a function of the state only and higher education as citizenry education, not an individual right for each citizen) and gradualism (extreme caution with regard to changes and lack of a clear timeline of reforms). This strictly authoritarian approach to reforms did not lead to improvement in any area of the HE sector, from enrollment rates to the quality of the centrally-dictated curriculum.

Furthermore, "[s]imilar to Uzbekistan's political and economic reform processes, the creation of educational laws and the stages of reform have been very centralized."[4] Ultimately, due to the slow and centralized nature of reforms, Uzbekistan has suffered stagnation in terms of access to HE, management and governance of the HE sector, the independent review of individual faculties/schools within HE institutions, staff retention, and student experience, as well as financing issues. A World Bank report on Uzbekistan's higher education, conducted in 2014, concluded that the country's general approach to HE reforms has been top-down and strictly centralized, offering little or no autonomy to local institutions on matters concerning course design, student intake, and management of their finances—a plethora of issues that might take years to address.[5]

Foreign University Branches in Uzbekistan: A Sign of Reform?

In contrast to the slow and non-market-based reforms of the sector over the past two decades, the rapid growth in the number of foreign universities in Uzbekistan is indeed a sign of willingness to reform. However, how sustainable is this type of reform? How do foreign universities fit into the higher education system? Which of the existing issues are these foreign universities expected to address? So far, the government does not appear to have clear answers to these questions.

The Law on Education[6] and the National Program for Personnel Training (the National Program) are legal bases for the national policy in the field of education. A review of the Law on Education reveals that there is no reference to establishing foreign university branches nor to their operation in the country. The Law, however, states that:

> The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan consists of: state and non-state educational institutions that implement educational programs in accordance with state educational standards.

It is not clear whether foreign university branches fall under the umbrella of "non-state educational institutions." The only reference to foreign educational institutions is in Article 33, which provides that:

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[1] Ararat Osipian, "Corruption Hierarchies in Higher Education in the Former Soviet Bloc," *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, no. 3 (2009): 327.

[2] The five pillars of the "Uzbek model" of development were the priority of economy over politics, the state as the only reformer, the supremacy of law, gradualism of reforms rather than shock therapy, and strong social policy.

[3] Kobil Ruziev and Umar Rustamov, "Higher Education in Uzbekistan: Reforms and the Changing Landscape since Independence," Economics Working Paper Series, 2016.

[4] Weidman and Yoder, "Policy and Practice in Education Reform," 60.

[5] World Bank, "Uzbekistan: Modernizing Tertiary Education."

[6] The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Education, No. 464-I, August 29, 1997, http://lex.uz/docs/15622.

> Educational institutions participate in international cooperation on educational issues, have the right to establish direct links with relevant educational institutions of foreign countries, to create joint educational institutions with them in the order prescribed by law.

Although the Article states that educational institutions can establish direct links with foreign educational institutions, it does not cover the completely separate case of foreign university branches operating in the country as autonomous higher education institutions. The Article further states that "The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is unified and continuous," which again makes it ambiguous as to whether the law envisions the current lack of synergy between national higher education providers and "internationalized" branches of various foreign universities. To put it simply, the Law on Education does not address the internationalization of Uzbekistan's higher education sector in general and the establishment of branches of foreign universities in particular.

The National Program,[1] adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan, represents a long-term strategy to reinforce the education system. It lists the goals, tasks, and stages of the development of the national model of education, from primary education to post-graduate education. Yet, the program does not refer to the internationalization of the country's higher education system through the opening of foreign university branches, nor does it provide an explanation of how such institutions fit into Uzbekistan's current system. This clearly shows that the establishment of foreign university branches at such a pace was not envisaged at the time that the strategic documents on higher education were written.

Other important legal documents governing the development of the HE system include Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Adoption of State Educational Standards for Higher Education[2] mentions that one of the purposes of adopting these standards is to integrate Uzbekistan into the global educational system. However, once again, the resolution makes no mention of the roles/responsibilities of foreign university branches with regard to meeting these standards.

This review of the existing documents shows that Uzbekistan's current HE policy includes no legal basis for—and no clear strategy or policy on—establishing foreign university branches. As such, the various foreign university branches that are operating in the country using their own admissions policies, curricula, strategies, and governance, not to mention their own budget models, are emerging as a parallel system to the national higher education system. To illuminate this point, a detailed comparison of the governance of a national higher education institution (Uzbek State World Languages University) and a foreign university branch (Management Development Institute of Singapore) is provided in Appendix 4.

This reality reinforces the paper's argument that HE reforms in Uzbekistan cannot be sustainable by relying on the opening of foreign university branches alone.

Two Parallel Higher Education Systems: Long-Term Goals vs. Short-Term Gains

Among studies on the internationalization of education, there is a belief that foreign university branches are perceived to be "a single thing that can magically solve educational woes."[3] The current trend of opening foreign university branches without a solid legislative basis for their operation, as well as without a clear strategy, does indeed give the impression that the government wants to fix higher education issues in the country by opening branches of foreign universities. However, the authorities are not paying attention to—

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[1] The National Program for Personnel Training, No. 463-I-son, August 29, 1997.

[2] Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Adoption of State Educational Standards for Higher Education, No. 343, August 16, 2001, http://lex.uz/docs/359620.

[3] Christopher Hill, "The Future is Bright for Branch Campuses, but Not as We Know Them,"Times Higher Education (blog), June 12, 2018, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/future-bright-branch-campuses-not-we-know-them#survey-answer.

or are closing their eyes to—the fact that these branches are in the country for commercial reasons rather than to bring any improvement to Uzbekistan's stagnant national higher education system.

The official information on the number of branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan and on the process by which they were established is not reliable. For example, on April 6, 2018, it was reported that the Uzbek Ministry of Preschool Education had signed an agreement to set up a branch of Seojeon University in Tashkent.[1] Several news outlets covered this agreement.[2] However, more than a year after the agreement was apparently signed, Seojeon University is still not on the MHSSE's list of branches of foreign universities currently operating in the country. As such, there is no way to say whether the branch has been opened or not.

This shows how disorganized the Ministry itself is with regards to its foreign university branch policy. It also shows that new branches are being established haphazardly. Often, this disorganization reflects the fact that agreements with foreign universities are being initiated by Uzbek embassies around the world,[3] and not necessarily by the MHSSE itself. Moreover, the Ministry's most recent list of foreign university branches did not include Yeoju University—a branch that is already operating in the country.[4] This fact is another example of the uncoordinated nature of the so-called "internationalization" of higher education in Uzbekistan.

With its current policy, the government seems to be seeking an immediate solution for addressing the low quality of its Soviet-style higher education without committing to long-term strategic reforms. The opening of foreign university branches might be perceived by the government as an immediate step toward improving the image of the sector. However, this trend is creating two parallel yet very distinct higher education systems. Drawing on interviews with the staff of local universities as well as the staff of foreign university branches, this paper identifies several huge differences in the teaching and operations of national universities and foreign university branches that have caused the emergence of two parallel systems.

My research revealed that local state universities do not have the academic and financial autonomy that foreign university branches currently enjoy. Although the government says it plans to make local universities academically and financially autonomous, such independence is not currently a reality. The second gap between the two systems is in international standards of teaching and learning. Students at branches of foreign universities have a choice of elective courses in addition to their major, whereas in state universities all subjects are compulsory and students do not have any exposure to international standards of teaching and academic support. Third, differences in managing and internationalizing the teaching staff of local universities and foreign university branches is a key issue that contributes to the development of two completely different, parallel higher education systems. Last but not least, there is a huge gap in student experience and employability between local universities and foreign university branches. The current HE policy does not indicate that local universities are going to adopt the governance and teaching practices of the foreign university branches.

Autonomy—Academic and Financial

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[1] See "University of Sejong to Open Branch in Tashkent," Tashkent Times, April 6, 2018, http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/2230-university-of-sejong-to-open-branch-in-tashkent-2.

[2] See "Toshkentda Sozhong universiteti filiali ochiladi," *Gazeta.uz*, April 6, 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/uz/2018/04/06/sejong/; "Toshkentda Sozhong universiteti filiali ochiladi," *Xabar.uz*, April 7, 2018, http://www.xabar.uz/jamiyat/toshkentda-sojong-universiteti-filiali-ochiladi.

[3] Anonymous government official, personal interview with the author, April 2019.

[4] See the website of Yeoju Technological Institute in Tashkent, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.ytit.uz/index.php/en/main-page/.

Foreign university branches in Uzbekistan have complete autonomy over their academic curriculum and financial management. As confirmed by a leading government official, foreign university branches decide what courses to teach and which textbooks to use for any given degree program. The same government official observed that the government of Uzbekistan does not ask foreign university branches to add any courses to their academic programs. A member of the teaching staff at a leading foreign university branch in Tashkent confirmed that not only do universities and faculties enjoy autonomy, but so too do academic staff in teaching their courses. My interviews revealed that the leading foreign university branch does not teach pro-government courses such as Ma'naviyat about nation-building or identity formation.

For their part, local universities follow the MHSSE's rules and regulations both for curriculum and finances. Nor is the MHSSE the only actor determining the finances of a local university. Other players include the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy. My interviews indicate that staff in local higher education institutions spend a lot of time preparing unnecessary reports to submit to the MHSSE. In fact, they spend less time on lesson planning than they do on preparing the constant stream of paperwork demanded by higher offices. Local universities lack the academic and financial autonomy that foreign university branches currently enjoy. This is where the two separate and yet parallel systems of higher education begin to emerge.

International Standards of Teaching and Learning

In the world of foreign university branches, students are taught an international curriculum that is designed to fit the degree they will be getting. Students in such institutions also have the right to choose electives in addition to courses compulsory for their major. Testing and assessment during the course of the study are completed in line with international standards (as per my interviews with current and former students of foreign university branches in Uzbekistan). Students are taught the basics of academic writing from the outset and are warned that plagiarism is a breach of academic conduct. If anyone is caught engaging in academic misconduct, they fail that exam/assignment, just like in most international contexts.

In national higher education institutions, meanwhile, students still attend classes from Monday to Saturday and the schedule is set up by the Faculty/School Management. All classes are compulsory and there is no choice of electives.[1] The assignments and the quality of examination processes are quite different from those in foreign university branches. Most teaching staff, much less students, are not aware of academic writing standards. There are no software programs to check the level of plagiarism in students' writing assignments, nor is there support for students to acquire academic writing skills. In such educational settings, students' writing assignments can easily be copied and pasted from any source without proper acknowledgment.

Teaching Methods and Culture

In most, if not all, national higher education institutions, teaching methods and classroom settings are Soviet-style. Student are obliged to attend all lectures. Student are also expected to respect and follow the instructions of the lecturer. This shows the dominance of collectivist culture in national higher education institutions. Moreover, in local universities, the management seem to pay more attention to whether students are wearing appropriate attire than to the teaching quality of the faculties. As a staff member at a local university mentioned, "...students are strictly checked for their uniforms. [Women] are encouraged to wear a top and a skirt. No fancy clothing or skinny pants are allowed. Only in winter (when it is cold) are students allowed to wear classic black pants to the University."[2]

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[1] My interviews indicated that the University of World Economy and Diplomacy and Tashkent State University of Law (TSUL) have introduced elective courses for their students.

[2] Staff member at a local university based in Tashkent, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, April 2019.

At branches of foreign universities, teaching methods and classroom attendance policies are quite different from in the national sector. Courses are designed to deploy student-centered teaching methods. In some universities, students are not obliged to attend the lectures of their elective subjects; they can access all course information, including the recorded lecture, online on online learning platforms (similar to Moodle or Wattle). Moreover, unlike in the national sector, foreign university branches have international teaching staff who encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills. Even the local staff working in foreign university branches are trained to teach students to question ideas and concepts. If national institutions teach students what to think, students in foreign university branches are taught how to think. This difference is subsequently reflected in the academic and professional activities of learners.

International Faculty and Staff Retention

While it is true that not all faculty members in foreign university branches are internationally recruited staff, there are international teaching staff in every foreign university branch. They usually teach the core subjects/courses in which the branch specializes. Even the local staff working in foreign university branches are well trained, with qualifications from European or American universities. Foreign university branches try to attract leading international faculty to improve their rankings in the market—and they offer much higher salaries and more favorable work conditions than public universities do. They develop staff retention strategies to keep the best and most talented professors in their institutions, including offering professional development opportunities to local staff. As a result, students in foreign university branches are exposed to international and intercultural perspectives throughout their studies.

In most local universities, staff often work under pressure to prepare all the necessary reports for the Ministry. Local universities and institutes do not try to compete with branches of foreign universities in terms of attracting the best researchers/professors in the field. Nor do they care about retaining existing faculty members. As an interview with a member of staff at a foreign university branch revealed:

> Lecturers here at X university are paid considerably better than in local universities. But salary is not the real motivator. Most locally hired lecturers stay at foreign university branches because they like working in an environment where they have autonomy, learning opportunities, and free time! They simply don't want to waste time on preparing useless and endless reports to the Center."

Thus, the differences in the management and internationalization of the teaching staff of local and foreign university branches is another key issue that contributes to the development of two completely different higher education systems operating in parallel.

Student Experience and Employability

In most foreign university branches, students are encouraged to take advantage of academic support to get academic advice during their studies. Moreover, they have access to a quality wifi connection while on campus and can use up-to-date library collections. Students at branches of foreign universities are often exposed to international speakers on various topics relevant to their degrees. They are also encouraged to find and apply for internship opportunities. Students receive career counseling as part of the student experience, and on completion of their degrees, they are usually awarded a diploma (or two diplomas) that is valid both in Uzbekistan and abroad (usually in the country from whence the foreign university branch originates). This allows them to be more competitive than their peers who studied at local higher education institutions.

It is unclear what the situation is when it comes to national higher education providers, especially those located in remote provinces. However, interactions with teaching staff in several national higher education institutions show that students in the national sector do not seem to have even a decent free

internet connection on campus, let alone other privileges. Staff from local universities confirmed for instance that there was wifi on their campus, but "it would only open the webpages approved by the web team of the University."[1]Unfortunately, the fact that a university should not only offer classes but also provide a positive student learning experience is little-known and receives limited attention in local universities. Interviews with staff from national universities give the impression that the concept of "student experience" is not even considered in local settings.

As long as students are attending lessons and sitting exams/submitting papers, then everything is as it should be. Career counseling or advice on internship placements are not normally provided by local universities. Students usually reach out themselves to potential employers and try to develop networks while enrolled in their studies. On completion of their studies, students receive a diploma that is valid only in Uzbekistan. Due to their lack of independence and limited capacity to internationalize their programs, Uzbek universities are not actively establishing partnerships for dual-degree programs/articulation programs. Thus, students at local universities continue to be disadvantaged in terms of career guidance and potential employment opportunities.

The emergence of two parallel Higher Education systems is creating a number of issues that the government and society will need to face. As indicated above, the creation of foreign university branches is not a sustainable way to reform or "internationalize" the sector. In other words, foreign university branches are not solving the issues of the national higher education sector. The national sector will continue to operate in a Soviet-style manner while the government opens its arms to foreign universities/branches. It will thus further stagnate, and students of national universities will continue to be disadvantaged in comparison to students in foreign university branches. To address the issues created by the emergence of these parallel yet unequal higher education systems, local higher education institutions should be subject to the same liberalization policy. The reform should ensure that each local higher education provider independently decides its own finances, curriculum, internationalization strategy, and staff retention and student experience policies. The final section of this paper contains targeted policy recommendations for how to re-structure Uzbekistan's national higher education sector.

Conclusion

The government of Uzbekistan is willing to provide wider access to higher education. There are signs of reform in the sector, mostly coming top-down from the Cabinet of Ministers, not necessarily the Ministry of Higher Education. The official discourse represents the proliferation of foreign universities in Uzbekistan as a sign of the reform and internationalization of the sector. However, there is as yet no publicly available legal basis for the operation of foreign university branches in the country. Nor is there a clear government strategy in relation to these institutions; the process looks quite haphazard. If the current trend continues, it may end up dividing Uzbekistan's higher education sector between a modernized, liberal foreign system and an old-fashioned, isolated, and low-quality national system. Such a division would make the national system even poorer, detached from internationalization and the job market and able to attract only a low-quality cohort of students. To avoid the emergence of two parallel higher education systems, the government should elaborate a comprehensive higher education reform strategy.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this research indicate that there is an urgent need to reconsider and re-structure the current Soviet-style higher education system of Uzbekistan. This study provides feasible policy recommendations to government and other stakeholders for completely restructuring the sector.

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[1] Staff member at a local higher education institution, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, April 2019.

In my view, the first step toward reforming the sector is the establishment of a working group under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan consisting of leading higher education specialists, academics, and consultants. This working group should study successful higher education structures in leading states—i.e., the US, Australia, and the UK —within a defined timeframe. The Working Group should then present the government with a Higher Education Reform Package.

On the basis of my findings, I recommend that the reforms should first address the structure or hierarchy of the Higher Education Ministry. Whereas there are currently multiple players involved in higher education reform (including the Social Complex of Cabinet of Ministers for overall management of the sector and the Ministry of Finance for the sector's finances and budgets), I recommend that the Ministry of Higher Education be made the only government agency responsible for higher education. The Ministry can then set up/reform agencies and institutes under its portfolio. The Higher Education Reform Package should include:

- Making universities self-governing bodies (with their own budget models and curricula).
- Developing an internationalization policy that will formalize the process for establishing foreign university branches to make it more consistent. Individual universities can use this policy to develop their own local internationalization strategies for establishing international partnerships with universities worldwide.
- Encouraging universities, as autonomous institutions, to have Boards through which the best candidates are selected for management positions. Rectors should not be appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers. Management positions within universities should be announced publicly in order to attract quality applicants from around the world.
- Allowing universities to work with industry and business to attract funds and encouraging academic staff to attract funds/grants for their research. Writing instructors and research management teams will be required in order for academics to gain the skills necessary to write good grant proposals.
- Adopting a policy on credit and grading in higher education that aligns with international credit standards.
- Rewriting position descriptions of academic appointments in HE institutions to include teaching, research, and other services to the university; introducing a compulsory research component to most academic appointments.

