Central Asian Regimes Trample Women’s Rights: The Effects of Political Transition on the Status of Women in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

A Thesis Submitted to the University Honors Program In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree With Upper Division Honors

Department Of Political Science

By

Anastasia Kocher

DeKalb, Illinois
05-12-2013
University Honors Program

Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title:
Central Asian Regimes Trample Women’s Rights: The Effects of Political Transition on the Status of Women in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan,

Student Name: Anastasia Kocher

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Jones

Faculty Approval Signature: [Signature]

Department of Political Science

Date of Approval: 4/13/13
HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

The five Central Asian states have all experienced difficult economic and societal transitions following their political independence in 1992 and face uncertain futures. This is especially true with regard to the significant issue of women's rights. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, women began losing ground as traditional gender stereotypes returned to the newly independent countries of Central Asia. In the absence of Soviet rule, women have found themselves increasingly unable to advocate for education, equitable working conditions, and political representation.

Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have faced their individual challenges since their independence. Yet, my research recognizes their commonalities, which I ascribe to similar types of political regimes. All five countries endured dictatorship after the collapsed of the Soviet authoritarian state. The existing governmental leaders lack the ambition to enforce the gender related laws and policies aimed towards improving the status of women. Since independence, each Central Asian country has tried to define its national identity. So far, this process has resulted in the deterioration of women’s rights based on redefined cultural norms that prioritize the women’s role as a housewife and mother. This tendency is reinforced by leaders in these countries, as well as a lack of a previously established socioeconomic system, including child care and elder care institutions.

In order to achieve gender equality, where women enjoy equal opportunities as men and contribute to the social, economic, and political development of their countries, women must be aware of their rights and encouraged to participate fully in political and economic decision-making. Some suggestions will be made following the analyses of the women’s conditions in three selected areas: employment, education, and women’s political representation.
HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT
THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Anastasia Kocher

THESIS TITLE: Central Asian Regimes Trample Women’s Rights: The Effects of Political Transition on the Status of Women in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

ADVISOR: Dr. Christopher Jones

ADVISOR’S DEPARTMENT: Political Science

DISCIPLINE: International Politics YEAR: 2013

PAGE LENGTH: 45

BIBLIOGRAPHY: 4

ILLUSTRATED: 15 Graphs

PUBLISHED (YES OR NO): No

LIST PUBLICATION: N/A

COPIES AVAILABLE (HARD COPY, MICROFILM, DISKETTE): 2

ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS): 277
Abstract

The five Central Asian states have all experienced difficult economic and societal transitions following their political independence in 1992 and face uncertain futures. This is especially true with regard to the significant issue of women’s rights. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, women began losing ground as traditional gender stereotypes returned to the newly independent countries of Central Asia. In the absence of Soviet rule, women have found themselves increasingly unable to advocate for education, equitable working conditions, and political representation.

Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have faced their individual challenges since their independence. Yet, my research recognizes their commonalities, which I ascribe to similar types of political regimes. All five countries endured dictatorship after the collapsed of the Soviet authoritarian state. The existing governmental leaders lack the ambition to enforce the gender related laws and policies aimed towards improving the status of women. Since independence, each Central Asian country has tried to define its national identity. So far, this process has resulted in the deterioration of women’s rights based on redefined cultural norms that prioritize the women’s role as a housewife and mother. This tendency is reinforced by leaders in these countries, as well as a lack of a previously established socioeconomic system, including child care and elder care institutions.

In order to achieve gender equality, where women enjoy equal opportunities as men and contribute to the social, economic, and political development of their countries, women must be aware of their rights and encouraged to participate fully in political and economic decision-
making. Some suggestions will be made following the analyses of the women's conditions in three selected areas: employment, education, and women's political representation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Honors Capstone advisor, Dr. Christopher Jones for all the time, support, encouragement, and guidance that he gave me working on this project. I also wish to thank my wonderful friend, Pamela Rosenberg, for her contribution in completing this project, and PhD student, Patrick Homan, for his peer review. I am grateful to the University Honors Committee for selecting me as one of the 2012 University Honor Summer Scholars; it is a great honor to represent the NIU Honor's Program. I am indebted to the creators and the sponsors of the University Honors Summer Scholars Program, for providing me with the time, financial support, and faculty mentoring to pursue in-depth summer research, which enabled me to start early on my Capstone project. I truly had a wonderful experience in the Undergraduate Honors program at Northern Illinois University!

