

# The Transformation of Tajikistan's Religious Field: From Religious Pluralism to Authoritarian Inertia

*Shahnoza Nozimova*

PhD Candidate in Political Science, Schar School of  
Policy and Government, George Mason University,  
USA

*Tim Epkenhans*

Professor of Islamic Studies, Department for Islamic Studies,  
University of Freiburg, Germany

## Abstract

The recent transformation of Tajikistan's political system has significantly altered the social and political context in which the country's lay Muslims and religious elites negotiate Islam and Islamic normativity. The quasi-governmental Islamic Center (*Markazi Islomi*) has taken on a more dominant role, becoming the sole official (state-approved) Islamic institution in Tajikistan defining Islamic normativity. In this work, we explore the rationale behind the Tajik state's pursuit of this political trajectory, conduct a detailed examination of the religious edicts (*fatwas*) issued by the Islamic Center, and identify its conservative trends. Our research suggests that the Islamic Center offers the Tajik government a way to achieve its much-desired monopoly over the religious field. Furthermore, we argue that the Islamic Center's conservative interpretation of Islam, with its emphasis on political conformity, social patriarchy, and limited mystical experience, is far more "legible" and administratively manageable for the authoritarian regime than the previous religious pluralism.

## Supplementary Material



FIGURE 1 Screenshot of question no. 1915 from “Zebo” on August 17, 2018  
SOURCE: “SAVOLU JAVOB,” *MARKAZI ISLOMIY JUMHURIY TOJIKISTON*, 2014–2017, [HTTP://SHUROIULAMO.TJ/TJ/FAQ](http://shuroiulamo.tj/tj/faq) (ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 30, 2018).



FIGURE 2 Thumbnail and illustration for an article on parenting  
SOURCE: M. SHONASURDINOV, "ZAMINAHOI TARBIYAI DURUSTI FARZAND,"  
*MARKAZI ISLOMII JUMHURII TOJIKISTON*, JANUARY 10, 2018, [HTTP://  
SHUROIULAMO.TJ/TJ/ARTICLES/IDS/329](http://shuroiulamo.tj/tj/articles/ids/329) (ACCESSED OCTOBER 30, 2018).