Appendix 1. Foreign university branches already operating in the market

Name of Foreign University Branch and year of its establishment	Main teaching areas

Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (since 1995)	Economics, Business, and Finance
Westminster University (UK) (since 2002)	Business/Management/Marketing, Business Information Systems, Commercial Law, Economy/Finance
Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia) (since 2006)	Applied Mathematics and Informatics, and Psychology
Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas (since 2007)	Oil and Gas
Management Development Institute of Singapore (since 2007)	Business and Management, Engineering, Fashion Design, Information Technology, Life Sciences, Mass Communications, Psychology and Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Management
Turin Polytechnic University (Italy) (since 2009)	Mechanical and Energy Engineering; Information Technology and Automation Systems in Industry (ICT); Industrial and Civil Engineering and Architecture
Inha University (South Korea) (since 2014)	Computer Science and Engineering, Information and Communication Engineering, Logistics
*Yeoju Technical Institute in Tashkent (YTIT) (South Korea) (7-8 September 2018) *This university, interestingly, is not on the official list of foreign universities (or branches) of the MHSSE. The university has been operating since July 2018.	Architecture and Urban Planning; Alternative Energy; Business Management; Tourism
Webster University (US) (since September 5, 2018)	Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). The degree is offered jointly by Webster University and a local partner university – Uzbek State University of World Languages.
Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloy (Russia) (since September 24, 2018)	Mining; Metallurgy; Automatization and Management of Technological Processes and Production
Branch of Information Systems Management Institute (Latvia, since September 28, 2018)	The Branch was established in Ferghana. The following faculties were listed in the local media: Undergraduate courses: Tourism, Hotel Management, Management of Cultural Heritage, Small Business Management, IT Master's courses: Business Management, Information Systems
Amity University (India, since October 3, 2018)	The local media spread the news that negotiations on opening a branch of Amity University in Uzbekistan had started.

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (Russia, October 4, 2018)	On October 4, 2018, the Rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations visited Uzbekistan, where he held talks about the establishment of a School of International Relations within the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (Uzbekistan).
Branch of Bucheon University in Tashkent (South Korea, July 2018)	The Branch was established by the Decree of the President dated July 2, 2018. It offers preschool education degrees.
Branch of National Nuclear Research University under Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics (Russia, July 10, 2018)	Uzbekistan and Russia agreed to open the branch of the National Nuclear Research University, which was recently founded in Russia on the premises of the renowned Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics. Students will be admitted from academic year 2019-2020.
Ajou University in Uzbekistan (not a Branch) (South Korea, November 30, 2018)	Undergraduate degrees in Architecture or Construction Engineering commencing from academic year 2019-2020.
Branch of Moscow University of Physical Training, Swimming, Youth and Tourism in Samarkand region (February 13, 2019)	More than 150 students will be accepted in the 2019-2020 academic year to programs on volleyball, basketball, tennis, swimming, etc.
Sharda University Branch in Andijan region (India, April 2019)	An agreement was signed at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in India between the Khokim of Andijon region and the Head of Sharda Group.

Source: compiled by the author based on local media and university websites.

Appendix 2. List of Local Private Universities

Akfa University Program offered by Gachon University (South Korea, partnership since October 3, 2018)	Gachon University and Akfa Medline signed an agreement on opening the branch of Gachon University's College of Medical Science—currently known as Akfa University—in Uzbekistan. The admissions to 6-year undergraduate studies will commence in 2019. The newly-established Akfa University will run Gachon's academic programs.

Appendix 3. Foreign University Branches that have signed agreements with the Uzbek Government to operate in the country (as of May 2019)

Name	Details
The Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (Russia)	July 25, 2018—President of Uzbekistan ordered that an agreement be reached with the Russian side to open a branch of the institute in Tashkent in 2020. Negotiations are planned to start in December 2018.

Branch of Nanjing Polytechnic Institute (China)	It is planned that the languages of instruction will be English and Chinese
Branch of "Universiti Teknologi Malaysia—UTM" (Malaysia Technological University, Malaysia)	Negotiations were held on January 27, 2019.
University of Technology (China)	The Chinese side visited the country for negotiations on January 25, 2019.
Branch of Kyung-in Women's University (South Korea)	An MoU on establishing this Branch was signed on April 20, 2019. The Branch will focus on program such as textile, design, fashion, aviation and tourism, health care, and Korean studies.
Branch of Turkish Healthcare Studies University on the premises of Bukhara State Medical Institute (Turkey)	The agreement with the Turkish side on opening this branch in the 2019-2020 academic year was signed on April 1, 2019.
Branches of Moscow Oncological Research Institute in Tashkent and Samarkand (Russia, news from April 25, 2019)	The news on negotiations with the Russian side was published on April 25, 2019.
Branch of Seojeong University in Tashkent (South Korea, April 6, 2018)	An MoU was signed on April 6, 2018.

Appendix 4. Number of Players in Public and Foreign University Branches: Comparison of UzSWLU with MDIS

Uzbekistan State University of World Languages is the leading public university for foreign language teaching in the country.

Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent (MDIS) is one of the older foreign university branches in the country, having been operating successfully since 2007. MDIS has complete autonomy as long as it meets National Quality Assurance Standards.

Table 1. Number of players in governance of UzSWLU

Organization	Responsibilities include
Cabinet of Ministers	- Development of strategy for the HE sector - Determining the quotas for entrance to HEIs - Setting the stipends for all students - Appointments of Rectors of HEIs
MHSSE (Higher Education Ministry)	- Consolidating annual budget bids prepared by HEIs - Reallocation of annual budget funds (approved by the Ministry of Finance) between HEIs - Organizing the academic year (length of semesters, dates of examinations and holidays)
Ministry of Finance	Approval of consolidated annual budget of HEI

Ministry of Economy	• Forecasting market demand for different sectors, which becomes the basis for setting admission quotas to HEIs (determined in consultation with MHSSE and MLSP)
State Testing Centre	• Developing and organizing national testing for admission to HEIs

Source: UzWLU website and interviews with UzSWLU staff

Table 2. Number of players in governance of MDIS

Organization	Responsibilities include
MDIS BOARD OF DIRECTORS	• Development of MDIS's strategy • Determining admission caps • Appointment of Vice-President • Developing budget models • Research and innovation • Student recruitment • Student experience • Student employability

Source: MDIS website and interviews with MDIS staff

How Private Schools Can Improve
the Uzbek Education System

Firdavs Navruzov

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This paper discusses the importance of the academic independence of the private sector in the Uzbek context. Since the presidential decree on the development of private education was adopted in September 2017,[1] there has been a tremendous rise in the number of private schools throughout the country, with 86 private schools as of April 1, 2019.[2] The main objective of the decree was to improve the quality of education and to develop non-governmental educational institutions. However, the policy that followed the decree maintains that the curriculum elaborated by the Ministry of Public Education for public schools should be followed by private schools as well. I would challenge this, arguing that private schools need at least partial academic independence in order to enable the quality of education to improve faster.

In the last two decades, the content of the Uzbek state curriculum has not seen substantial change, despite the global context of a technological boom. As a result, most school graduates cannot gain admission to their desired universities or acquire employment in the modern workforce. Without external help such as private tuition or special vocational courses, they simply do not meet employers' expectations in terms of their skill set, whether we mean basic soft skills or language and computer skills. Even though they are the main venue for economic and human capital development, public schools are unable to respond to the essential challenges facing the country.

It has now become obvious that governments alone cannot meet the demand for information and knowledge in the modern world. Public schools and private schools are required to support each other, one stepping in when the other falls short. This is particularly true in a developing country such as Uzbekistan. The government's efforts to respond to cultural, economic, and technological changes and transformations have caused public expenditures to increase exponentially (the prognosis for 2019 suggests that a staggering 26.5 percent of GDP will be spent on education, with more than half of that sum being directed to secondary education[3]). However, this still falls short of necessary expenditure on education; the government does not have a large enough budget to be able to spend as much as it ideally would. This is where the private sector steps in.

Preliminary evidence shows that the unit costs of private schools are lower than those of public schools. In addition to mobilizing revenue for the state, there are more obvious benefits. The most important

[1] Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures for Further Development of Activities for the Provision of Non-State Educational Services," PP-3276, September 15, 2017, accessed July 22, 2019, http://lex.uz/docs/3343085.

[2] Order of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Approval of the Concept of Development of the System of National Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030," UP-5712, April 29, 2019, accessed July 22, 2019, http://lex.uz/docs/4312783.

[3] Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Biudzhet dlia grazhdan: proekt 2019," Tashkent, 2018, https://www.mf.uz/media/file/press/budget_2019.pdf.

of all is that a rise in the number of private schools will inevitably create healthy competition between private and public schools. To entice students to their schools, the public sector will have to improve the quality and delivery of its programs, teacher qualifications, facilities and amenities, etc. However, for competition to arise, private schools need to be able to create their own programs.

This paper will first discuss the current policy in Uzbekistan and the roadmap for the development of education up to 2030 elaborated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It will then look at the research conducted on the relationship between public and private schools and achievement in different parts of the world. On the basis of this, it will conclude with recommendations for a new policy of academic independence for private schools.

Background on the Education System of Uzbekistan

In 2017, Uzbekistan changed its school system from being 12 years (nine years at school and three years at a specialized college or lyceum) to being 11 years of obligatory primary and secondary education, starting at the age of seven. This requirement includes four years of primary school and two cycles of secondary school, lasting five and two years respectively. Preschool education is provided to children aged 3-6 years in kindergartens. Preschool education is not compulsory. While the formal eleven years of education are overseen by the Ministry of Public Education, preschool education is overseen by the Ministry of Preschool Education.

General (basic) education is provided in several types of basic education schools: schools with only primary education (Grades 1-4) and those with complete (Grades 1-11) education; adult education centers; and specialized schools and boarding schools for students with disabilities. General education is also available in such institutions as gymnasia and lyceums (Grades 10-11), some of which are attached to higher education institutions. Colleges, vocational and technical schools, which lasted 3 years and have been replaced by high school education (Grades 10-11), are now post-secondary education establishments lasting from 6 months to 2 years. Additionally, since 2017 Uzbekistan has recognized private schools or non-governmental educational institutions for primary and secondary education.

Education is mainly financed by the government. Higher and specialized secondary education institutions are financed by the state budget, while secondary schools and kindergartens are financed by municipal budgets. There is a system of financial support for all students at higher and secondary specialized institutes. About 70% of the financing for specialized secondary schools comes from local authorities, 20% from the Ministry of Higher Education, and the other 10% from contracts with industry, employment services, fee-paying courses, and the sale of products.[1]

As of April 1, 2019, basic education was being provided in 9,691 institutions with an enrollment of about 5.8 million students. There are also 13,800 students receiving education at 86 private schools or non-governmental educational institutions. Apart from this, there has been a surge in extracurricular educational institutions: over 140,000 children attend 5,540 extracurricular facilities to develop their artistic skills. The Ministry of Public Education also oversees 86 specialized schools and 21 boarding schools for physically and psychologically disabled children (20,610 at schools and 13,437 at home).[2]

Current Issues in Public Education and the Roadmap

The presidential decree[3] identifies five problem areas of public education and sets out a roadmap for solving them. The areas are as follows:

- Management of public education;

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[1] UNESCO, "Uzbekistan: General Information," last accessed July 22, 2019, http://uis.unesco.org/country/UZ.
[2] Order of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Approval of the Concept…"
[3] Ibid.

- Staff training and professional development;
- Organization of educational processes;
- Material and technical equipment of schools; and
- Financing the system of public education.

Management of public education. The main issues in terms of managing public education include the absence of a legal and institutional framework for dealing with new reforms in education, analysis of the operations of educational institutions, and determining the actual state of education in regions. The low level of use of modern communications technology to provide state educational services, manage educational institutions, and conduct planning and organization impedes monitoring and effective implementation of decisions; it also leads to excessive bureaucratization of public administration and increases costs.

Staff training and professional development. There is a serious lack of pedagogical staff in a number of subjects, and due to the absence of scholarships or financial support for students from remote regions who seek admission to higher educational institutions, there is an even more acute shortage of teachers in mountainous and desert areas. Higher educational institutions with teacher-training majors teach subjects that are of no use to future teachers; the outdated content of courses, as well as the outdated teaching practice system, adversely affect the professional development of future teachers. In terms of job placement, there are no specific requirements for determining teachers' qualifications during hiring processes. The lack of national standards describing what teachers and principals need to know and be able to do hinders their growth and makes the existing procedure for selecting and appointing heads of institutions inefficient.

Organization of educational processes. Over-large class sizes in most centralized schools have led to a sharp deterioration in the quality of education. Since parents in most regions of Uzbekistan are not restricted to a given local area in their choice of schools, the quality of both high-enrollment and low-enrollment schools has slumped. Due to the corruption of certain school administrators, some classes have 45-50 students per room. On top of this, the rigidity of the textbook development process requires publishers to adhere to certain prerequisites, with a negative impact on their content, methodology, and publication quality. Moreover, while state educational standards seek to develop competence, textbooks—not to mention teaching and assessment methods—work against this by focusing on describing information for students to memorize, thereby hindering the development of critical thinking, independent retrieval and analysis of information, etc.

Material and technical equipment of schools. Due to a historically lower level of state budget expenditure on material and technical equipment of schools and some corruption in school administration, there is a need for additional equipment in 28 percent of schools, 50 percent of equipment is obsolete and must be replaced, more than 3,000 general schools need canteens to provide nutritious meals to students, and 2,907 secondary schools need construction and repair work.

Financing the system of public education. Most of the funds allocated to public education institutions from the state budget are spent on wages, while not enough funds are being spent on updating school equipment and repairing schools. Funds must be distributed and used more efficiently and transparently.

The roadmap for the development of the system of public education until 2030 highlights four main targets:

- Improving the effectiveness of educational content and improving the quality of staff
- Raising the status of teachers in society
- Improving the material and technical base of educational institutions and increasing competition in the public education system
- Putting into practice a set of measures, including five initiatives, aimed at creating additional conditions for the upbringing and training of young people

Each target responds to one or more of the aforementioned issues with the public education system, as well as to other limitations that are hindering Uzbekistan from participating in international programs and assessments (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS[1]).

Practices around the World

Coleman et al.'s pioneering study[2] opened the way to a wave of empirical research on the performance of private and public schools in a wide range of educational contexts. The findings and conclusions in the literature today regarding this issue are mixed and highly context-based. The diversity of types of private schools (independent, charter, low-cost, recognized, unrecognized, etc.) and levels of quality in public schools around the world make it difficult to come to any definitive conclusion. Aside from this, there is a need to control for differences in the personal and socio-economic background of students, as well as the level of government interference in the education process.

Although a number of studies posit that private schools are less efficient than public schools[3] or even condemn private schools as a threat to democratic equality and social cohesion,[4] it is widely assumed that they are likely to perform better than public schools. Studies show that independent private schools produce substantial revenue mobilization for governments,[5] as well as a number of added benefits. First, in private schools, high-ability, low-income students receive tuition discounts, largely mitigating the fear of "elitism." Second, school administrators become more responsive to the needs of students and their parents, thereby improving the efficiency of education provision. Finally, a rise in the number of private schools will create healthy competition between private schools and public schools.[6] A number of articles on this issue[7] have shown that students in private schools achieve more, especially in languages and mathematics, than they do in public schools, creating a competition that forces state schools to improve.

A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

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[1] Ibid.

[2] James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic and Private Schools Compared* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 1-12.

[3] D. Brent Edwards, Jr., Steven Klees, and Janet Wildish, "Dynamics of Low-Fee Private Schools in Kenya: Governmental Legitimation, School-Community Dependence, and Resource Uncertainty," *Teachers College Record* 119 (2017): 1-42; G. Brunello and L. Rocco, "Educational Standards in Private and Public Schools," *The Economic Journal* 118 (2008): 1866-1887, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0297.2008.02194.x; Muhammad Iqbal, "Public versus Private Secondary Schools: A Qualitative Comparison," *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education* 6, no. 1 (2012): 40-49.

[4] R. Marples, "What's Wrong with Private Schools," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 52 (2018): 19-35, doi:10.1111/1467-9752.12275.

[5] Emmanuel Jimenez, Marlaine E. Lockheed, and Vicente Paqueo, "The Relative Efficiency of Private and Public Schools in Developing Countries," *The World Bank Research Observer* 6, no. 2 (1991): 205-218; Stephen J. Caldas and Sylvain Bernier, "The Effects of Competition from Private Schooling on French Public School Districts in the Province of Quebec," *The Journal of Educational Research* 105, no. 5 (2012): 353-365.

[6] Richard Arum, "Do Private Schools Force Public Schools to Compete?" *American Sociological Review* (1996): 29-46; Jimenez, Lockheed, and Paqueo, "The Relative Efficiency of Private and Public Schools."

[7] José Manuel Cordero, Diego Prior, and Rosa Simancas, "A Comparison of Public and Private Schools in Spain Using Robust Nonparametric Frontier Methods," *Central European Journal of Operations Research* 24, no. 3 (2016): 659-680; Sunku Hahn, Tae-Hwan Kim, and Boyoung Seo, "Effects of Public and Private Schools on Academic Achievement," *Seoul Journal of Economics* 27 (2014): 137-147; Jitendra Gouda, Kailash Chandra Das, Srinivas Goli, and Ladumai Maikho Apollo Pou, "Government versus Private Primary Schools in India: An Assessment of Physical Infrastructure, Schooling Costs and Performance," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33, no. 11/12 (2013): 708-724.

Private schools decrease the state budget expenditure on schools. Financial constraints limit the state's ability to expand free public education. This is especially true in poor and developing countries, where the demand for schooling is projected to increase dramatically in the coming decades. Private schools can handle at least part of the expansion by reducing expenses such as teacher wages, cost allocation per student, and construction and/or maintenance of school facilities. They can also assist governments by reducing the excessive number of students in public school classrooms. Finally, private schools—which are more autonomous and responsive to students and their parents—will deliver education in a cost-effective way.

Hoxby's seminal paper[1] studies the behavior of schools in three states in the US when exposed to competition. In each state, student performance improved substantially, while expenditures per student were less affected. The study was corroborated by Greene and Kang[2] and Dee.[3] Greene and Kang, who study the relationship between competition and expenditure, also found that for the most part competition reduces the proportion of the budget spent on non-instructional purposes, but it might encourage spending in the non-instructional categories. Dee's research focuses on the overall link between expenditure and school performance but mentions how competition from private schools positively affects public schools. The study was later repeated by Caldas and Bernier[4] in Quebec, where they came to the opposite conclusion: competition between private and public schools did not seem to have a significant effect on the academic performance of students, but it significantly reduced total expenditures per student by French-speaking public school districts.

Achievement Gap

Assessing the academic performance of private schools in comparison to public schools has been the focus of many researchers from different educational contexts. The findings of the vast literature devoted to this issue are mixed. Some studies find that private schools perform better after controlling for differences in the personal and socio-economic background of students.[5] Others contend that the differences disappear when those variables are taken into account and that public schools can even outperform private ones.[6] In general terms, however, it is widely assumed that private schools are likely to perform better than public schools because market competition forces them to achieve a more efficient use of resources and because of their obligation to be responsive to students and their parents.