Introduction

Discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanities (www.unhcr.org.).

The international interest in improving the condition of women in developing countries was raised as early as 1975, in Mexico City, during the First World Conference of International Women's Year, and it culminated in 1995, at the Beijing Women Conference. The main focus of those conferences was to raise the awareness that women, who are half of the world's
Anastasia Kocher

population, are faced with economic, political, and social challenges that hinder their equal status around the world. The goal of the conferences was “to build an international community based on equality and justice,” with special attention devoted to a newly introduced concept of “women empowerment,” which emphasized a greater and equal participation of women at all levels of the decision-making process (www.un.org).

The movement to empower women compelled countries to create the necessary conditions for women’s equal treatment and integration into a nation’s economic and political life with full participation in international organizations. The conferences called for a universal plan of action to stress the need for improvement in three basic spheres: education, employment, and political participation, as critical means for women to attain greater control over their lives. These basic spheres are vital resources of information that provide women with awareness, options, choice, control, and power that are the key means for women’s autonomy and equal status.

Over the last several decades a number of strategies have emerged and evolved to promote gender equity and women’s rights. Yet, debates regarding the relative efficacy of these strategies remain. While there have been some positive gains in the battle for women’s rights in Western countries, there is still uncertainty in developing regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Currently, women advocates continue to pursue the goals set during the World Conference of the International Women’s Year. Removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of women to development and opportunities remain on the agenda of various international conferences, non-profit organizations, and political marketing. In the words of Secretary of State John Kerry:
No country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind. This is why the United States believes gender equality is critical to our shared goals of prosperity, stability, and peace, and why investing in women and girls worldwide is critical to U.S. foreign policy (state.gov).

**Issue Significance**

Global stability, peace, and prosperity depend on protecting and advancing the rights of women around the world. Research shows that the majority of the one billion people living on less than $1 a day are women. Gender inequality exists in every country in the world, with millions of women around the world facing discrimination and abuse. Women still disproportionately suffer lack of access to health care; they are subjected to considerable domestic violence; they are denied opportunities to work outside the home, and they endure unequal pay. Women often suffer unfair treatment before the law and are denied land rights and economic opportunities because they are women (gcc.concernusa.org).

Women’s empowerment, their leadership, education, health, engagement in economics, and equal representation are the keys to success for building equitable and sustainable growth, just societies, and legitimate, well-functioning democracies. Integrating women’s perspectives into peace negotiations and security efforts can help prevent conflict and can lead to more durable peace agreements. When women and men are equally empowered as political and social actors, governments are greater represented and more effective (whitehouse.gov).

Women advocates around the globe are inspired by shared goals of equality, but each country has its own specific women’s issues that needed to be targeted more forcefully. In the United States, only 10% of the largest 100 companies have women CEOs (gcc.concernusa.org). Thus in the United States, women advocates’ leading objectives are to break the glass ceiling and
motivate women’s confidence to advance to the top of the American economy and politics. Conversely, in Africa, 58% of people living with HIV are women. In Cameroon, women do 75% of the agricultural work, but own less than 10% of the land. Therefore, African women activists place a strong emphasis on health issues, as well as trying to close the gap between women and men in agriculture to generate gains in food security. The gender gap imposes real costs on society in terms of lost agricultural output, food security and economic growth. In the Middle East women advocates’ main concerns are to attain peace and security and to eradicate such social problems as domestic violence and rape. In East Timor, only 18% of women give birth with the aid of a skilled medical personal. The priority of women’s advocates in this part of the world is to improve women’s safety, and healthcare, including the birth mortality of their children. (gcc.concernusa.org).

Focus of Inquiry

Women’s rights have not been examined extensively in some countries. A case in point is the Central Asian region. The existence of the Central Asian region dates back to the days of Genghis Khan and Khan Tamerlane. Their conquests and triumphs from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries provided them power and influence over a large territory. Yet very little is known about this part of the world. Countries of Central Asia were part of the former U.S.S.R. and became independent in 1991 after fall of the Soviet Union. Presently, Central Asia is comprised of five countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which encompasses a vast area from the Caspian Sea in the west to China in the east and from Afghanistan in the south to Russia in the north. My research project examines the status of women’s rights in each country of Central Asia since their independence.
A retrospective examination of Central Asia’s history shows that the disintegration of the 
Soviet Union and the transition to independence has resulted in a continuous change of the 
regions societies, offering great opportunities for women’s growth and progress. The transition to 
privatization and a free market economy has opened Central Asia to many opportunities. At the 
same time the five countries now confront many new challenges and hardships posed by this 
transition, with women particularly marginalized and negatively affected. Claims are made that 
women’s rights will be respected more. However, international policies are sometimes ignored in 
favor of domestic customary laws. These laws are instigated by patriarchal views, religion, or 
tradition and present a primary barrier for equal rights. The situation is further exacerbated by the 
deteriorating status of Soviet infrastructure, which provided all of the necessary social services. 
While the Soviet Union was a reforming force in the lives of women, by endorsing education and 
participation in economic life, the future of Central Asia is not clear. Today, women in Central 
Asia have been burdened with both family caregiving responsibilities and the need to assume 
esential economic roles to sustain their living.