It is interesting to note that the most vivid examples of an achievement gap between private and public schools can be seen in the case of developing countries. In developing countries, the efficiency of private schools is highly dependent on the institutional regime and the incentive structure under which they operate. For example, such incentives as contracting for educational services in the Philippines, voucher systems in Chile, or public-private subsidy programs in Pakistan show considerable improvement of private schools' academic achievement. In some countries—like India, Nigeria, Jordan, and Pakistan—research

[1] Caroline Minter Hoxby, "School Choice and School Competition: Evidence from the United States," (2003): 9-65.

[2] Kenneth V. Greene and Byung-Goo Kang, "The Effect of Public and Private Competition on High School Outputs in New York State," *Economics of Education Review* 23, no. 5 (2004): 497-506.

[3] Thomas S. Dee, "Expense Preference and Student Achievement in School Districts," *Eastern Economic Journal* 31, no. 1 (2005): 23-44.

[4] Caldas and Bernier, "The Effects of Competition."

[5] Eugenia Froedge Toma, "Public Funding and Private Schooling across Countries," *The Journal of Law and Economics* 39, no. 1 (1996): 121-148; Joseph G. Altonji, Todd E. Elder, and Christopher R. Taber, "Selection on Observed and Unobserved Variables: Assessing the Effectiveness of Catholic Schools," *Journal of Political Economy* 113, no. 1 (2005): 151-184; Jaap Dronkers and Péter Robert, "Differences in Scholastic Achievement of Public, Private Government-Dependent, and Private Independent Schools: A Cross-National Analysis," *Educational Policy* 22, no. 4 (2008): 541-577.

[6] Vincent Vandenberghe and Stephane Robin, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Private Education across Countries: A Comparison of Methods," *Labour Economics* 11, no. 4 (2004): 487-506; Chang-Tai Hsieh and Miguel Urquiola, "The Effects of Generalized School Choice on Achievement and Stratification: Evidence from Chile's Voucher Program," *Journal of Public Economics* 90, no. 8-9 (2006): 1477-1503.

shows that private schools outperform public schools in certain subjects (English, arts, etc.) but not their native language, for instance.

There is still much denial about the efficiency of private schools and some studies heavily support the "only government will do" position on secondary education. Gradually, however, the private sector is being acknowledged by influential policymakers in governments, philanthropy, and charity. The successes of private ownership and markets for schooling are gradually being recognized.

Proposals

The cumulative research mentioned above and the issues with public education point to one solution: Uzbekistan needs to open the door to the private sector as an important partner in educating future generations. This paper posits two possible options for improving the academic independence of private schools in order to ensure their progress and create competition between private schools and public schools.

A) *Grant full academic independence*

The Ministry of Public Education could allow private schools to develop their own curricula and programs. This option has two main advantages. First, it would diminish the ministry's control over the curriculum development process. The school administration would be able to choose the number of hours allocated to each subject and add or eliminate any subject it deemed irrelevant to the curriculum. Second, it would help private schools avoid putting students under extra pressure. Most private schools add extra subjects to their program but cannot retract any mandatory ones, therefore increasing time constraints on students. Academic independence would allow private schools to replace some subjects and thus avoid burdening students.

On the other hand, there are clear concerns regarding this option, such as the abuse of this freedom by private schools. First, there is a risk of undermining overall academic achievement. Schools may want to focus excessively on select subjects and not meet the minimum educational standards of the country. Second, some schools may fabricate test results to get their students into better institutions or other schools. As can be seen from the arguments above, while Option A has compelling upsides, its outcomes would be too unpredictable in the long run and less than accountable to the student body and their parents.

B) *Grant greater academic independence*

The Ministry of Public Education could come up with an assessment tool to support and evaluate private schools' curriculum development processes. The main advantage of this option is that it would help eliminate ineffective curricula. Based on previous experiences, the ministry could support private schools in creating their own curricula by allocating educational advisors from the Republican Center of Education, an office under the Ministry of Public Education responsible for state curriculum development and evaluation. This would ensure that no school could undermine students' future educational and professional prospects by ignoring minimum educational standards.

Second, with support from the ministry, schools could create curricula they consider efficient in their specific contexts. These diverse curricula might lead to healthy competition between private and public schools. Third, the process of creating diverse curricula could benefit the ministry as well, helping the government to identify and eliminate the issues in the present curriculum. It could pave the way to the introduction of more foreign experiences and methodologies. Subjects under the STEAM umbrella could be more rigorously taught; teachers would also have the opportunity to retrain in sciences and IT. This could potentially prepare students for the job market not only within the borders of Uzbekistan, but also in more developed countries.

There is a risk of excessive government intervention. The government may exert excessive control over schools' curriculum development processes instead of guiding and supporting them. Another concern

with this option is the scope for corruption. Some schools might try to bribe the persons responsible for curriculum evaluation to get their curricula certified. Finally, all the curricula created for different schools will need to be piloted for evaluation, which could adversely affect the academic achievement of the students. However, these issues could largely be mitigated in the following ways:

- The policy could stipulate the specific parameters of government involvement in the process of curriculum development. This would minimize the danger of excessive intervention by the state.
- The parts of the curricula developed by private schools could be posted online for the wider public to see. This could prevent private schools from developing inefficient curricula and bribing the persons involved.
- A curriculum could be piloted with only a small number of students to evaluate its efficiency. Until it yields positive results, the school could continue implementing the state program.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on this study, following are some recommendations to the Ministry of Public Education:

- Direct the Republican Center of Education to evaluate and support program development in private schools. The center can allocate a team of experts to work with private schools to develop their own curricula and ensure the quality of their programs.
- Pilot the programs developed by schools and the center to evaluate their efficiency. To ensure that the whole student body at schools does not undergo experimental programs, they should be evaluated with a representative pilot group.
- Issue a policy granting private schools greater academic independence in terms of curriculum development, professional training, and assessment of student knowledge.

In conclusion, granting greater academic independence to private schools would create a means to deal with the issue of uniformity and would help contextualize curricula. It would thus lead to a diversity of ideas and healthy competition that would support academic and human capital achievement. By supporting schools throughout the process of curriculum development, the ministry can eliminate the possibility of an academic achievement and establish specific minimum educational standards for schools to follow. Finally, it would generate a constant stream of ideas for further improvement of both public and private schools that could inform the work of the Ministry of Public Education.

The Nuances of Hijab
at the Crossroads of Religiosity and Secularism in Uzbekistan

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Prior to 2016, the Uzbek authorities were very cautious toward any non-state-controlled form of Islam. With the arrival in power of the new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, some restrictions on religious practices, including women's veiling, have indirectly been eased. Although there was no overt propaganda advocating veiling, new expressions of piety appeared. As a result, not only private spaces but also public places such as schools saw veiling become a widespread practice. Mirziyoyev has encouraged the revival of Islam through Quran recitation competitions, allowing prayer calls to be heard through mosques, and the establishment of new mosques, inspiring people to express their religiosity and piety more openly.[1] Having been encouraged to be proud of their Islamic identity and heritage, people have been shocked by recent discussions about banning the hijab.

In this paper, I concentrate on discussions around the manifestation of religiosity in Uzbekistan, especially on the nuances of wearing hijab. The paper first deals with Uzbekistan's position toward religion and secularism. Next, it discusses the issue of hijab in broader terms as well as in the Uzbek context. After that, it introduces some women's voices on hijab to highlight the multifaceted motivations for wearing the veil. Through this research, I argue that the state is trying to find a balance between accepting and rejecting cultural elements that are associated with Islam.

Uzbekistan's Position on Religion and Secularism

It should be noted that the place of Islam in a society does not always correspond with the relationship between the state and Islam. Despite the curtailment of religious expression in Soviet time, Islam has been practiced in everyday life in Central Asia.[2] Today, although people feel wholeheartedly Muslim in their everyday lives, the independent states born in 1991 are cautious toward religion because of the—real or supposed—dangers of fundamentalism. In *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics and Identities*, Marlene Laruelle argues that the relationship between Islam and the state in Central Asia has "a schizophrenic character":

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[1] Decree on Creating Islamic Civilizations Center under the Cabinet of Ministries of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Collection of Law Documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Number 31, point 782, 2017; National Database of Law Documents numbers 09/19/23/0576, 01.17.2018; http://www.lex.uz/docs/3296658.

[2] For a discussion of policies on Islam in Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbekistan, see Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia* (Westport, CT: Greenworld Publishing Group, 2001); Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Maria Elizabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Islam has been glorified as a religion of the nation, the local pilgrimage sites have been valorized, and the great national figures linked to Sufism have been celebrated, but at the same time religious practices have been monitored, sermons in the mosques are increasingly controlled, religious education is highly restricted, and interactions with the rest of the *Umma* are looked upon with suspicion.[1]

Noting the complexities of the issue—which take it beyond the dichotomy of good and bad—Laruelle argues that "interaction between state and society emerges as much more complex than the black and white narrative of advocacy groups criticizing the lack of religious freedom in the region and [the] repressive practices of the state structures toward religion."[2]

In the Karimov era, Uzbekistan embraced a restricted understanding of Islam while maintaining the bans on Arabic teaching, the hijab, and religiosity in public spaces in the names of secularism.[3] The government has long tried to maintain secularism in public places such as schools by limiting visual manifestations of religiosity, making such manifestations subject to an administrative penalty (*ma'muriy jazo*) for contravening institutional dress codes.[4] The Uzbek word "secular" (*dunyoviy*) also refers to "political pluralism, the coexistence and recognition of multiple religious viewpoints and interethnic harmony," thus emphasizing tolerance as an important aspect of the country's multiethnic and multi-faith communities.[5] Looking at Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Johan Rasanayagam defines secularism "as a practice through which the state seeks to classify and regulate all aspects of society, including what constitutes as religious."[6]

Another government-controlled sphere is education. Uzbekistan's educational policies, which are key to the state's developmental mission, demonstrate that secularism applies to non-Islamic religious believers as well. The secular agenda has remained evident in Mirziyoyev's educational policy: an April 2017 decree requires for instance that students in secondary schools and vocational training colleges obtain an understanding of secular values and religious relations by learning philosophy, a subject that includes classes on aesthetics, religious studies, and the individual and society.[7] In school curricula, Islam is taught as a way of living as a moral, ethical citizen of Uzbekistan.[8] The separation of teaching *in* religion from teaching *about* religion is important in this context. If teaching *in* Islam means education in the spirit of Islam or to prepare Muslim leaders, teaching *about* Islam approaches the subject from a secular point of view.[9]

In defining the relationship between the state and religion, scholars Svante Cornell and Jakob Zenn identify five types of secularism: 1) the "Fusion" model, in which the spiritual and political power merge; 2) the "Dominant Religion" model, in which the principal religion is recognized at the same time as minority

[1] Marlene Laruelle, *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics and Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 4.

[2] Laruelle, *Being Muslim,* 4.

[3] Emmanuel Karagiannis highlights state interventions on the issues of political Islam in the Central Asian context. See *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2009); and *The New Political Islam: Human Rights, Democracy, and Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[4] Decree No. 168 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Amendment to the Law on Freedom of Consciences and Religious Entities, Chapter 14, paragraph 5, May 1998. http://lex.uz/docs/65108, Law on Administrative Penalty, Chapter 184 (1). http://www.lex.uz/acts/-97664.

[5] Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 107.

[6] Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan*, 98.

[7] Decree No. 187 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Approving Education Standards for Secondary Schools and Vocational Training Institutions, April 6, 2017; Annex 2, Paragraph 22 on Teaching Philosophy.

[8] Adeeb Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 573–98, doi:10.1017/S0020743803000242; Donohon Abdugafurova. "Islam, Morality and Public Education: Religious Elements of Ethics and Etiquette in the Uzbek School Curriculum," *Central Asian Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2018): 212-232.

[9] Svante Cornell and Jakob Zenn, "Religion and Secular State in Uzbekistan," *Silk Road Paper*, Central Asia Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program (June 2018): 18.

religions are acknowledged; 3) the "State Neutrality" model, such as the one used in America, which proposes that religious matters are civic and private; 4) the "Skeptical/Insulating" model, like the French *laïcité*, which separates the state from the influence of religion; and 5) the model of "Intolerance" to any manifestation of religion.

According to Cornell and Zenn, Uzbekistan, while assuring the dominance of Islam, recognizes the ethnic and religious diversity of its population. The state also positions itself as separate from the influence of religion, just like the French *laïcité* model, "yet in promoting the restoration of the traditional religious practices of Central Asia, it borrows from the dominant-religion model prevalent in nineteenth-century European monarchies with state churches or in Meiji Japan."[1] Evidently, therefore, Uzbekistan has its own approach to religion that defies easy categorization.

Here, I argue that Uzbekistan's position vis-à-vis secularism also includes the fusion model, where spirituality merges with politics. The acceptance of Sufism, in which the relationship of the Believer and the Believed is emphasized in a mystical and spiritual way, keeps the Islamic narrative alive even without the visual manifestation of orthopraxy. *Naqhbandiyah* tariqa, which encourages "*Dil ba yoru dast ba kor*" (your heart with God and your hand at work)—in other words, keeping one's mind on God while at the same time dealing with worldly affairs—was a handy method for the government to encourage moderate Islam and being a "good Muslim".[2] The recognition of two Islamic holidays—Ramazon Hayit (Eid al-Fitr) and Qurban Hayit (Eid al Adha)—as national celebrations provides a further indication that Islamic spirituality is important in the state discourse. However, if spirituality becomes manifested in the public space, this is a problem in the eyes of the state.

Decree on School Uniforms and Hijab Discussion

Like its Central Asian neighbors, Uzbekistan does not allow the hijab to be worn in school settings.[3] In August 2018, a decree establishing school uniforms was adopted.[4] Article 7 states that students have to be without any headgear (*bosh kiyimsiz*), effectively banning the hijab from being worn on school grounds. Although Islamic clothing is not forbidden per se, no manifestations of religiosity are permitted:

> Because there are different nationalities and religious confessions, and public education is secular in Uzbekistan, it is forbidden to add additional elements (hijab, kipa, kashaya, cross, and others) that represent belonging to any religious, confessional and subcultural groups to school uniforms.[5]

The document does not name religions but lists artifacts representing religions such as Islam (*hijab*), Judaism (*kipa*), Bhuddism (*kashaya*), and Christianity (cross). In regard to the document, one did not hear discussions about wearing a cross, kipa or kashaya in schools: the real issue has been the right or not to wear the hijab. In implementing the school uniform decree, school administrations interpreted the rules as anti-hijab and

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[1] Ibid., 18.

[2] Louw *Everyday Islam In Post-Soviet Central Asia*, 49.

[3] Marianne Kamp and Noor Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity," in *Routledge International Handbook on Veiling and Unveiling Practices,* ed. Anna-Mari Almila and David Inglis (New York: Routledge, 2018), 84-93.

[4] This decree specified that the uniform law would come into force in academic year 2019-2020. However, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan delayed this until 2024-2025. See Decree No. 509 of June18, 2019, Amendment to the Law on Providing Uniforms in Public Schools, Article 3. National Database of Legal Documents: http://lex.uz/docs/3866498.

[5] The decree goes on to describe the dress code for boys and girls in regards to appearance: "Additionally, the following are forbidden: Boys coming to school with tattoo drawings on the open parts of the body, with piercing, beard, and with hair longer from 2-3 centimeters, brightly colored; Girls coming to school with tattoo drawings on the open parts of the body, or with piercing, with brightly colored hair, extreme make up, with more than one pair of earrings in their ears, wearing rings, having nail polish and long nails." Decree No 666 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Providing Uniforms for Public School Students, August 15, 2018; chapter 2, section 7. http://lex.uz/docs/3866498.

outlawed students wearing it. In reality, the document does not define "hijab": it does not explicitly differentiate between the traditional Central Asian headscarf, the Turkish-style veil, and the black dress and headpiece worn in Saudi Arabia. Judging from how schools have implemented the policy, it is assumed to represent all of the above.

The current policy in schools—forbidding the hijab along with other religious symbols—has been transferred to the university level as well. Students who defy the rules are expelled from schools and universities. The tension reached a peak when students from International Islam Academy were denied entrance to the facilities because of their hijabs. The tension between the parents of the female students and the religious authorities incited vivid pro- and anti-veiling discussion on social networks. Recently, appeals to higher courts have helped to differentiate traditional headscarves from the hijab and allowed students to wear the headscarf in the traditional way—that is, tied at the back of the neck, as opposed to completely covering one's head and neck.[1]

Hijab Issue

Women's veiling is a subject of discussions, heated arguments, and political actions in many countries. If some Muslim-majority countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, promote women's veiling as a supposed defense against inciting men's sexual desire, France and Uzbekistan consider veiling to be an excessive manifestation of religiosity that is out of step with the agenda of *laïcité* or secularism. Uzbekistan, while acknowledging its Islamic traditions and cultural heritage, deems the current veiling styles to be an imported identity, as they replicate the styles of women from Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East. Some state that this resemblance links the Central Asian women to the "transnational Islamic Community."[2] In Tajikistan too, anti-hijab propaganda labels it a foreign import that is tied to outside ideology.[3]

In order to promote *laïcité* or secularism, manifestations of religiosity must be restricted to places of worship and the home.[4] Comparative studies of the government's involvement in veiling in the U.S. and French contexts indicate the state's control of minorities, while a comparison of France and Uzbekistan highlights the issue of hijab from the perspective of human rights and especially of women's rights.[5]

Concentrating on the international experience, Hilal Elver analyzes the issue of the headscarf from the angles of secularism, human rights, Islamophobia, religious discrimination, and the law. She argues that the concept of secularism does not include all the nuances of the relationship between the state and religion, as secularism varies from state to state depending on the context, including the political context. As a result, the hijab has become an international reference point not only for religious freedom but also for human rights.[6]

The discussion of the hijab in the Uzbek context casts into relief the divide between ordinary people and the vision of the state religious authorities. According to the state vision, nationalist identity and ideology

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[1] "O'zbekiston: Islom Akademiyasi Ro'molni O'zbekona o'rashga ruxsat berdi," *BBC*, April 1, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan-47778332.

[2] David Abramson, "Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan" in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival and Civic Activism*, ed. Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 72.

[3] Hélène Thibault, *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[4] John Richard Bowen, *Why the French Do Not Like Headscarves: Islam, The State and Public Space* (Princeton: University Press, 2007).

[5] Abdullahi An-Naim, "Human Rights and Islamic Identity in Freance and Uzbekistan: Mediations of the Local and Global," *Human Rights Quarterly* 22 (2000): 906-94; Jen'nan Ghazal Read, "Introduction: The Politics of Veiling in Comparative Perspective," *Sociology of Religion*. 68, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 231-236.

[6] Hilal Elver, *The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4-5.

should override religious identity and ideology.[1] To institute this, it has determined that the hijab is an excessive manifestation of religiosity. The state's efforts to control the issue have made Uzbek women— whom the state sees as bearers of national identity—objects of state politics. Islam is among the key ingredients in the state's nation-building agenda and social engineering,[2] but like the governments of other Central Asian countries, the Uzbek authorities do not want women to imitate the clothing of foreign peers but to maintain local Islamic heritage and infuse modernity with national values. It might thus be said that the authorities' goal is to maintain social cohesion by preventing the rise of a supposed "Islamic radicalism" without exoticizing the issue of Islam.[3]

The artificial distinction of public and private spheres, and the determination that religious symbols cannot be worn in the public sphere, is problematic in relation to the veiling of women in Uzbekistan. The hijab is intended to be worn specifically outside the home (i.e., in the public sphere) to protect girls from the gaze of men who are not family members. Women who choose to wear the hijab consider it a manifestation of their piety and a way of performing their identity. Beyond this, the hijab can serve as a protective tool for women who are active in the public space.[4]

Women's Voices on Hijab

Discussions about the hijab are widespread among both men and women due to its religious and political implications. In this piece, I focus on women's voices, elucidating their varying motivations for wearing the hijab. While some emphasize the morality side of the veil, other also associate it with fashion and being beautiful.[5] Studying Muslim women in Britain, Emma Tarlo argues that wearing the hijab allows a woman to transition from "simply being Muslim to becoming visibly Muslim." Whatever a woman's reasons for wearing the hijab, "becoming visibly Muslim" can be challenging: "coping with this visibility is no easy matter, not least because of the multiple projections and interpretations of others."[6]

We can classify motivations for wearing the hijab into three main categories: piety, morality, and beauty/fashion.[7] Many women express their opinion about the hijab through social media and blogs. There are for instance specific Telegram groups concerning the religious duties of women, hijab, and life after committing to wearing it. Open Uzbek-speaking channels such as "I Love Hijab" have attracted more than 9,000 subscribers.[8] On one channel, the question "Who do you see when you look in the mirror?" generated many responses from women. One respondent indicated that close family and friends were against her decision to wear the hijab but that she wants to overcome these obstacles and believes in the life-changing power of the hijab:

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[1] Presidential Decree on Improving the Productivity of Spiritual and Educational Affairs, July 28, 2019, http://www.lex.uz/docs/-4071203?ONDATE=29.07.2017%2000#-4071284.

[2] For the narrative of social engineering of Soviet policies in the context of Uzbekistan, see Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); on women's participation in social engineering practices, see Marianne Kamp, *New Women in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

[3] In the context of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, women's clothing is likewise discussed in terms of national identity. See Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Being Muslim in Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill 2018), particularly part 4, chapters 10-12: Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esanamonova, "The Wars of Billboards: Hijab, Secularism and Public Space in Bishkek," 233-257; Shahnoza Nozimova, *Hijab in a Changing Tajik Society,* 258-279*;* and Marintha Miles "Switching to Satr: Ethnography of Particular in Women's Choices in Hijab Coverings in Tajikistan," 280-300.

[4] Nozimova "Hijab in a Changing Tajik Society," 271-272.

[5] Kamp and Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling," 91.

[6] Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 75.

[7] On Muslim.uz, a formal Islamic website in Uzbekistan, there is a special page related to women's issues. Musimaat.uz serves Muslim women in the Uzbek language.

[8] The number of subscribers to the channel is rising rapidly. In April 2019, it had more than 8,300 and as of June 2019, it has over 9,000 subscribers.

When I look in the mirror, I see a weak girl with frail stamina. Just like other Muslim girls, I want to wear the hijab very much, but my family is against this. I like to dress modestly (*Yopiq kiyinishni yaxshi ko'raman*). But I am tired of questions such as "Why do you dress like this? Why are you like this?" I want to resist them all and wear the hijab and become the person whom I want to be. And I believe that one day I will resemble in the mirror the girl whom I want to see.

Communal expectations, family members, and peers influence women's clothing, and reactions to the veil differ based on ethnicity, region, and family expectations.[1] The respondent quoted above is on a spiritual quest for self-realization. She is firm in her decision to wear the hijab and is waiting for the opportunity to overcome the challenges in the way of the manifestation of her desired identity. Another respondent was further along in the process and was enjoying her decision to wear the hijab:

When I look in the mirror, I see a girl who has learned how to be thankful. I also see a girl who feels more beautiful, gentle, and radiant, who does not want to put on makeup (because Allah created her already beautiful), who is humble and simple, who enjoys wearing long, loose dresses (emoji with a star). May I say something? (Emoji) I am jealous even of myself. Because since I started wearing hijab, I have started to consider myself very beautiful (emoji). Girls who do not wear hijab yet! YOU FEEL REAL BEAUTY AFTER YOU START WEARING HIJAB (emoji).

Another user's note also emphasized the bliss of wearing the hijab. Her motivation was not beauty or making a good marriage. Rather, it was piety, which puts her above those who do not wear the hijab:

I wore the hijab! Not with the goal of marrying a good, pious man or to be seen as more beautiful, but for the sake of Allah! I have seen the proof of the saying that Allah gives faith to beloved servants…Slowly, faith came to my heart. Now I have started to feel pity when seeing girls without hijab. Hijab -fard! Allah commanded this. If I imagine the fate of girls without hijab, on the one side I feel pity; on the other, I give thanks that among those people Allah [gave] me faith.[2]

Women who decide to wear a veil put their Islamic identity at the forefront, emphasizing their increased piety. Sometimes, a spiritual hierarchy becomes visible between women who wear the hijab and women who do not. The respondent quoted above already elevates herself to the desired purity and separates herself from those who are not pure because they do not wear hijab.

Some women think that women's immodest clothing incites immorality. On Muslim.uz, one of the main Uzbek websites devoted to Islam, a contributor under the name of Nilufar Bozorboy Qizi indicated that "I think all indecent things start from women's wearing of open and shameless clothing that shows off their figures. Loose dress and headscarf protect women's dignity, solemnity, and courtesy from malicious gazes."[3] The reasoning that moral decay is occasioned by women's clothing is echoed in another Telegram post with a picture of a girl in hijab and a note reading: "You take off your clothes for praise. We dress up for Allah. You

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[1] Kamp and Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling," 89.

[2] This is a repost from another Telegram channel. The administrator of the channel mischievously writes with emoji "hacked from neighbor channel" [Qo'shni kanaldan uxlatildi. emoji]. Interestingly, there is no moral concern about this act.

[3] Nilufar Bozorboy Qizi, "Begonalar Nazariga Nishon Bo'lmang" [Do not be a Target for The Gaze of the Strangers], accessed May 14, 2019, http://muslim.uz/index.php/rukn/ayollar-sahifasi/item/9227.

are away from faith; we are away from a gaze!"[1] This You-versus-Us moral judgment declares that girls who do not wear the hijab lack faith, while those who do are close to Allah. The moral hierarchy becomes a spiritual one in which other women's degree of faith is determined by their outward appearance in the eyes of the hijab-wearer.

Some women also argue against wearing hijab in schools, but they seem to be far fewer in number than those advocating for it, especially on Telegram. This may be because such narratives would not attract subscribers to a channel. Other reasons for abstaining from advocacy may be that women are not yet sure how they feel about wearing the hijab or simply do not want others to judge their faith. In a personal interview, a middle-aged woman argued that modesty is not taken away by the introduction of school uniforms. She believes that there should be control of religious issues in order to prevent fundamentalism.[2]

Conclusion

Caught between what is perceived as the rise of radicalism and its long-established secularism, the Uzbek government is attempting to control religious expression in public places in the name of protecting the interests of the multiethnic and multi-confessional people of Uzbekistan. From this very brief sketch, we can see the pluralism of Uzbek society and the state's struggles to find the right balance in its relationship to Islam. The authorities are afraid that recognizing more religious rights will embolden the religious population and shrink the secular basis of the state. In the Belgian port city of Antwerp, for instance, a school found that it faced increasing demands to accommodate religious beliefs after the principal allowed girls to wear the hijab. The proportion of the girls wearing the hijab also increased from 50% to 80% in three years. As a result, girls who did not wear the hijab came under pressure to wear it. Efforts to support multiculturalism were ruined by the ever-increasing demands of Islamic conformity. Thus, when a new term began, the school banned the hijab.[3] Would it be possible for Uzbekistan to find a compromise that provides some relief to both sides: those in favor of maintaining secularism and those who want to give more visibility to Islam in the public space? To foster such a compromise, I propose the following recommendations:

To the government

- Establish a clear definition of hijab—which forms are permitted and which are banned.
- Create working groups to analyze the experiences of other secular Muslim countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey.
- Develop para-school teachings about religion. Considering the secular nature of school curricula, classes on religion by certified teachers should be offered, but outside normal school hours, to accommodate both sides.

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[1] "Siz olqish uchun yechining! Biz Alloh uchun kiyinamiz! Siz iymondan biz esa nazardan holimiz!" Telegram post, April 30, 2019.

[2] Personal interview, May 24, 2019.

[3] "Muslim Headscarves: The Controversy Will Not Die," *The Economist*, September 10, 2009. Cited in Elver, *The Headscarf Controversy*, 109-110.

Who Are the New Uzbek Opinion Leaders
on Social Media?

Eldar Asanov

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Many experts claim that the problems Uzbekistan faces are intricately linked with the lack of freedom of speech. Under Karimov's rule, all media outlets were under the direct or indirect control of state structures and subject to censorship. Special agencies controlled information, and newspapers had to coordinate their activity with them. Journalists were persecuted, fired, and/or forced to flee to other countries. In some other cases, they were arrested and handed prison sentences on charges of defamation and disloyalty. Self-censorship became a test of loyalty, while stigmatization was used to suppress manifestations of disloyalty. Nor was this necessarily a top-down process: Uzbek society, being traditional, easily rejected ideas and practices considered "alien" or "unspiritual."

In July 2019, Reporters Without Borders published a new World Press Freedom index.[1] Uzbekistan has improved its position, climbing five places. On the one hand, this may be evidence of improvements in the mass media and information space. On the other hand, the country is still toward the bottom of the index, ranking 160th out of 180 countries. According to Reporters Without Borders, three years after Islam Karimov's demise, a thaw has begun in what was one of the planet's harshest dictatorships. The last imprisoned journalists—some of whom had been held for nearly 20 years—have been released, although not rehabilitated. Live political broadcasts have made an appearance and some media outlets are now covering sensitive subjects such as corruption and forced labor. Uzbekistan has reopened its doors to foreign journalists and Uzbek journalists-in-exile; many permanent accreditations have been issued. Yet, it still remains prohibited to criticize the highest level of government. The authorities maintain a significant level of control over the media. Surveillance, censorship, and self-censorship are still present. A number of news websites continue to be inaccessible. Facebook and YouTube were often blocked in 2018 and several bloggers were arrested. This reality illustrates well the contradictions of Mirziyoyev's Uzbekistan.

In response, the politically active segment of Uzbek society, filled with protest sentiments, developed a toolkit for self-expression that could get around these official and unofficial obstacles. In a context of censorship, lack of independent media, and lack of political competition, social media has become the only platform for civic activism in the Uzbek media space. The Uzbek corners of Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and other social media platforms have become places where people can freely discuss political issues, economic problems, and the cultural transformation of society. This trend has grown since Mirziyoyev's arrival in power, to the point that a new generation of influential Uzbek opinion leaders can now be found on social media.

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[1] See "2019 World Press Freedom Index," Reporters Without Borders, 2019, accessed July 31, 2019, https://rsf.org/en/Uzbekistan.

New Faces, New Voices

The end of the Karimov era first prompted fear for the future among members of Uzbek society. The changes that followed, however, quickly revived optimism among the population. The new president has won popular sympathy by unexpectedly becoming a supporter of a political *détente*. Political activists, public figures, bloggers, and journalists who believe that the new authorities are sincere in their desire to change the situation for the better began to raise sharp questions and offer their visions of the future. For their part, the authorities eagerly reached out to these media figures, attempting to show that their intentions were genuine by meeting the media's minimum requirements.

These processes of change ran up against a number of challenges. First of all, the political elite, who had taken decisive steps at the very beginning of the country's liberalization journey, became more cautious, carefully navigating the seeming minefield of ideas and visions. Second, the politically active part of the population became increasingly polarized. Three main groups stand out: supporters of Islamization, traditionalization, and modernization. Each group is hierarchical and divided into subgroups. These factions may enter into conflict with each other, as well as periodically forging alliances or engaging in dialogue. The authorities, in turn, are trying to balance between these groups and manage their social actions.

A new generation of Uzbek opinion-makers has thus become more active in the public arena and is involved in diverse ideological debates on nationalism, Islamism, and liberalism. Due to their experience of censorship under Karimov's rule, traditional media outlets such as newspapers and TV have distanced themselves from political and social activism. Websites and social media have therefore become the main platform for ideological debates and providing alternative (unofficial) news.

Public opinion leaders—bloggers, journalists, and activists—are now trying to build their own hubs for ideological advocacy and discussion of social problems. The most convenient tool for this is the Telegram messenger. At least 500 new Telegram channels have been created in the past two years by popular bloggers, journalists, activists, and young professionals, as well as news sites, government agencies, etc. Even President Mirziyoyev has an official Telegram channel, which has 242,000 followers. Between 150 and 200 of these channels have more than 2,000 followers. The most-followed popular news sites are *Kun.uz* (666,000) and *Daryo.uz* (507,000). The most popular personal Telegram channels are Khushnudbek.uz (lawyer Khushnudbek Khudayberdiyev—111,000), Oqituvchi (teacher Isroil Tillaboyev—68,000), Troll.uz (blogger Umid Gafurov—41,000), and Davletov.uz (journalist Kobilbek Khidirov—32,000).

Although there has been a boom in Telegram blogging, activists do not limit themselves to this messenger. Many new YouTube channels and Twitter pages have also emerged; Facebook activism is likewise thriving. Categorizing this social media activism is quite challenging and would require big data research. Here, I briefly present the three main ideological groups mentioned above: the supporters of Islamization, traditionalization, and modernization.

"All Roads Lead to Islam"

For three decades, Uzbek secular authoritarian elites removed Islamic leaders from the political struggle and drove them to the roadside of history. The most radical figures fled; the rest negotiated with the government. Yet having lost their political influence and even their mosques (which are still under the control of the special services), religious leaders pressed on. They found their way into business: publishing, catering, IT, etc. Gradually, they have shaped an audience around themselves, started websites, and published *samizdat* books. Since Karimov's demise, the number of Internet users demonstrating high religiosity, as well as the number of religious sites and channels on various platforms, has increased dramatically. Imams of several mosques and some members of the Spiritual Board joined the informal leaders, leading the charge in condemning the unfair treatment of believers.

Two years ago, religious sites were writting mostly about the good, tolerance, the miracle of the Quran, Islamic values, and other "safe" topics. Nowadays, they insist on the restoration of violated religious rights. Islamic bloggers advocate for opening more mosques; prayer rooms in airports, public places, and

offices; the implementation of religious education in schools, etc. They also openly confront officials regarding religious rights: they for instance demand that teenagers be allowed to mosques. On several occasions, they have taken legal action against state universities where students were forbidden from having beards or wearing hijab.

These religious activists often write about social and family issues. This approach helps them to gather non-religious people around themselves and emphasize that they are interested not only in religious matters, but in the welfare of society as a whole. Since most Uzbeks, even without being active believers, consider themselves orthodox Muslims, they are usually sympathetic to religious advocacy. The Russian-speaking part of the population, meanwhile, is much more cautious toward them. In 2017, Rahmatullah kari, imam of one of the mosques of Tashkent, indicated for instance that men should be forbidden from becoming gynecologists. This proposal shocked some of the Russian-speaking activists, who immediately declared the religious leader an extremist. Stormy disputes between the two sides ensued. Sometime later, Rahmatullah kari publicly criticized Uzbek atheists. He was eventually fired from his position as imam of the mosque.

The reputation of religious activists is spoiled by the fact that their fight for the restoration of religious rights seeks to limit the rights of secular people. They have made significant efforts to fight against atheism, "immorality," "rotten Western civilization," and the "Jewish conspiracy." For instance, the religious site Azon.uz once harshly criticized a popular Turkish TV series being broadcast on a public channel.[1] The authors of the site accused the series of "immorality" and the "destruction" of the institution of the family. Since "immorality" is a point of great concern for Islamists and secular conservatives alike, they were able to get the series taken off the air.[2]

Nowadays, the most popular Uzbek Islamic bloggers are Mubashshir Ahmad, Abror Mukhtor Aliy, and Abu Muslim. The three men differ in their rhetoric, which in each case reflects the ideas of one of the three main camps of Islamic opinion leaders.

Mubashshir Ahmad graduated from the Islamic University, then worked for some time at the Committee on Religious Affairs (which reports to the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan). He is currently involved in media projects, having founded the Qaqnus media publishing house, the Azon.uz news portal, and the Azon.uz TV online channel. Mubashshir Ahmad is not active in public polemics. He usually avoids conflict and mainly writes short opinion posts about religious issues. Due to his ownership of Azon.uz TV, he became involved in the polemics about the Turkish series, but he emphasized that authors with Islamic views have the right to express their opinion even if their claim is offensive. Mubashshir Ahmad is considered a supporter of moderate Islam, but some opponents are sure that he is secretly a conservative. His website, Azon.uz, frequently publishes articles that harshly criticize the "immorality" of secular life. Whatever his personal opinions may be, his website provides a platform for more radical Islamic ideas.

Abror Mukhtor Aliy graduated from Tashkent State University and the Islamic University. He worked for some time as an assistant imam in the Minor mosque in Tashkent. He is currently involved in business projects, serving as a business analyst for the SalSal restaurant chain and the Chusty's Cuisine restaurant. Abror Mukhtor Aliy is one of the most controversial figures in the Uzbek blogosphere. He does not confine himself to texts but publishes many video and audio monologues in which he sharply criticizes his opponents. He likes to give his opinion on all questions discussed on social media. He engages not only with atheists and secular bloggers, but also with other Islamic authors about Islamic values, radicalism, etc. He is one of the few Islamic bloggers who openly criticizes ISIS—ironically, many moderate Islamic authors prefer to ignore ISIS and Islamic terror, considering that it may "discredit" Islamic values or Islamic solidarity. Abror Mukhtor Aliy considers himself a follower of the true values of the Ahli Sunnah va-l Jamaa' mazhab. In his view, ISIS

[1] See the *Azon.uz* criticism at: "Millat xoinlarini tanib oling!," *Zamin.uz*, February 14, 2018, https://zamin.uz/oz/madaniyat/32442-millat-xoinlarini-tanib-oling.html.
[2] See "O'zbekiston televideniyesida namoyishi oxiriga yetmay to'xtatilgan seriallar," *Daryo.uz*, February 23, 2018, https://daryo.uz/2018/02/23/ozbekiston-televideniyesida-namoyishi-oxiriga-yetmay-toxtatilgan-seriallar/.

and other radical groups such as the Quranists (the direction of Islam that denies the authority of Sunna and consider religious practices should be based only on the life of the Prophet), as well as the supporters of a moderate Islam are "false Muslims."