Research Design

World peace and democracy is unattainable, as long as half a population is denied the 
opportunities to participate actively and on an equal basis, in economic, social, and political 
spheres. My study seeks to identify particular areas, where women are underrepresented in the 
five countries of Central Asia. The goal is to raise awareness of the current situation inside each 
country in order to appeal to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and for my own future 
research. My primary concern is twofold. I wish to assess the setbacks in women’s rights 
progress and evaluate the institutional, social, and cultural factors that have led to the regression 
of women’s rights. In addition, I seek to identify particular cases and practices that suggest the
deterioration of equal opportunities and the legitimate status of women, over time, in three basic spheres: education, employment, and political representation. In this project, I also probe why women in some countries have achieved greater progress than others under similar conditions. Furthermore, what role does the government and its regimes play in shaping, defining, and legitimizing women's rights in Central Asia? In particular, I want to know, why after independence, the opportunities that women in Central Asia enjoyed under egalitarian Soviet policies started to crumble.

My study first begins by outlining the key policies and changes in women's status that took place under Soviet rule. Second, I focus on women's situation, in post-Soviet Central Asia in three areas: education, employment, and political participation, selecting several variables from the World Bank database within those areas. Using graphs, I present the data chronologically from 1991 through 2010. Third, I examine each country's progress through the selected variables over the years by interpreting available data. Fourth, I refer to additional sources to investigate the extent to which quantitative data in graphs from the World Bank database represents the real conditions in the individual country of focus. Lastly, I conclude by recognizing the common challenges that women face in Central Asia due to a shared political history of Soviet authoritarian regime. I further suggest implications for improving the status of women in three areas: education, employment, and political representation.

**Literature Review**

There is considerable academic research on women's rights, equality, and representation in post-communist Eastern and Central Europe, but little scholarly work has been published on the five new countries in Central Asia. More specifically, there is an absence of literature that
Anastasia Kocher

examines women’s status in education, employment, and political participation in all five countries of Central Asia. Most scholars examine the status of women in one or two Central Asian countries. For instance, Central Asian scholar Cynthia Werner (2009) writes about the revival of non-consensual bride abduction practices in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, several years after their independence. Her study is based on the author’s field work in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where a shift towards patriarchy in post-Soviet Central Asia is examined through changing marriage practices. Werner shares several heartbreaking stories of shame and despair of young women who had experienced abduction and were forced to ‘stay’ in unwanted relationships by popular view. During the Soviet period, the state promoted gender equality and Kazakh and Kyrgyz women were encouraged to make their own decision about their future husband. In contemporary Central Asia the search for a national identity reinforced the past tradition where men had full control over female mobility and sexuality.

Sociologists John Williamson and Ulrike Boehmer (1997) write a broad overview on women’s status in various countries. The sociologists focus their study on female life expectancy in less developed countries. The article shows evidence of how a certain aspects of women’s status have a positive effect on female life expectancy. Women’s educational and women’s economic status prove to be important predictors of female life expectancy.

Irina Liczek (2005) writes about gender policy making in contemporary Turkmenistan. Her study examines the historical progression of the main cultural parameters that influence gender policy making in contemporary Turkmenistan. She closely examines how Turkmenistan accommodates the progressive international commitments it made to improve the status of women while simultaneously openly supporting the revival of patriarchal trends based on customs and a religious heritage dating back to nomadic times. She breaks the Turkmen cultural
practices into three periods: pre-Soviet patriarchal nomadic practices, Soviet-era egalitarianism, and the current post-independence era, in which global norms of gender equality are combined with a resurgence of the pre-Soviet norms.