Abu Muslim is from Turkistan, South Kazakhstan, and graduated from the International Kazakh-Turkish University. He has never held an official post and is primarily engaged in blogging. He is the founder of a number of Islam-oriented websites, such as Islom.uz, IslamOnline.uz, Islam.uz (in Russian), etc. Around five years ago, he started his own catering business and opened the restaurant Beshbarmoq. Like Mubashshir Ahmad, Abu Muslim is not a controversial person. He avoids discussions on sensitive issues. Unlike Mubashshir Ahmad and Abror Mukhtor Aliy, Abu Muslim does not write about issues related to Islamic canon law, Sharia', hijab-wearing, beards, etc. His posts generally advocate for Islam, broadly understood. On his websites, he publishes articles translated from Turkish and Russian, mainly focusing on the "good news" about Islam and the Islamic world; the "bad news" about Christianity; the "Rotten West"; "new scientific findings" that "prove Islam is a true faith" or the "crisis" of Darwinism.

In addition to these three opinion leaders, we can see the rise of other ideological directions. Popular blogger **Musannif Adham** and exiled political scientist **Kamoliddin Rabbimov** openly demonstrate sympathy with the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. **Kamoliddin Yoldash**, an Uzbek blogger from Kazakhstan, and **Dilnur Kamilov**, a popular singer and activist from Khorezm, are trying to gather an audience around Quranism. Blogger and political scientist **Sardor Salim** is promoting the development of a "Neo-Jadid" (moderate) interpretation of Islam.

"Our Great Ancestor Amir Temur…"

The second group of opinion leaders is constituted by supporters of so-called true Uzbek national values or traditionalists. An entire generation of young people that grew up under Karimov's rule has been affected by the notions of *Mustaqillik* (Independence), *Ma'naviyat* (Spirituality), and *Milliy qadriyatlar* (National Values).

School education, which emphasized a patriotic teaching of Uzbek history and encouraged children to join Kamolot, the Uzbek equivalent of the Komsomol, helped shape a very loyal youth—the so-called "Children of Independence." A new organization, the Youth Union, is actually continuing Kamolot policies. Government representatives are trying to shift the online balance by attracting Youth Union leaders to online activism. Many thousands of the organization's members have become very active online, using hashtags and flash mobs to promote "national values" and the memory of "great ancestors" celebrated under Karimov, such as Timur. They are often used as an instrument to badger activists from other ideological camps. To wit, when Nikita Makarenko, the most famous Russian-speaking Uzbek journalist and blogger, published a piece criticizing "Spirituality," he immediately became the target of a bullying campaign carried out by governmental media outlets and Youth Union activists. With significant financial resources, the latter can afford to conduct massive and expensive information campaigns. Despite this, Youth Union activists have a very limited impact in the Uzbek corner of social media and usually become the object of ironic memes. They very rarely mention social problems, saying nothing about economic issues, the lack of political competition, or freedom of speech.

Many Uzbeks criticize Youth Union activists not for their promotion of "national values" and "Spirituality," but for their silence about the real problems facing society. This is not the case of the other traditionalist bloggers, who combine both a conservative, nationalist agenda with discussing pressing social issues. A large segment of the online population indeed agree with the ideas of "Spirituality" and "Uzbek-style morality" and many independent bloggers support the government in its efforts to fight against "immorality," "rotten Western civilization," pop culture, homosexuality, atheism, and other "destructive" ideas. During these debates, traditionalists usually enter into short-term alliances with Islamic opinion leaders against the modernists and liberals. But their paths typically diverge again when the debate comes to concern religious rights and Islamic life.

The following individuals are the most popular Uzbek bloggers who are part of this traditionalist trend. This group of public opinion leaders has the greatest impact on Uzbek society and is the main competitor of Islamic opinion makers, although the two support each other on many issues.

Khushnudbek Khudayberdiyev is a lawyer and blogger who founded the Khushnudbek.uz Telegram channel, which has 111,000 followers. Khudayberdiyev is famous for his posts on legislative issues: he provides short posts deciphering new laws and other acts in simple, intelligible language. He is also well-known for his posts devoted to legal ways to fight against forced labor, corruption in higher education, and monopolies. He almost never shows his ideological preferences. However, in some cases, he expresses himself publicly. Like many Uzbek traditionalists, he was for instance against the celebration of May 9— Victory Day, seen as a Soviet tradition. In addition, he has spoken publicly several times against the activity of atheists and in support of religious leaders.

In June 2019, Khudayberdiyev was awarded the state medal "Kelajak bunyodkori" (Builder of the Future) by prime minister Abdulla Aripov, showing how authorities now understood the need to invest in social media opinion leaders. In rewarding a traditionalist blogger, the government sent a powerful signal to other ideological groups. As mentioned by Russian-speaking blogger **"Dobryi piarshik"** (the Good PR Man), bloggers who have been awarded state medals can still criticize state agencies, but will not become sharp dissidents. Another popular Uzbek blogger, **Kobilbek Khidirov**, founder of the Davletov.uz Telegram channel, famous for sharing insider news from the inner circle of government, was awarded the state medal "Shukhrat," as were some popular journalists. This reverberated through the Uzbek blogger community, with people taking mixed views of this involvement of state authorities into the social media world.

Umid Gafurov is a blogger and the founder of the Troll.uz brand. He has more than 40,000 subscribers to his Telegram channel. He is now working on other, mainly business-oriented, projects. Umid Gafurov usually limits his activity to pictures-memes and very short posts in two languages—Russian and Uzbek. He is one of the few Uzbek bloggers who writes in both languages. He raises social issues, such as the problems in higher education, but often aligns himself with the government. He was the most active supporter of the government proposal to organize only "modest" weddings to decrease people's expenditures during economic crisis time. He also categorically denies the ideologies of Islamism and Turkic solidarity, and emphasizes the traditional values of Uzbeks as a nation-building project. Yet, more recently, he took some distance with state initiatives, for instance criticizing the new project of modifying the Latin script, by declaring that moving from Cyrillic to Latin had already huge consequences on literacy. Some months ago, he joined the Uzbek atheists and agnostics group on Facebook and began to act there as a "neutral traditionalist". He also supported the atheists' idea of founding a new political party (see below).

Shahnoza Turakhojaeva is a philologist, publisher, and journalist. One of the most popular Uzbek women bloggers, she ranked first in the bloggers' championship held in 2018 on the initiative of the Youth Union. She has about 3,500 followers on Telegram and more than 10,000 followers on Facebook. Like the other bloggers in this group, she focuses on social problems: higher education, forced labor, women's rights, freedom of speech, etc. In matters of "morality" and "spirituality," she does not depart from the traditionalist perspective, and for instance advocates for language purification.

We can also mention such bloggers as **Dima Qayum**, a simple stove-seller in Rishtan, a far corner of the Ferghana Valley, and probably the most famous "provincial blogger." He became popular for his short satirical pieces on Facebook and published some books based on his Facebook and Telegram posts. He then expanded his activities by organizing charitable acts. He is now planning to stand for deputy from Rishtan district.

"Morality is Primary, Religion is Secondary"

In August 2017, an unknown young journalist named Khurshid Yuldoshev published an article on religion and morality. He claimed in his piece that morality is primary and religion is secondary; that religious morality was good for the Middle Ages; and that modern people are more moral than the first Christians and Muslims. He also noted that modern Muslims are actually forced to adjust Islamic morality to modernity. The article strongly resonated on the Uzbek Internet. Traditionalists and Islamists were outraged by the fact that an unknown young author had claimed that it was possible to be moral even without religion or national values. Khurshid Yuldoshev went on to publish a couple of articles on similar topics and was involved in sensitive disputes with religious opinion leaders. This case is remarkable in that it was the first time that the Uzbek liberals made themselves known. Even more remarkable is the fact that Yuldoshev's articles were published on the site of Islamic blogger Sardor Salim, who advocates the liberalization of Islam. Yuldoshev was thus able to create an alliance with supporters of moderate Islam against traditionalists and Islamists.

Today, there are already several hundred social network users who are striving for the liberalization of society and its "modernization" in a Western sense. They have thousands of followers, even if their audience is noticeably smaller than for their two main competitors. Representatives of this modernizing trend have participated in debates about Turkish TV shows, religious dress code, etc. Some Islamic activists, such as Abror Mukhtor Aliy and Abu Muslim, consider them their main ideological opponents and have dedicated a subset of their articles and vlogs to "exposing" "atheists" and other "agents of the West."

Two online groups with close names—"Uzbek Atheists and Agnostics" and "The Café of Atheists" (*Ateist qahvaxonasi*)—were created on Facebook. Despite their names, the groups have become the home for many supporters of non-standard ideologies: Quranists, Tengrists, Uzbek converts to Christianity, secular Muslims, etc. These groups have hosted a number of discussions on topics that remain taboo for most Uzbeks: homosexuality, atheism, criticism of Islam and nationalism, etc. Some members of these groups are planning to use Mirziyoyev's thaw to create a legal political platform to protect the rights of atheists, agnostics, and secular and liberal minorities—the Movement of Uzbek Libertarians (*O'zbek libertarianlari partiyasi*).

Khurshid Yuldoshev is a philosopher, journalist, and blogger. He worked for many years at the magazine *Tafakkur*. He also took part in launching new media projects such as Turon24.uz and Minbar.uz, and is currently a project manager on the new media project Togri.uz. Yuldoshev is popular among liberal-minded youth, although he avoids public attention and does not participate in Facebook and Telegram groups. He advocates a free society and equal rights. He sharply criticizes religious leaders for their "duplicity," saying that they are simultaneously fighting for their rights through democratic mechanisms while condemning the "immorality" of democracy. Having spent some years as a student at a madrasah, he is very well-informed about Islam, the Arabic language, and the Quran. Through the efforts of Yuldoshev and Sardor Salim, as well as Nargiza Saidova, the director of Turon24.uz, and Jamshid Niyozov, another supporter of liberal Islamism, three websites—Taraqqiy.uz, Turon24.uz, and Minbar.uz—have become the first Uzbek outlets to publish articles criticizing Islam and "Uzbek national values" and promoting atheism.

Nikita Makarenko is a musician, actor, and Russian-language journalist for one of the oldest and most popular Uzbek sites, Gazeta.uz. He has also become extremely popular among the Uzbek-speaking audience due to his critical articles. His paper "Why Is *Ma'naviyat* Killing Tashkent?" offended the conservative segment of the society so much that an entire bullying campaign was organized against him. But it had the opposite of the intended effect and most social network users defended Makarenko. The majority of his followers are Russian-speaking Uzbekistani people who consider traditionalists as Uzbek nationalists and are afraid of Islamists.

Firuz Allayev, a blogger, tourism expert, and young businessman, founded the electronics delivery service Asaxiy.uz. Allayev gained popularity for his blog posts about travel, plurality, democracy, the challenges of doing business in Uzbekistan etc. He studied in France and returned to Uzbekistan much influenced by the ideas of French democracy. Firuz Allayev skillfully uses social media marketing, paying attention to social issues. When for instance the religious site Azon.uz touched off the controversy about the "immorality" of

Turkish TV series, Allayev posted a funny ad on social networks: "Do you want to watch a Turkish TV series? Buy a big TV on 'Asaxiy.uz.' Do you want to express dissatisfaction with a Turkish series? Buy a good mobile phone on 'Asaxiy.uz.'" Firuz Allayev also launched the project Asaxiy Books for translating and publishing popular fiction and non-fiction books from around the world. All of them sold very quickly. But a scandal arose around Yuval Noah's *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, accused of advocating atheism—it ended with the resignation of Allayev from the post of director of Asaxiy.uz and Asaxiy Books.

Comedian, journalist, and blogger **Nozimjon Safarov** deserves an honorable mention on this list. He has been involved in many debates around religion, secularity, social problems, etc., and has achieved popularity in Uzbek social media. His activity helped to find points of agreement among ideological groups.

Conclusion

Significant changes have occurred in Uzbekistan over the past three years. It has become possible to criticize government agencies and engage in public discussions on topics that were banned in Karimov-era Uzbekistan. Islamic leaders exploited the situation by starting with social problems, then transitioning to advocating for the protection of religious rights. Traditionalist bloggers likewise gained popularity very quickly, trying to establish nationalism as a middle ground between modernization and Islamization. Another group of strongly ideologized bloggers—supporters of modernization or liberalization—began to emerge somewhat later, as they were fewer in number and had a smaller audience.

Despite the emergence of a more diversified public debate, the Uzbek society remain under the strong influence of so-called national traditions and Islamic values. Therefore, the position of the liberals, who defend atheists and gays, and declare the relativity of morality, remains incomprehensible to the majority of Uzbek social media users. However, these liberal bloggers were still able not only to find an audience, but also getting supporters from some opposed figures, attached to the idea of freedom of speech for all. Will this new online activism help consolidating a plurality of opinion in the society, potentially resulting in a more formal, institutionalized, diversity and a culture of respect for diversity of worldviews? As cliché as this sounds, only time will tell.

Overcoming Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment in Uzbekistan

Fotima Israilova

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Gender inequality issues have become one of the most significant challenges facing society in the twenty-first century. A central misconception about gender equality is that it only brings benefits for women, but the most recent research tells a different story. The McKinsey Global Institute shows that increasing female employment rates could add US$28 trillion in return on investment to the global economy annually by 2025[1]—a figure equal to the entire Chinese and U.S. economies today combined.[2] Moreover, empowering women through employment in the business sector is a powerful tool for eradicating rural poverty and food insecurity.

In Uzbekistan, women's role in economic development is often overlooked. Currently, only 10 percent of Uzbekistan's 16 million women are engaged in business, demonstrating that women still face obstacles to gaining full access to self-employment.[3] There is also a substantial employment and pay gap between the two genders. According to a report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), health and education are traditionally considered women's fields, and work traditionally performed by women is lower-paying than work in fields dominated by men.[4] As shown in Figure 1, women either occupy low-paying positions (healthcare, social work, and education) or perform unskilled labor in informal labor markets.[5] Female traders are highly visible in the informal industry of shuttle trading, the export and import of small quantities of goods for sale across regional borders:[6] 70-80 percent of women in business work in bazaars, of whom 50 percent are engaged in bazaar-based shuttle trade.[7] Expert Dinara Alimdjanova claims that women's unemployment in rural areas continues to grow in Uzbekistan, leaving more and more women struggling to make ends meet.[8]

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[1] Laura Colby, "How Do You Boost GDP by $28 Trillion? Gender Equality Would Do It, McKinsey Says," *Bloomberg*, September 24, 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-24/mckinsey-says-gender-equality-would-boost-gdp-by-28-trillion.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Chamber of Commerce and Industry and UNDP Examine Challenges Women in Uzbekistan Face in Starting a Business," *UzDaily,* October 13, 2017, https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/41195.

[4] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update," 2018, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479841/uzbekistan-country-gender-assessment-update.pdf.

[5] Shoirakhon Nurdinova, "Human Development and Women Employment in Uzbekistan: Situation and Problems," 2014, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274204869_Human_Development_and_Women_Employment_in_Uzbekistan_Situation_and_Problems.

[6] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[7] Ibid.

[8] Dinara Alimdjanova, "Women Farmers in Uzbekistan: Experience during the Period of Institutional Reforms," *Economic and Rural Development* 4, no. 2 (2008): 7-15, http://erd.asu.lt/erd/article/view/55/54.

Figure 1. Wage rates by sector
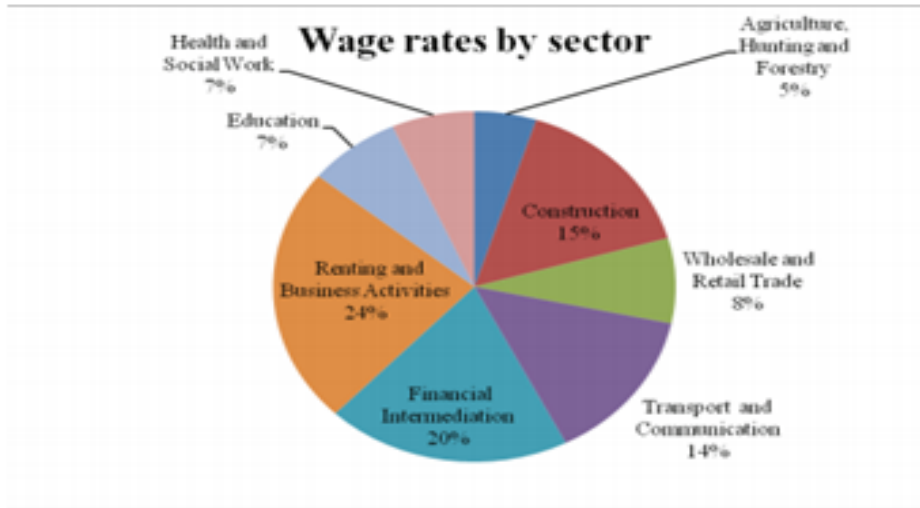
Figure 3. Payment for labour market in economic sectors

Source: developed by the author from the data of International Labour Organization, 2011

Source: Shoirakhon Nurdinova, "Human Development and Women Employment in Uzbekistan: Situation and Problems," accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274204869_Human_Development_and_Women_Employment_in_Uzbekistan_Situation_and_Problems.

Figure 2. Women-led businesses by sector, 2017
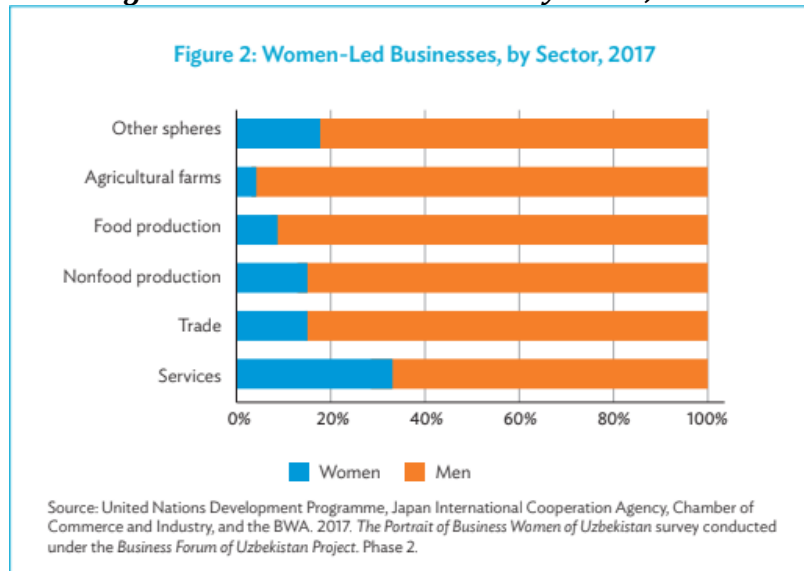
Source: Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update," December 2018, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479841/uzbekistan-country-gender-assessment-update.pdf.

Figure 2 breaks down women-owned businesses by sector. As we can see, services, trade, and non-food production are the three leading women-led business sectors, with 36 percent, 16 percent, and 16 percent,

respectively.[1] Women-led farming enterprises constitute only 5 percent of the total on average, although there is significant regional variation: the lowest proportion is in the Syrdarya region (0.75 percent) and the highest in Karakalpakstan (14 percent).[2] Focus groups conducted by the UNDP and Chamber of Commerce and Industry among women entrepreneurs revealed that women face challenges in opening businesses in sectors as varied as agriculture, tourism, sewing, and dairy production.

Many regulations have been enacted and programs established in Uzbekistan to fight gender discrimination by ensuring women's rights to education, health, and participation in the economy. That being said, there is a huge gulf between policy and practice. Women still face obstacles that prevent them from gaining full access to self-employment, of which this paper will discuss three: cultural barriers, level of educational attainment, and access to financial credit.

Cultural Barriers

The Convention On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which Uzbekistan has signed on, stipulates that men and women have equal rights and prohibits any kind of discrimination on the basis of gender.[3] In reality, however, women are treated unequally in Uzbekistan as a result of beliefs, norms, and traditions that are rooted in cultural history.

Cultural pressure is considered one of the strongest deterrents preventing women from taking advantage of the equal rights that they technically enjoy under Uzbek law.[4] As Johanna Higgs wrote:

> In Uzbekistan, women are raised to be good housewives. They are expected to live with their husbands' families, to wake up before sunrise, sweep the street, cook, and give up their own careers. In rare cases where women do work, they are expected to give all their [hard-]won income to [their] mother-in-law and have no control over their own finances[5]

Consequently, women face stereotypes and prejudices that discourage them from undertaking entrepreneurial activities. In rural areas, there is a widespread perception that women cannot lead businesses, creating a glass ceiling for women entrepreneurs. After conducting a group discussion with women entrepreneurs in rural areas, the ADB Project concluded that women lacked self-esteem and experienced doubts.[6] It would seem that the gender stereotypes related to social norms and tradition-bound notions of motherhood, family, and children directly affect young women's approaches to career development.

Fertility rates in rural areas of Uzbekistan continue to grow, and local traditions encourage families to have many children. As a result, childcare is an important part of life in the regions—and women spend about three times as much time providing it as do men.[7] Inadequate access to affordable childcare and preschool education limits rural women's ability to engage in paid work. According to a UNICEF report, only

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[1] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[2] Ibid.

[3] UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Article 14 (1979), accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.refworld.org/publisher,CEDAW,CONCOBSERVATIONS,UZB,,,0.html.

[4] Women Economic Empowerment, "Women Economic Empowerment—Women Entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan," 2004, accessed July 29, 2019, http://www.womensilkroad.com/women_entrepreneurship.html.

[5] Johanna Higgs, "Uzbek Man Takes a Stand on Violence Against Women," *Morocco World News*, February 24, 2018, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2018/02/241451/uzbek-man-takes-stand-violence-women/.

[6] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[7] ESCAP, "Examining Women's Economic Empowerment in SPECA Countries," UNECE, 2018, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/SPECA_WG_Gender/Meetings/2018/Background_paper-Women_s_economic_empowerment_EN.pdf.

about one in every four children receives some form of preschool education.[1] Not only are preschool institutions and kindergartens concentrated in large towns and cities, but rural households cannot afford these fee-based establishments.

Rural women also spend 45.9 percent of their free time on unpaid domestic work, compared to the 16.6 percent of a rural male's free time that is occupied by such activities.[2] As a result, rural women experience time poverty, which prevents them from realizing their potential and undertaking entrepreneurial activities. As can be seen from Figure 3, the number of unemployed women has not changed since 2007 and is almost equal to that of men, at 8 percent and 8.5 percent, respectively.[3]

Figure 3. Unemployment rates in SPECA countries, 2007 and 2016
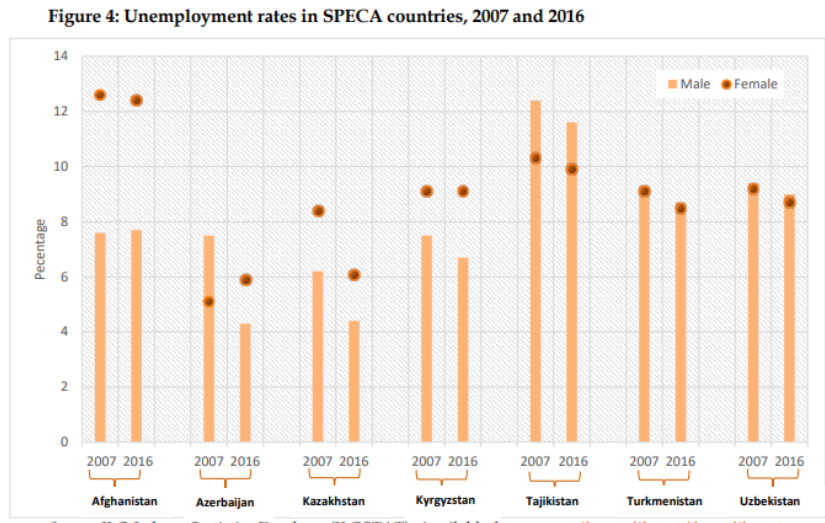
Source: UNESCAP, "Examining Women's Economic Empowerment in SPECA Countries," April 23, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/SPECA_WG_Gender /Meetings/2018/Background_paper-Women_s_economic_empowerment_EN.pdf.

Educational Attainment

According to the Law on Education, every Uzbek citizen should receive a total of 11 years of primary and secondary education.[4] However, girls are discouraged from enrolling in tertiary education, as evidenced by the Gender Parity Index (GPI) in Education.[5]

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[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Country Gender Assessment Series," FAO Regional Office for Europe And Central Asia, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, http://www.fao.org/europe/resources/gender/en/.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Maksim Yeniseyev, "Education in Uzbekistan—The Borgen Project," *Central Asia News*, August 2, 2017, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2017/08/02/feature-01.

[5] Nurdinova, "Human Development and Women Employment."

Figure 4. Gender parity index in education
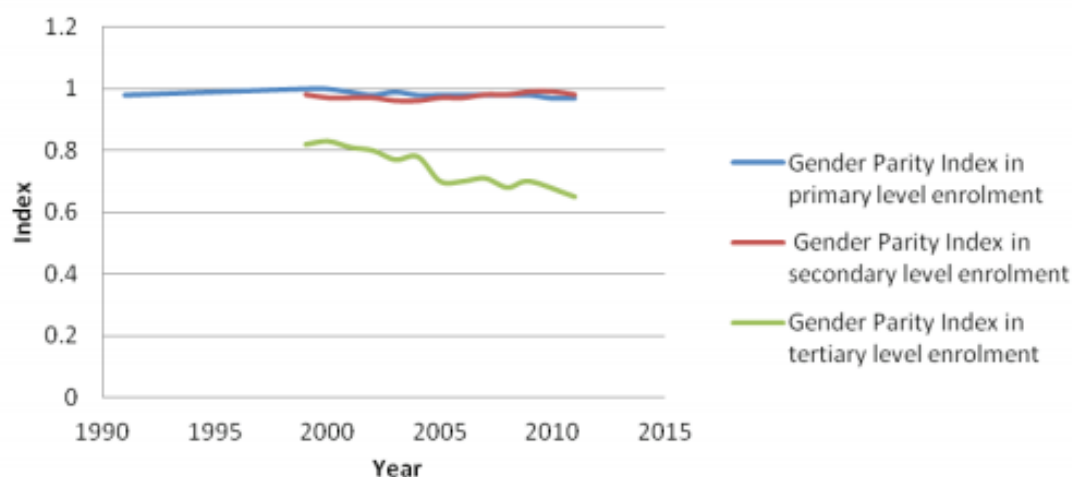
As Figure 4 shows, gender parity in tertiary education has been declining year on year almost ever since Uzbekistan became independent. ILO statistics on the percentages of men and women graduating from tertiary education institutions show similar graduation patterns over the past decade.[1] It is clear from Figure 5 that fewer females in Uzbekistan completed higher education in 2016 than did ten years earlier.[2]

Today, 61.8 percent of students in higher education are male, compared to 38.2 percent who are female.[3] This is due in part to the content of curricula used in the Uzbek higher education system, which have not been adapted to the new requirements of the labor market. Not only are the existing educational programs for women in business not well linked with labor market needs, but education in finance, management, and IT is available only to women living in Tashkent.

There are several other reasons for the comparatively low share of women in higher education. First of all, quality higher education is fee-based. Families prefer to invest in educating their sons, considering that any investment in a daughter's education will not bring any benefit to her future family.[4] Second, women are getting married at an early age. Uzbek families prioritize girls' marriages over their higher education. This is particularly true in rural areas.[5] Therefore, the number of women tertiary education graduates has been gradually declining since 2011, from approximately 44% of the total tertiary graduates in 2011 to only 35% in 2017.

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[1]   David   Anthony   et   al.,   "Generation   2030:   Uzbekistan,"   UNICEF,   July   2018, https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/686/file/Generation%202030%20Uzbekistan.pdf.
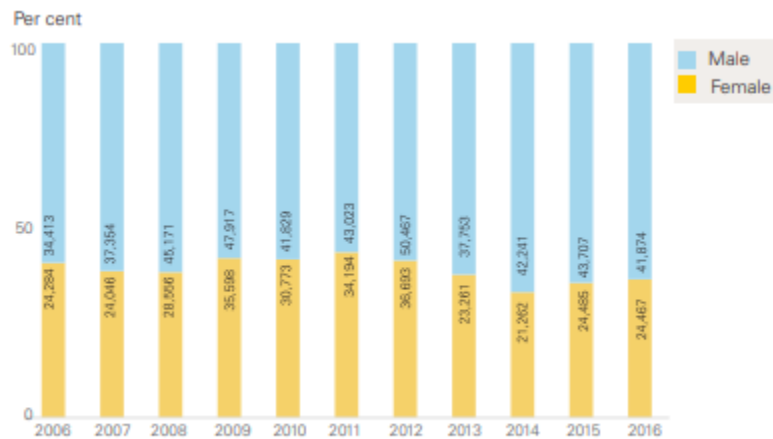
[2] Ibid.

[3] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[4] Ibid.

[5] Higgs, "Uzbek Man Takes A Stand."

**Figure 5. Higher education graduation figures for men and women, 2006-2016 (%)**

To avoid child marriages, in 2009, an internal regulation was adopted by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan that states that Islamic marriage (*nikah*) must only be carried out by an official imam and only after the official registration of a marriage. However, to bypass the law, some couples started asking religious figures from their districts to perform *nikah* instead of official mosque imams.[1] During interviews with child spouses, it was determined that religious leaders did not ask about their age or the completion of state registration.[2] This makes girls extremely vulnerable.

Figure 6. Fertility rate per 1,000 women in Uzbekistan, 2000-2013
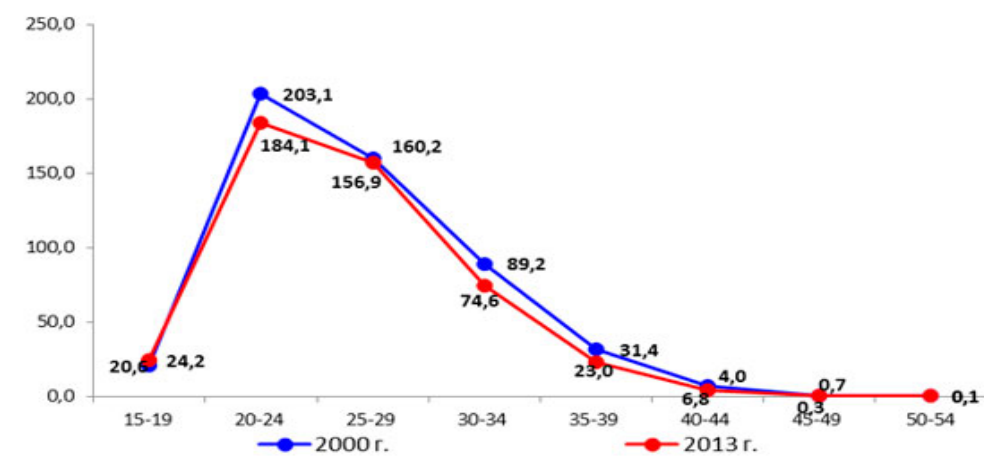
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[1] UNFPA Uzbekistan, "Child Marriage in Uzbekistan," Girlsnotbrides.org, 2012, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/UNFPA-Child-Marriage-in-Uzbekistan-2014.pdf.
[2] Ibid.

Finally, and on a related note, women's tertiary education is affected by their reproductive function: Uzbek females in their twenties have the highest rate of childbearing. As shown in Figure 6, between 2000 and 2013, most babies in Uzbekistan were born to women aged 20-24.[1] All in all, women's enrollment in higher education in Uzbekistan has been decreasing year on year almost since independence, whereas it has been remaining constant or rising in the other Central Asian countries (and in the world at large) over the same period—see Figure 7.

Figure 7. Percentage of women in tertiary education across Central Asia
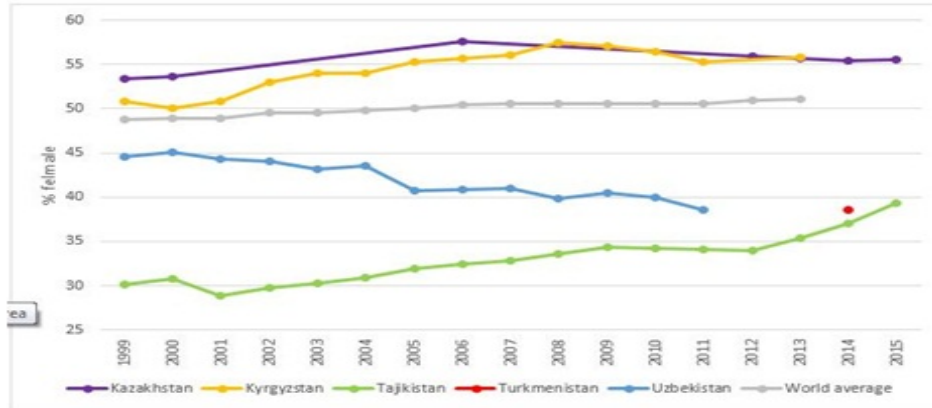
Source: UNESCO indicator: Percentage of students in tertiary education who are female

Source: Emma Sabzalieva, "Gender Gaps in Higher Education Across Central Asia," University World News, July 8, 2016, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20160707140807406.

Access to Credit

In 2014, the World Bank compared females' access to credit from banks and financial institutions in four Central Asian countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.[2] It is evident from Figure 8 that Uzbek women were not as able to access loans from banks and financial institutions as their counterparts in the other countries studied. Whereas 32 percent of women in Kazakhstan and 30 percent of women in Kyrgyzstan had taken out loans in the past year, only around 10 percent of Uzbek women had done so.[3] Instead, Uzbek women rely primarily on family and friends for startup funding. They see this lack of access to credit as one of the main barriers to business development.[4] Other impediments to women opening businesses include high income taxes; the interest rate on loans to micro, small, and medium enterprises; high customer taxes on imported goods; and regular government inspections.[5]

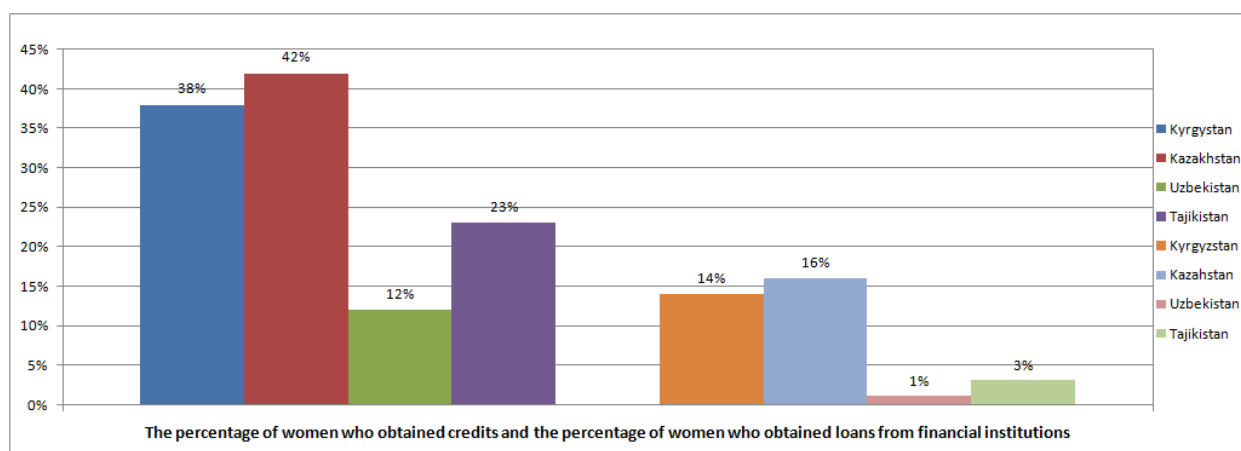[1] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[2] Saviya Khasanova, "Zhenshchiny Tsentral'noi Azii: Ekonomicheskie Vozmozhnosti (Infografika)," Central Asia Analytical Network, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, https://caa-network.org/archives/9753.

[3] Ibid.

[4] ESCAP, "Examining Women's Economic Empowerment."

[5] Sarosh Sattar, "Opportunities for Men and Women in Emerging Europe and Central Asia," World Bank, 2012, accessed July 23, 2019, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/479131468250293544/pdf/659310WP00PUBL065737B0Gender0Report.pdf.

Figure 8. The share of women who obtain credit and loans in Central Asian countries

Source: Saviya Khasanova, "Zhenshchiny Tsentral'noi Azii: Ekonomicheskie vozmozhnosti (infografika),"
Central Asia Analytical Network, 2019, https://caa-network.org/archives/9753.

Moreover, although women and men enjoy equal rights to own property under the law, there is a discrepancy between this law and customary practice.[1] The value of property registered in a woman's name accounts for just 22.3 percent of all property recorded with the national registry and cadastre system.[2] Rural households are usually led by men; the majority of household real estate is registered to them. Other family assets—like cars, livestock, farming machinery, and equipment—are also traditionally considered the property of male household members. When a man wants to obtain a loan from the bank, these assets serve as collateral, allowing him to finance a new business.