Other contemporary scholarly work on Central Asia is done on its political transition after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Dilip Hiro’s book (2009) explains the ethnic tension, religious intolerance, and struggle for political identity in the former Soviet territories. Hiro’s work is built around contemporary events in five Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The author describes each country starting with its development in the final years of the USSR, further progressing to years of independence, and later the years of nation-building. Hiro recognizes certain commonalities in the five Central Asian countries after the collapse of Soviet era. They are characterized by a struggle to define a unifying national identity, difficulties in creating functional economies, tensions between various ethnic groups, the resurgence of interest in traditional Islam, and a strong tendency towards authoritarian one-party rule. The author closely examines the political structure of each state, evaluating political leaders. For instance, he writes about “Turkmenbashi” Niyazov and his dictatorship in Turkmenistan. He covers the events that led to Tajik civil war, and consequences of ethnic tensions in the Fergana valley, and the incident in Andijon.

A number of scholars focus their work around the strategic importance of Central Asia after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the United States. For instance, Alexander Cooley’s book (2012), explores the dynamics of the new competition for control of the region since September 11, 2001. He writes that three great powers—China, Russia, and the United States—wish to increase their power in the Central Asian area, which includes Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Each great power driven by a
certain goal. The United States aims to control the situation in Afghanistan through establishing its military presence in Central Asia; China seeks the access to natural resources; and Russia wants to increase its own political influence in the region. Cooley writes that the leaders of Central Asia play their own game, using the support of all three powers for their own benefit, creating domestic rules to deflect foreign interest.

Rajan Menon (1995) examines the level of stability of the Central Asian countries after their independence. He recommends that the United States should use a strategy of long-term assistance to ease the post-Soviet transition. He explains that the legacy of Central Asian history, the circumstances of geography, and the logic of power guarantee that Central Asia will remain part of Russia's sphere of influence. Menon is skeptical that any regional state, alliance, or outside power or organization can change this reality. The author warns that instability in Central Asia can increase the chances for ethnic nationalism. The author believes that the U.S. diplomacy aimed at rewarding governments that increase opportunities for political participation and adoption of international human rights norms toward ethnic minorities will foster a greater stability in the Central Asian region.

Kathleen Collins (2002), examines the issue of political transition, questioning what factors account for the differences of post-Soviet regime change in Central Asia with Kyrgyzstan turning toward democracy, Uzbekistan shifting toward neo-authoritarianism, and Tajikistan descending into civil war. Offering an analysis of informal institutions, especially those of the clan networks, she argues that informal associations are more critical in the transition process than are the formal political institutions. The extensiveness of informal associations and their influence on political choice make them crucial elements of any attempt to explain the transitional form of power regimes in Central Asia.
Anastasia Kocher

While most all of the scholarly work on Central Asia is dominated by an analysis of the transition to post-Soviet rule, some focuses more on cultural, ethnic, and religious issues, still, others scholarship concentrates on security, social issues, and problems of governance. All this work reflects an awareness of the fact that the transition to self-governance is far from complete. This study on women’s status in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan offers not only a comprehensive analysis of women’s status in three major areas of life (education, employment, and political representation), but it also shows how the political transition led to lasting stagnation, corruption, socioeconomic problems, rumbling infrastructure, and brutal dictatorships. Furthermore, my work demonstrates that the collapse of an authoritarian Soviet state did not, nor will it, automatically lead to democratic oriented societies in all aspects of life. It highlights the need to understand cultural undercurrents and how those affect women’s status when transitioning from one political regime to another.

Data Analyses

It has been two decades since the fall of the Soviet Union; and the five Central Asian countries under study have experienced considerable turmoil since their independence in 1991. To better understand the contemporary situation of women in Central Asia, one must begin by evaluating the freedoms and opportunities available to women during the Soviet rule. The research initiated by the World Policy Institute, conducted by Belinda Cooper and Isabel Traughott (2007) reflects on the condition of women before independence in 1991. It indicates that Central Asian women during the Soviet era enjoyed relative freedom and a substantial amount of legal, economic, and social equality.

The Soviet presence changed the situation for women in Central Asia. Lacking a traditional proletarian base in the region, the Communist leadership adopted
women as what one scholar has termed a “surrogate proletariat.” Soviet revolutionary efforts were in part directed at women’s emancipation, which was seen to mean release from the Islamic oppression of the past (Cooper 62).

The Soviets “unveiled” the female population in Central Asia. They banned all traditional discriminatory practices against women, such as polygamy, arranged marriages, or the practice of buying a bride (a girl of the age of 14 or 15 years old) by the groom’s family. Abolishing such practices led to “a female population that was literate, able to seek professional employment, and politically involved” (Cooper and Traughott 2007, p.63). Even though women remained responsible for household duties and raising children, Soviet rule improved the position of women in society. Women enjoyed benefits provided by the state, such as access to decent health care, childcare, and education. They also attained equal pay, as well as equal right to their family inheritance and marital property. In fact, “47 percent of women were employed outside the home, not only as agricultural workers and teachers, but also as scientists, lawyers, doctors, and professors” (Cooper 63 Traughott 2007, p.63). The quota system introduced by the Soviets reassured women of their emancipation and their participation as equal citizens.

Women were particularly active during the Nikita Khrushchev era from 1950 to 1960. Khrushchev promoted and emphasized women’s representation and systematic activities in political, economic, and social spheres. The motive behind such an active promotion of women’s rights was the recently fought World War II, which took millions of lives from the male population in Soviet Union. Nevertheless, this tragedy also simultaneously gave women opportunities for active participation in various political and social organizations on all levels across the country (Zellerer and Vyrotkin 2004). Unfortunately, the participation of women in international organizations was very limited, due to the political isolationism of the Soviet Union.
When the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan became independent, several international organizations and various non-governmental agencies were internally placed to monitor progress in these countries during the transition. The data tables presented in my paper were obtained from the World Bank databank data on gender statistics.

**Uzbekistan**

**Women’s Employment**

In Uzbekistan women make up 40% of the total labor force. Labor force participation rate, female “% of population ages 15-64” has increased by 1% since the year of independence to 2010, and consists of 51%. The data for male population between the ages 15 and 64 increased by 2% since 1991 and consisted of 77% in 2010. According to the data on labor participation, female participation in labor “ages 15+” has increased by two percent since 1991 and arrived at 48% by 2010. Male participation in labor, increased by one percent, to stand at 74% during the
same time period. The data shows that throughout the years, the male population dominated the work force continually by approximately 24-26%.

According to the data, the employment among women is lower than among men. In addition, there is an imbalance of sectorial distribution of female labor. Women are mostly employed at low paid sectors, such as agriculture and education. According to the research conducted by Sarah Bassiuni, instigated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), women in Uzbekistan are increasingly “marginalized as a result of not having independent incomes... Women are excluded from the labor market and only given work in ‘non-productive’ areas, while “those women who are employed, received 40 percent lower wages” (Bassiuni 2012). The existing gender stereotypes in Uzbekistan emphasize women’s role as a housewife and mother, limiting their choice of the professions to those that can be useful in a family, or constraining their time with a wide range of household duties. This is especially true in the rural areas of Uzbekistan, where women experience a limited access to the everyday services like water, gas, and transportation.

**Data Analysis: Kazakhstan**

**Women’s Employment**
Women make up nearly half of the country’s labor force in Kazakhstan. According to data in 2010 total women in the labor force was 49%, and it has increased by 2% since 1991. Kazakhstan data on the female labor force participation rate of those between the ages 15-64 are also remarkably high, at 74% in 2010, an increase of 4% since the year of independence. The same indicator for the Kazakh male population within the designated age group in 2010 totals 81% with a slight decline of 1% since 1991. Kazakh’s male labor participation rate “% of male population ages 15+” dominates female’s labor participation rate “% of female population ages 15+” throughout the years. It makes up 77% in contrast to 66% for females.

However, while women have made greater gains than men in becoming a larger part of the labor force, gender inequalities still exist among wages, and the numbers presented by the graph do not embody a high disparity in wages. According to the United Nations Kazakhstan: Country Analysis, “Women are marginalized by having inadequate access to the production process, and as a result, to income distribution. Women receive 62.3% of the income that a man would receive for the same work” (europeandcis.undp.org).
Further analyzing the data and the reports of various nonprofit organizations, I have concluded that the high percent of women in the workplace can be explained by a growing number of self-employed, especially in the rural areas of Kazakhstan. The United Nations report reads:

Poverty and vulnerability are heavily concentrated among the self-employed, in both rural household production and the informal urban economy, all characterized by low productivity. The share of self-employed people in the informal sector as a part of the economically active population remains high, at some 35-40 percent overall: self-employment is twice as high in rural as in urban areas (59.2% rural women vs. 25.3% urban women, 51.5% rural men vs. 22.8% urban men). At the same time, self-employment is more specific for women, who work in such sectors as trading at commodity and food markets, catering, household services, and processing of agricultural products" (p.12-13).