This reality inevitably puts female household members at a disadvantage. They experience problems providing collateral when they apply for a loan from banks or other financial institutions because all family assets are in the husband's name. This can be especially problematic in rural areas, where male family members may migrate for work for years at a time, leaving women and children behind without the means to access financial services and use this credit to increase the family's income. Akhunov also points out that women-led businesses have to provide a higher value of collateral than men-managed businesses.[3]

A lack of understanding of credit processes is also a factor in women's lack of access. In the 2018 ADB survey, many female participants indicated that they not only lacked legal possession of machinery or real estate but would be hesitant to leverage property for collateral because they were afraid of taking risks.[4]

Compounding the problem is the fact that Uzbekistan enjoys very low access to formal financial services. Ninety-five percent of the financial sector is occupied by banking, leaving the rest of the sector underdeveloped. According to Holzhacker, the insurance market, stock market, and leasing market are not well developed and the main players are subsidiaries of banks.[5] The majority of investments are internally

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[1] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[2] Ibid.

[3] Muzaffar Ahunov, "Financial Inclusion, Regulation, and Literacy in Uzbekistan," ADB, 2018, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/441226/adbi-wp858.pdf.

[4] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

[5] Hans Holzhacker, "Uzbekistan Diagnostic: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Unlocking the Private Sector's Potential and Developing a Sustainable Market Economy," European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, 2018, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.ebrd.com/.../uzbekistan-diagnostic-paper.pdf.

generated, setting Uzbekistan apart from its counterparts in the rest of Central Asia.[1] Only around 25 percent of SMEs even have bank loans.[2]

As a result, microfinance institutions are comparatively larger players on the financial services scene. According to Naser, microfinance institutions provide 35 percent of credit worldwide. In Uzbekistan, meanwhile, they account for 80 percent of total loans (see Figure 9).[3] However, these providers serve just 60,000 borrowers in Uzbekistan; in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, meanwhile, microfinance institutions serve 175,000 borrowers.[4] These facts combine to cause women serious problems in accessing funding sources.

Figure 9. Microfinance institutions' share of credit provision
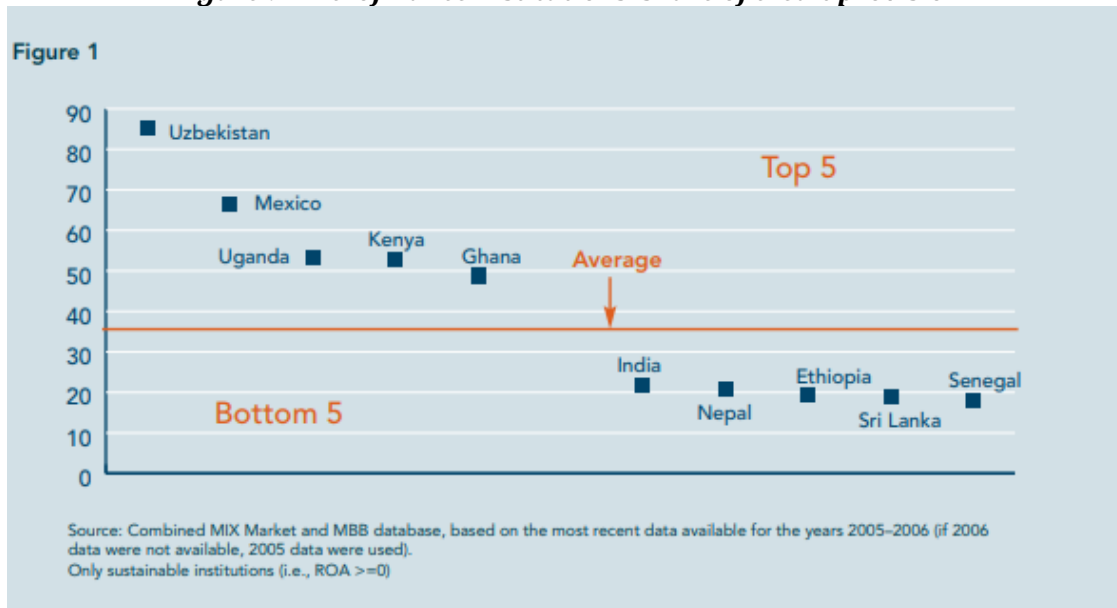
Source: Muhammad Abu Naser, "Microfinance, Poverty Alleviation & Women Entrepreneurs in the Bangladeshi Community: Rhetoric and Realities (PhD diss., De Montfort University, 2018), https://www.dora.dmu.ac.uk/handle/2086/16549.

The government has introduced programs to help overcome the lack of access to credit. For instance, no collateral is now required from an agricultural borrower except for pledging the sale of crops. Decree of the President #2844 (March 17, 2017) "On measures for further simplification of the microcredit system of entrepreneurship subjects and the broader population" even allows individual entrepreneurs and family business entities in rural areas to obtain a loan of $41,000 from the Preferential Crediting Fund at a rate of 7 percent per annum; goods purchased for conducting the business can be used as collateral.[5] In practice, however, banks still rely heavily on collateral—which women cannot provide because they lack legal ownership of any equipment and real estate. Banks may also refuse to let them use the assets they have as

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Muhammad Abu Naser, "Microfinance, Poverty Alleviation & Women Entrepreneurs in the Bangladeshi Community: Rhetoric and Realities (PhD diss., De Montfort University, 2018), https://www.dora.dmu.ac.uk/handle/2086/16549.

[4] Christoph Kneiding and Richard Rosenberg, "Variations in Microcredit Interest Rates," CGAP, 2008, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.cgap.org/sites/default/files/CGAP-Brief-Variations-in-Microcredit-Interest-Rates-Jul-2008.pdf.

[5] Asian Development Bank, "Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update."

collateral, in turn enabling them to turn down a woman's request for a loan.[1] In total, just one percent of agricultural businesses obtain credit from financial services.[2]

Other programs have been equally ineffective on the ground. In February 2017, the President of Uzbekistan established a Guarantee Fund for the development of small business.[3] The idea was that the Fund could secure loans granted to small businesses and thereby improve the business climate in Uzbekistan.[4] Yet as of May 2017, the Fund had yet to begin operations.[5]

In 2018, the "Every Family an Entrepreneurial Family" project was adopted to engage every family in entrepreneurial activities. The main purpose of this project is to push the unemployed population, particularly youth, into economic activity and help them establish a stable source of income. It was accompanied by the March 7, 2019, decree "On additional measures for the widespread involvement of the population in entrepreneurship and the development of family entrepreneurship in the regions," which lays out the process by which this project should be implemented.[6] The Uzbek government provided money to engage every family in entrepreneurial activities such as fish farming, weaving, sewing, handicrafts, beekeeping, poultry farming, cattle-fattening, and greenhouse-building. So far, according to the president, the number of new entities has risen by 2.3 times.[7]

However, a number of problems with the project have been observed. For one thing, entrepreneurs still face extortion and red tape on the local level, as evidenced by the 16,000 appeals the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has received from businesspeople.[8] Of these, about 2,000 mention officials' lack of action taken to implement the "Every Family an Entrepreneurial Family" program.

For another thing, the available resources are not being used properly. Just 19 percent of total funds have been allocated, limiting their impact on entrepreneurship.[9] In some cases, funds have even been misappropriated: officials of Halq Bank illegally provided loans to some citizens.[10] The *khokims* of the regions and Tashkent city have also failed to carry out their task of allocating empty land and buildings to people who could use them for agricultural and manufacturing activities.

On top of this, few women and young adults are getting involved in the program, limiting its impact on families' material wellbeing—and there has been little focus on low-income families. The president argues that the low level of involvement in the program by women and young adults is an impediment to improving the material well-being of families. Overall, the "Every Family an Entrepreneurial Family" project has been implemented in an unsatisfactory way.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of these three dimensions of discrimination—cultural barriers, level of educational attainment, and access to financial credit—I advance the following recommendations.
To the government:

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[1] "Guarantee Fund to Appear in Uzbekistan in Support of Small Business," American-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce, February 17, 2017, http://www.aucconline.com/news.php?news_id=1366.

[2] "President's Report Proposed Loan and Grant to the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Agriculture Diversification and Modernization Project," IFAD, 2017, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/PRO/2017/11/Anlagen/PRO201711305004.pdf?v=1.

[3] Ibid.

[4] American-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce, "Guarantee Fund to Appear in Uzbekistan in Support of Small Business."

[5] More recent information does not appear to be available.

[6] "'Every Family Entrepreneur' Program Execution is Critically Analyzed," *UzDaily*, May 2, 2019, http://www.uzdaily.com/en/post/49540.

[7] Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan, "New System Pending Introduction to Consider Appeals from Entrepreneurs and Investors," Chamber.Uz, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, http://www.chamber.uz/en/news/4655.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

- Invest in women's business education. Develop short- and medium-term professional trainings to push women to enter the private sector by developing their entrepreneurial competencies. They need to know how to write a business plan, how to make a budget, how to develop a business pitch, how to carry out a market analysis, etc.
- Develop women's financial and managerial literacy by opening independent institutions and centers in the regions of Uzbekistan.
- Create consultation centers where women can access legal advice on such issues as taxation, employment law, property, bank accounts, and applying for loans.
- Replicate the "Women's Entrepreneurship Challenge," launched to support 130 growth-oriented businesses in Vietnam, in rural areas of Uzbekistan.[1] The program includes capacity-building, coaching, peer learning, and entrepreneurship development.
- Monitor financial inclusion by using gender-disaggregated data on women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises to assess the effectiveness of financial products. Mandate that certain indicators be included in regular monitoring and reporting.
- Strengthen the capacities of National Statistical Offices and provide sufficient funds to conduct comprehensive surveys on critical issues facing women in rural businesses and unpaid care work (social expectations, needs, responsibilities, domestic roles, and family decision-making dynamics).
- Expand and strengthen the financial infrastructure by creating collateral registries and credit bureaus to support women's credit histories in their own names and decrease the cost of borrowing money.
- Increase women's ability to leverage and own assets by addressing issues with housing deeds, property, inheritances, and bank accounts.
- Address the high level of informality in the agricultural field.
- Encourage public-private dialogue by involving businesswomen's organizations in decision-making on policy implementation and funding for economic development.
- Foster an environment that facilitates smart financial investments from a wide spectrum of sources. Conduct thematic research on rural development, engaging with organizations that have the capacity to conduct the relevant research (think tanks, the Women's Committee, and civil society organizations).
- Strengthen childcare and domestic support by developing subsidized childcare facilities in every region of Uzbekistan and simplifying private childcare arrangements.
- Target measures to redistribute the burden of domestic work and unpaid care by including flexibility in working arrangements and care facilities for both children and adult dependents.
- Introduce special measures to ensure gender balance in students' selection of academic areas of study. Set quotas for enrollment, scholarships, and internships to boost women's entry into the business sector. Analyze contributing factors in the decline of female enrollment in higher education, including those related to women's economic status.
- Increase punishment for religious leaders, officials, and parents who allow early marriage. Large fines and imprisonment are required in cases where the law has been breached repeatedly. Organize an awareness-raising campaign on the harmful aspects of child marriage for students and parents. Carry out in-depth multidisciplinary qualitative and quantitative research on child marriage.

To the Women's Business Organization:

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[1] World Bank, "Female Entrepreneurship: Program Guidelines and Case Studies," 2013, accessed July 29, 2019, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGENDER/Resources/FemaleEntrepreneurshipResourcePoint041113.pdf.

- To combat social stereotypes and discrimination, the Women's Business Organization should develop media coverage of women-owned businesses that will raise public awareness, encourage women to participate in the economy, and feature the advantages of sharing domestic responsibilities between spouses. The main message should be the transformative power of women's education: helping a girl stay in education and succeed in the private sector can support Uzbekistan's economic development.
- Advocate for changes to policies that present barriers to the rise of women-owned businesses by assigning women the primary responsibility for household activities.
- Host competitions for business growth targeted at women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperating with financial institutions to offer grants to selected winners.
- Create guarantee associations among women-owned businesses and create venues for education.
- Develop partnerships with business companies to share entrepreneurial skills ranging from generic knowledge (eg., literacy) to specialized skills (eg., accountancy).
- Implement national strategies and policies for rural development and agriculture that will be inclusive and gender-responsive. Policies should be based on evidence and globally-recognized best practices. Targets and a dedicated budget should also be taken into account.

To international financial institutions (IFIs):

- Share reports of the successes of financial products for women in Africa and India. This should help increase banks' interest in targeting women entrepreneurs and develop their knowledge of the risk profiles of women clients.[1]
- Disseminate innovative approaches to loan registration, such as those used in Malawi.[2]
- Promote active participation of women in decision-making related to property and land.
- Replicate efforts like Capital Sisters International, which provides zero-interest $1,000 bonds to microfinance institutions to sponsor micro-business loans for poor women in developing countries in Asia and Latin America.[3] Their vision is that investment will be directed toward 10 micro-enterprises and will be returned within one, two, three, or five years. The story of Capital Sisters International demonstrates how the government could make microfinance an effective tool to encourage female entrepreneurial ventures.
- Allow grace periods: in an experiment in India, this approach increased return on investment by 6 percent and doubled the likelihood of opening a new business.[4] This strategy is not only focused on helping women to run their business, but also guarantees that a loan will be repaid. This, in turn, will contribute to the development of Uzbekistan's economy.
- Initiate communication between women's entrepreneurial associations, NGOs, and government institutions to improve coordination of actions.
- Support proactive measures to ensure that women are able to fully participate in local decision-making.
- Create loan products that meet sector-specific market needs in which women are needed to grow businesses. It is crucial for the economy of Uzbekistan to involve women in such industries as sewing, dairy, agriculture, and tourism.

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[1] Jan P. Maes and Larry R. Reed, "The Promise of Microfinance and Women's Empowerment," EY, 2014, accessed July 23, 2019, https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY_-_Microfinance_and_womens_empowerment/$FILE/EY-The%20promise-of-microfinance-and-womens-empowerment.pdf.

[2] Xavier Giné, Jessica Goldberg, and Dean Yang, "Credit Market Consequences of Improved Personal Identification: Field Experimental Evidence from Malawi," *American Economic Review* 102, no. 6 (2012): 2923-2954.

[3] Varsha Raghunandan, "Changing Equations: Empowerment, Entrepreneurship and the Welfare of Women," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 19, no. 3 (2018), accessed July 23, 2019, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/336b/52519579cb8c3de9301a8bee29b661fb2466.pdf.

[4] Maes and Reed, "The Promise of Microfinance."

- Develop partnerships with microfinance institutions and commercial banks to ensure guarantee and risk-sharing agreements for women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Create special financial products for women. Researchers, microfinance institutions, and regulators need to evaluate microfinance programs on the basis not only of financial indicators but also of social performance parameters that focus on women's economic development of Uzbekistan. Gender-responsive budgeting is an important tool for equal distribution of resources to men and women, girls and boys, in order to meet their priorities and needs.
- Encourage deposits with repayment schedules and follow-up text messages.
- Propose alternative types of collateral:
  - For instance Access Bank of Nigeria Gender Empowerment Program allows jewelry, debentures, and bills of sale to be used as collateral[1]
  - Development Finance Corporation Uganda (DFCU) created a land loan to combat the collateral problem: women could purchase property that could eventually be used as collateral.[2]
- Encourage banks to innovate by organizing staff trainings focused on women. Staff need to offer non-financial services, taking into account the various financing options open to women, documentation required, collateral, risks, and costs. Banks could become businesswomen's preferred source of non-financial services such as financial education training and advisory services on financial products.
- Incentivize lending institutions to create procedures and policies that will target women-owned SMEs.
- Open up the sector for new players to make the financial sector as an efficient source of funding; restructure state-owned banks by strengthening supervision and setting up non-bank channels for financial intermediaries.
- Guarantee stability in the banking system, adjust customs rates on imported goods, and provide support for the socially vulnerable part of the population in rural areas.

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[1] World Bank, "Female Entrepreneurship: Program Guidelines and Case Studies."
[2] Ibid.

How Integrating Minorities and Vulnerable Groups Will Improve Human Capital in Uzbekistan: The Case of the Central Asian Gypsy Community

Kamilla Zakirova

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Luli girls from Uzbekistan
Photo by Alexander Barkovskiy

Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country. The demographic data count more than 17 ethnic groups living in the country. The last census was conducted in 1989, but according to official estimates[1] updated in 2017, of a total of 32.1 million people, the Uzbek majority comprised over 26.9 million (83.8 percent of the population), while Tajiks amounted to 1,544,700 (4.8 percent). Other sizable minorities include Kazakhs (803,400—2.5 percent), Russians (750,000—2.3 percent), Karakalpaks (708,800—2.2 percent), Kyrgyz (274,400—0.9 percent), Tatars (195,000—0.6 percent), Turkmens (192,000—0.6 percent), Koreans (176,900—0.6 percent), and Ukrainians (70,700—0.2 percent).

While the country enjoyed such ethnic diversity throughout most of the twentieth century—due in part to the Soviet Union's internationalism policy—the awakening of national identity brought some serious

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[1] State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Demograficheskaia situatsiia v Respublike Uzbekistana," July 20, 2017, accessed July 29, 2019, https://stat.uz/ru/433-analiticheskie-materialy-ru/2055-demograficheskaya-situatsiya-v-respublike-uzbekistan.

challenges, including interethnic conflicts. The tragic events of 1989 in the Ferghana Valley, where more than fifty members of the Meskhetian Turkish minority were murdered, is one of the most pronounced and best-remembered examples of interethnic tensions.[1] The Ferghana Valley has also witnessed violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the city of Osh.

Today's Uzbekistan grants equal constitutional rights to citizens without regard for nationality, ethnicity, or religion. The government continues to fund public schools taught in the languages of the Russian, Tajik, and Karakalpak minorities, as well as ethnic and religious celebrations. Yet the country ranked 47th on the 2018 Peoples under Threat index, a two-place fall from the 2017 ranking.[2] Communities at risk include Tajiks, Russians, and Karakalpaks, as well as some religious minorities.

Perhaps unique among these ethnic minority communities are the Central Asian Gypsies or Roma, known in Uzbekistan as Luli. The term Central Asian Gypsy is usually understood by the general public to denote a social group that is united by a common lifestyle, occupation, and particular ethnic-cultural characteristics. What separates them from other minority groups is the fact that despite their long-time presence in the region, there are no accurate data on them, and they have one of the lowest levels of integration into the public education system and the general labor market.

In this paper, I delve into the current situation of Luli in Uzbekistan, having collected the limited data available on them, and outline a prospective NGO that would work with Luli and other vulnerable groups facing discrimination to foster integration and reinforce the cohesion of Uzbek society.

Central Asian Luli: A Short History

Central Asian Gypsies are usually called *Luli* in Uzbekistan. They are also known as *Jughi* (in Tajikistan) or *Multani* (in some regions of Uzbekistan). The Luli describe themselves using the term *Mughat, a* term reportedly meaning "fire cult followers". Luli or Mughat are primarily Sunni Muslims. They have inhabited the territories of Central Asia for centuries, ever since their ancestors migrated from the Punjab in present-day Pakistan.