According to the International Women’s Rights Watch, Country Report on Kazakhstan, a similar pattern of women’s vulnerability to unemployment has been noted as “women are the last to be hired and the first to be fired” (w w w . l . u m n . e d u). The World Bank Women Business and the Law report states, “women in Kazakhstan still face gender inequality obtaining work in the same industries as men and there are no laws protecting women from sexual harassment in the workplace” (s t a t e . g o v).

Data Analysis: Kyrgyzstan

Women’s Employment
In 2010 Kyrgyzstan women made up 43% of the total labor force. The graph shows that the female labor force, which stood at 46% in 1991, has slowly decreased over time. The percentage of working females in the age category 15-64 has fallen from 65% in 1991 to 59% in 2010. The same age group for men has increased from 78% in 1991 to 81% in 2010, showing that men have consistently and increasingly dominated the labor force by 22% since independence.

However, the numbers presented in the graph do not represent the reality of the female situation in Kyrgyzstan. Assessing supplementary information, provided by the World Bank’s Report, states:

Women have lower participation rates, higher unemployment rates and longer unemployment spells... women are worst off in labor markets of all groups in the Kyrgyz Republic. Lack of affordable child care is a major obstacle for female participation. Women are overrepresented in badly paid sectors like agriculture, education, and health, and earn significantly less than their male counterparts. Violation of workers’ rights is widespread both in related to pay and working conditions (siteresources.worldbank.org).
Furthermore, the numbers are unreliable when it comes to the internal atmosphere of traditional stereotypes and gender roles, which come to play inside the place of employment. Women are downgraded continually by predominate patriarchal culture in Kyrgyzstan, as in all five countries of Central Asia. “Men usually control the family finances allowing little access by women to money or property rights” (Bassiuni 2012). Additionally, women are often deprived of decent working conditions. This is especially true in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, where women workforce is dominated in areas such as agriculture. The U.S. Department of State’s 2010 Human Rights Report on Kyrgyzstan reads: “Safety and health conditions in factories were poor. The law establishes occupational health and safety standards, but the government generally did not enforce them” (state.gov).

Data Analysis: Turkmenistan

Women’s Employment

As the preceding graph reflects, the total number for the female labor force in 1991 was 40%, and decreased by 1% in 2010, all illustrated by the chart. The latest data on female labor
participation in Turkmenistan indicated that in 2010, 49% of women were employed in the age group 15-64, which is 30% short of the 79% of the employed in 2010. Since independence, this statistic has declined for women and risen for men. The overall labor participation rate, ages 15 and older, for the female population is 46% as opposed to the male population at 76%.

An examination of alternative information on the women’s situations in Turkmenistan showed that an alarming number of young girls are in a marital relationship by the age of 19. Therefore, one reason for such unequal work force participation in Turkmenistan can be the practice of early marriages. According to Turkmen law, the legal age of marriage is 16, for both male and female citizens. “The 2004 United Nations report estimated that 5.9% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed.” These circumstances reduced their opportunities to be active participants in the labor force. Additionally, according to the UN report:

Employment law grants women and men equal rights in employment, including salaries. However, women are prohibited from working in certain dangerous and environmentally-unsafe jobs, potentially limiting their professional opportunities. In addition, it is reported that stereotypes regarding women’s place in society and prejudice on the part of employers towards women who have children or who are of childbearing age limits women’s professional opportunities (genderindex.org).

A closer look at the Turkmen Constitution, updated in 2007, shows women are enjoying equal rights. However, the U.S. Department of State’s report reads: “women continue to face discrimination, and their freedom is further restricted due to traditional socio-religious norms. Employers allegedly gave preference to men to avoid productivity losses due to pregnancy or child-care responsibilities” (state.org). With this restricted freedom women are not able to freely
decide their own fate, "as women are confined to the role of mother and homemaker and men assume all other responsibilities as head of the household" (genderindex.org).

**Data Analysis: Tajikistan**

**Women's Employment**

In Tajikistan, the percent of total female population in the labor force increased by one percent since the independence and in 2010 was 45%. According to the data, labor participation for females and males “ages 15+,” has decreased by one percent since 1991 with 57% of females and 75% of males employed in 2010. The data shows the male population dominated the work force continually by a margin of about 22%. The labor participation rate of the female population “ages 15-64” has also slowly decreased since 1991. Specifically, for females it has fallen from 63% to 60% and for the male population it decreased from 79% to 78% over the same years.