Many legends and superstitions surround the Luli, explaining their origins and appearance among the populations of Central Asia. Generally, these legends depict a people of low social status, telling stories about curses and exiles, imbuing them with divine status as angels or quasi-apostles, or describing their executions by fire. From a historical point of view, the most plausible narrative is that the Luli relocated from India. According to *Shahnameh*[3] (The Book of Kings) by the Persian medieval poet Ferdowsi, in the fifth century, about 10,000 artists, Indian musicians, and *Luri*[4] singers were sent as gifts to the Persian king, Bahram Gur.

In another potential indication of their Indian origin, some researchers associate the ethnonym Luli with the name of the city Arur, or Al-Rur, which was the capital of the most ancient *Rajas*[5] of Sindh, one of the provinces of modern-day Pakistan.

The Luli are considered one of the world's most marginal societies. Yet historical evidence shows that they were not always considered pariahs in Central Asia. Multani held positions within the court of the Kokand Khanate, received a recognized status in the census, and often paid taxes as normal citizens.[6] That

[1] Francis X. Clines, "57 Reported Dead in Uzbek Violence," *The New York Times*, June 7, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/07/world/57-reported-dead-in-uzbek-violence.html.

[2] "Uzbekistan," Peoples Under Threat 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, https://peoplesunderthreat.org/countries/uzbekistan/.

[3] K.E. Eduljee, "Zoroastrian Heritage: Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*," Heritage Institute, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/shahnameh/.

[4] Lurs are an Iranian people living mainly in western and south-western Iran. See Amanolahi Sekandar, "The Lurs of Iran," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (March 1985), https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/lurs-iran.

[5] Raja is a title for a monarch or princely ruler in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

[6] Timur Beisembiev, *The Life of Alimqul* (London: Routledge, 2015).

status seems to have changed at some point between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Second World War. In a society as regimented as the Soviet Union, it seems strange that the Multani or Luli were allowed to exist as a marginalized community.

According to research[1] conducted by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, there are a number of different communities that fall under the umbrella of Luli. In their study, the authors divide these into "intermediate communities" and "Gypsy-like communities." They then subdivide them into the geographical regions with which they are historically associated, e.g. *Samarkandikho, Karshigikho, Mug'atoi Bukhorgi*, etc., and into patronymic clans (*tupar)*, which are in turn comprised of separate extended families (*avdol*)—see Table 1.[2] This categorization shows that the Luli community may to some degree have preserved the Indian caste system and hierarchy.

Table 1. Central Asian Luli

Gypsies	Intermediate communities	"Gypsy" – like Communities
Luli	Tavoktarosh/ Kosatarosh/ Sogutarosh/Koshuktarosh	Chistoni
Jughi	Mazang	Kavol
Multoni	Agha	Baluj
Ghorbat		Parya

Source: Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus
(Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

In Central Asia today, there are two main Gypsy communities: the Tajik- and Uzbek-speaking Muslim Luli, and the Russian-speaking Christian *Tsygane*. The term *Tsygane*, used in Soviet times and in today's post-Soviet space, refers to the Russian-speaking Roma community. Marushiakova and Popov provide census data on the number of Luli living in Central Asia over the course of the twentieth century (see Table 2). As we can see from the census data, the largest concentration of Luli has long been in the territory of Uzbekistan.

Table 2. Historical data on number of Luli by countries and dates

Year	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
1926			See numbers for Uzbekistan		3,710
1939	4,257	776	1,193	190	5,487
1959	7,265	776	1,556	103	7,860
1970	7,766	863	1,171	218	11,371
1979	8,626	1,927	1,139	357	12,581
1989	7,165	990	1,791	119	16,397

Source: Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus
(Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

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[1] Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, *Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[2] Ibid.

Luli in Contemporary Uzbekistan: A Marginalized Community

According to Paul Salopek, an American journalist and *National Geographic* photographer, there are currently about 12,000 Luli living in Uzbekistan.[1] However, research suggests that this number may be a historical figure drawn from the aforementioned story in *Shahnameh*. There are no accurate contemporary data on the Luli population because it does not participate in the government-conducted census and many members of the Luli population never obtain legal documents.

Due to the negative stigma attached to their ethnic group—they are often considered filthy, cursed sorcerers practicing witchcraft—Luli tend to disguise their identity, often declaring themselves to be Tajik. They are generally multilingual, with native-level fluency in Uzbek and Tajik, and often also in Russian. Luli communities maintain a rigidly closed society and preserve a caste system. At least in part, however, this is due to the significant gap between the majority of the population and members of this minority group. People believe that the Luli do not want to integrate, not obey the laws due to their freedom-loving and responsibility-avoiding souls.

Traditionally, Luli lived a nomadic lifestyle, migrating for certain seasons to rented homes or agricultural buildings in rural settlements. Generally, they live in separate communities called *Lo'li Mahalla*[2] or *Jugikhona*, which are considered a no-go zone by the general population. Most men engage in horse- and donkey-trading, selling small goods, trading with local residents, and recycling valuable materials, as well as providing seasonal agricultural labor, music for celebrations, and cures for humans and animals. The most popular occupations both for men and women are working in trash facilities and collecting cut hair.[3] Women and children are generally occupied with begging, fortune-telling, and other folk-healing practices. Although children are eligible to attend public schools, attendance is very low. Schools organized by Luli community leaders, meanwhile, have poor academic outcomes.

There are several public opinion surveys, mostly conducted by the pro-government Public Opinion Research Center *Ijtimoiy Fikr*, that contain some information on Luli. These include "Uzbekistan—To a Common Home," conducted from 1999 to the present; "National Identity," conducted from 2001 to the present; "Uzbekistan: Years of Independence," conducted from 2001 to the present; and "Uzbekistan: Public Opinion," conducted from 1998 to the present. While the numbers presented by *Ijtimoiy Fikr* are interesting, they may not be reliable. The Center is notorious for providing inaccurate data and conclusions, often manipulating results in order to conceal existing problems in the country. While *Ijtimoiy Fikr* may indeed have polled the Luli, the latter may have been obliged, under pressure, to provide positive feedback on their living conditions. Moreover, Luli communities are very closed to outsiders and controlled by local leaders (known as "Baron" among the *Tsygane*), usually men with power and authority who strictly regulate the lifestyles of community members.

Referring to an *Ijtimoiy Fikr* poll,[4] the Director of the National Center for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Akmal Saidov, stated that 99 percent of the Luli responded that they do not feel any type of discrimination. The majority of respondents indicated that their right to acquire citizenship is not infringed and that there is no discrimination in their access to education at all levels. According to the survey, 1.4 percent of Luli have higher education, 13.9 percent have completed secondary education, 20.8 percent have incomplete secondary education, and 63.9 percent have primary education. They mainly live in private homes (92 percent of respondents), with just 8 percent saying that they live in apartment buildings. The majority of respondents are citizens of Uzbekistan (84 percent), while the others have a "residence permit."

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[1] Paul Salopek, "Trading in Tresses," *National Geographic*, January 17, 2017, https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/out-of-eden-walk/articles/2017-01-trading-tresses/.

[2] "Lo'li Mahalla" is the Uzbek-language term for "Luli neighborhood."

[3] Ibid.

[4] Akmal Saidov, Director of the National Center for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Terpimost' i ne diskriminatsiia. Voprosy Roma i Sinti" (speech to the OSCE, Warsaw, October 1, 2015), accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/187971?download=true.

According to another study,[1] conducted by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education, not a single Luli student was enrolled in a college or university in 2010-2012. The survey also revealed that Luli live in small families consisting of 4-6 people and disproved the common myth of polygamy: the majority of respondents (84.4 percent) have one spouse. When in need, respondents declare that they receive material assistance in most cases from the state (75 percent) and the neighborhood community, the *mahalla* (13.7 percent). The absolute majority of interviewed (86.0 percent) confirmed that they did not experience any restrictions or infringements of their right to education. According to the same poll, an absolute majority of Luli children attend secondary school.

However, the reality suggests that children do not typically attend schools. Professional photographer and artist Alexander Barkovskiy,[2] as well as Anzor Bukharskiy[3] and Bekhzod Boltaev,[4] are a few of the limited number of people that the Luli have permitted to film and photograph their lifestyle. Barkovskiy filmed a small Luli two-room school in a remote rural area of Surkhandaryo region[5] that was established in a barn and observed that a maximum of four to six children attended classes. According to him, the Luli are currently undergoing a national "elimination" of their identities. Even if they obtain a national passport, their ethnicity is often changed to Uzbek or Tajik, demonstrating that the authorities do not recognize the Luli as a separate ethnic group. Barkovskiy's observations also show strong discrimination by government agencies against the Luli: "The entire Luli village in Tashkent's Vodnik district was forced to move away from their neighborhood. The reason for this forced relocation was to construct an elite children's education center in the area and to avoid annoying high-ranking government officials who visited the neighborhood."

In Tashkent, the Luli communities are concentrated in the Kuyluk, Vodnik, Sergeli, and Sputnik neighborhoods. In 2016, Podrobno.uz[6] posted an article about the reconstruction of Chashma *mahalla*[7] in Bektemir district of Tashkent, which led to mass relocation of Luli families, and estimated that more than 250 families have been forced to move from the Old Town. In an interview with Podrobno.uz, the mayor of Tashkent stated that, "It is not yet clear that they will move closer to us. Nobody will force them to move. We provided them with free choice; they make their own decisions."[8]

In a video interview with Fergana.ru,[9] a Luli woman stated that Uzbeks would not allow them to join the labor market or attend schools, adding that they can hardly get medical care without paying bribes. Although there are very few cases where Luli are physically attacked or become victims of hate crimes based on their identity, there are still strong stigmas attached to them. A new trend is labor migration of Luli men to Russia and neighboring countries. Facing economic hardship, like the majority of Uzbek men, Luli have

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Dengiz Uralov, "Among the Mugat," *Transitions Online*, January 24, 2013, http://www.tol.org/client/article/23567-among-the-mugat.html.

[3] Irina Sklyar, "Asian Lyili Gypsies in Anzor Bukharskyi Photo Series," *Bird in Flight*, May 25, 2015, https://birdinflight.com/inspiration/project/asian-lyili-gypsies-in-anzor-bukharskyi-photo-series.html.

[4] See Bezhod Boltaev's Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/_behzod_boltaev_/ (accessed July 29, 2019).

[5] "Segodnia v shkolu ne poshel 480P," YouTube video, 6:42, uploaded by "Aleksandr Barkovskii," May 13, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSMFdXvOAfE&t=139s.

[6] "Krupneishaia makhalla tsygan-liulei v Tashkente mozhet byt rasshirena," *Podrobno.uz*, July 28, 2016, https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/krupneyshaya-makhallya-tsygan-lyuley-v-tashkente-mozhet-byt-rasshirena-/.

[7] A mahalla is an urban community division used today in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Historically, mahallas were autonomous social institutions built around familial ties and Islamic rituals. Before the establishment of Soviet rule in Uzbekistan, mahallas fulfilled local self-government functions, connecting the private sphere with the public sphere. Religious rituals, life-cycle crisis ceremonies, resource management, conflict resolution, and many other community activities were performed at mahalla (or neighborhood) level.

[8] *Podrobno.uz*, "Krupneishaia makhalla."

[9] "Liuli v Uzbekistane," YouTube video, 9:33, uploaded by "Fergana informagentsvo," October 7, 2013, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5m3_4sWSX0A&feature=youtu.be.

started migrating to Russia for work, usually leaving women alone with several children—a reality that drives them to beg on the streets.

After President Mirziyoyev opened the borders with neighboring countries in 2017, Luli carrying Uzbek passports flowed into Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan. As Luli explain it, they migrate to neighboring countries only after the cotton-picking season in Uzbekistan ends in order to try and make a living by begging in neighboring countries. In December 2017, *Nastoiachshee Vremia* published an article about the regional migration of the Luli.[1] When 14-year-old Oyatbek was caught in the city market in Jalal-Abad, he said that two days earlier, he had come from the city of Kara-Su. After the death of his mother, there was no one to feed the six siblings. It was almost winter, yet the teenager was wearing flip-flops: "I came to earn some money for school clothes. My mother died long ago, my father lies at home because of a kidney disease. We live with a stepmother. In winter, you need to buy flour and other products. I am the fifth of six children. Nobody gives me a job because of my age. We have no choice but to go out begging. I don't even have shoes, but I still have to buy a school uniform. We try not to miss classes."

Which Integration Experience for the Luli?

Soviet Experience

Professor Khol Khalikovich Nazarov of the Samarkand Medical Institute, who has been studying the community for more than forty years and was himself born into a Mughat family, writes that the most effective integration projects were implemented during the Soviet period. Special Luli kolkhozes[2] were created and children were forced to attend public schools. Sergey Abashin, a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the European University at St. Petersburg, has also written about how Soviet authorities took various measures to bind the Gypsies to a permanent place of residence, find jobs for them, arrange schools for children, and create a stratum of Gypsy intellectuals.[3]

In the 1920s and 1930s, a Gypsy kolkhoz and artels were created in Central Asia. During the collectivization period, the first gypsy collective farms appeared in the Ferghana and Tashkent regions.[4] By the end of the 1930s, and not without administrative coercion, 13 collective farms had been established, the members of which were predominantly Tsygane and Luli. True, in 1938, when the national policy of supporting minorities was curtailed, many of these collective farms fell apart. In 1925, Mizrab Makhmudov, a Luli communist, who was a collective farm movement activist, was elected to the Central Election Committee of the Uzbek SSR.[5]

Gypsies were also organized in artisanal artels and pushed to work in factories. In 1928, the first Gypsy scrap collection labor community, known as *Mekhnatkash Luli*,[6] was established in Samarkand, employing more than 61 Luli. Similar artels of woodworkers existed in Kokand and Bukhara, as well as an artel for making toys in Tashkent. Special schools were opened within kolkhozes.[7]

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[1] Radio Azattyk, "Pochemu ulitsy Kyrgyzstana zapolonili uzbekskie tsygane-poproshaiki," *Nastoiashchee Vremya*, December 2, 2017, https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28890711.html.

[2] A kolkhoz, short for "kollektivnoe khoziaistvo" (collective ownership), was a form of collective farm in the Soviet Union.

[3] Lev Gumilev Center, "Sredneaziatskie tsygane-liuli," August 22, 2014, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.gumilev-center.ru/sredneaziatskie-tsyigane-lyuli/.

[4] Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, *Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Mekhnatkash Luli* (Uzbek) translates to "Hardworking Luli."

[7] Ibid.

Today, there are no such state-sponsored policies toward the Luli community. Several projects by the UNDP[1] have included these communities, but only as part of broader efforts focused on local economic development. The government has also implemented a project to help Luli acquire legal documents.[2] But there are no projects working on eliminating stigma, raising awareness, inclusion, or public education integration.

International Experience

The most successful programs of Roma integration are being implemented in the European Union.

LERI, or the Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion Project, covers Italy, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Spain, the UK, and several other European countries with large numbers of Roma. The project brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in integration actions and to identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders in joint efforts to bolster inclusion of the Roma. Specifically, the LERI project in Strasbourg, France, could serve as a model for Uzbekistan. The project aims to support the municipality in increasing the participation of Roma in efforts to improve living conditions in slums and open additional temporary accommodations. The project is working with two authorized municipal camps inhabited predominantly by Romanian Roma in order to increase their participation in local council initiatives, to ensure their further inclusion, and to fight discrimination.

Several successful Roma projects have also been supported in Romania and Bulgaria by the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants.[3] The *Mission Possible* project, funded under the Public Health Program of the EEA and Norway Grants, aimed to reduce social inequality by improving the sexual and reproductive health of young people. It was implemented on the outskirts of the village of Kovachevtsi, about 40 km from the Bulgarian capital Sofia.[4] Of the around 300 Roma people living in 43 houses in the neighborhood, only three houses had running water. Most of the families were marginalized, with no education or jobs, and relied on social benefits. Many girls dropped out of school due to early marriages and pregnancies. Most of them never saw a doctor before giving birth. Over 50,000 Roma benefitted from the measures taken by the project. The project report stated that over 300 doctors, nurses, and health care specialists came to work directly in Roma communities, thus increasing their knowledge of health risks and needs. Direct interaction between medical specialists and Roma patients helped overcome mutual biases and mistrust, as evidenced by an increase in the number of Roma women using mainstream health care services.[5]

The experience gained from this project can help to develop tools for implementation and monitoring of Luli integration efforts at the local level in Uzbekistan.

Conclusion*: Implementation of the *Tenglik* Project*

Values tend to change. Bias and stigma toward the Luli population is not inevitable and can be eliminated. As the late Swedish physician and author Hans Rosling wrote in his book *Factfulness*, "Cultures, nations, religions, and people are not rocks. They are in constant transformation."[6]

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[1] UN Volunteers, "Making Youth Volunteers the Driving Force Behind Development," Tashkent, August 2012, accessed July 29, 2019, https://www.unv.org/news/making-youth-volunteers-driving-force-behind-development.

[2] "Uzbekistondagi lulilarning uzligi," *BBC*, May 11, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/uzbek/uzbekistan/2016/05/160511_identity_centralasian_gypsies.

[3] EEA and Norway Grants, "Who We Are," accessed July 29, 2019, https://eeagrants.org/Who-we-are.

[4] "Report on Roma Projects: Visible Achievements and Positive Changes," October 13, 2017, accessed July 29, 2019, https://eeagrants.org/News/2017/Report-on-Roma-projects-Visible-achievements-and-positive-changes.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Hans Rosling, with Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlund, *Factfulness: Ten Reason We're Wrong About the World— and Why Things Are Better Than You Think* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2018).

Based on this analysis of the international experience of working with the Roma minority and the current context in Uzbekistan, I advocate for the launch of a new project, *Tenglik* (meaning "equality" in Uzbek), aimed at eliminating stigma toward minorities within Uzbek society and encouraging better integration of marginalized groups. The long-term objective is to support minorities and to provide equal socio-economic opportunities for them. The project's long-term goals include the development of public policies that will protect the basic rights of different minorities in the society.

The following activities should be developed and implemented during the project:

- Master classes and courses for young and adult Luli to improve their skills. These might include professional trainings and English and Russian language classes
- Tutoring programs both for adults and children
- Vocational training for Luli youth
- Basic computer classes
- Medical consultations, including workshops on contraception for young women and workshops on HIV and STD awareness for teenagers

The project should collaborate with local photographers to facilitate the sharing of personal illustrated stories of the Luli on social media, in turn shedding light on the issues facing the community. Better integrating Central Asian Gypsies into non-segregated public education institutions, professional training programs, and the labor market can only help improve Uzbekistan's human capital.