Further evaluation of the Tajik labor state of affairs indicates that Tajikistan’s Constitution lacks a legal definition of discrimination and harassment. Women predominantly
work in the lowest paid sector, agriculture, where 70% of the workforce is female (Bassiuoni). Established during the Soviet time, manufacturing industries were dominated by Tajik women. However, since the independence, manufacturers were closed and women were pushed to the lowest paying jobs in agriculture or to unemployment (genderindex.org). There is no system in place to monitor or regulate working conditions in the agricultural sector. Tajik law provides for equal opportunities and equal pay for women, but “cultural barriers continued to restrict the professional opportunities available to women” (state.gov). This information is further reaffirmed by an Amnesty International report on gender segregation in employment. It reads:

With the vast majority of the working female population (86 percent) working in the low-paid sectors, such as agriculture (75 percent), public health services, and education. Wages in these branches are approximately four to seven times lower than in other spheres (as in industry, construction, transportation, and communication). Furthermore, a significant number of women of employable age are engaged in housekeeping or in the informal sector of the economy (amnesty.org).

Data Analysis: Uzbekistan

Women’s Political Representation
According to the Uzbekistan data table, the "proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)" drastically increased between 1996 and 2010, from 6 percent to 22 percent. However, the data on the female in ministerial level positions is not available.

According to the report on “Country Profile: Uzbekistan,” conducted by the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI): “33 of 150 members of Uzbekistan’s Legislative Chamber are women (22%), as are 15 members of the senate (15%). Overall, however, women are poorly represented in political and other decision-making bodies in Uzbekistan” (genderindex.org).

The claim of poor representation could be explained by the absence of women on so-called Mahalla Neighborhood Committees. These committees do not have a legal authority. Yet, such a system is in place to deal with the day-to-day community and family matters (genderindex.org). The group of aksakals or elders, which comprises the Mahalla Committee, rules in accordance with Islamic traditions, holding social stereotypes that, “classify women in a secondary position to men” (Bassiuoni 2012). Gender equality exists under Uzbek law; however, “there is no legal definition of gender discrimination” (CEDAW). Instead, the government promotes an “idealized role for women as self-sacrificing wives and mothers, a patriarchal concept of women as people in need of protection, and the de-emphasis of women’s public role,” which is reinforced by neighborhood aksakals of Mahalla (Cooper and Traughott 200764).

Data Analysis: Kazakhstan

Women’s Political Representation
In Kazakhstan, according to the available data, “the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments” was 18% in 2011, which constitutes an 8% increase since 2000. The Social Institute and Gender Index organization lends additional support, stating “19 out of the 109 members of the House of Representatives are women (17.76%), as are two members of the Senate (out of 47 – 4.26%).” The countries overall status in international community now ranked as an upper middle income country. Therefore, a large portion of the international donor aid that previously supported women’s rights groups has been withdrawn, jeopardizing their continued activities (gendeindex.org). This state of affairs has the potential to hinder women’s political representation in the future. The organization Women in Politics notes:

The electoral system contains no incentives for political parties to involve women in politics or assign them to public positions, An analysis by the Feminist League of certain legal texts, including the Constitution and electoral laws, revealed a high incidence of linguistic sexism. Specifically, the grammar forms used in some documents of electoral constituencies referred only to men (The National Democratic Institute).

Reviewing the official documents from the Kazakh constitution, one can see that the terminology explicitly refers to “Кандидат,” or “гражданин” - “candidate men,” “citizen men,”
which can be misleading in its assumption that only men have rights to run for office (Constitution of Kazakhstan, section II-III). The United Nations report on Kazakhstan notes the lack of awareness amongst women of their rights, stating that “knowledge of how to participate in the political process” is lacking and “traditional stereotypes prevent the public—including women’s themselves—from recognizing the leadership capabilities of women” (europeandcis.undp.org).

Data Analysis: Kyrgyzstan

Political Representation

According to the Kyrgyz data, women represent 23% of members in national parliaments; it is 1% higher than in Uzbekistan (22%). It is undeniable that the Kyrgyz Republic has made great progress in the political sphere. The election of Roza Otunbayeva, as the president in 2011 is a visible example of the advancement of women in politics. In addition to the Otunbayeva election, 30 percent gender quotas were introduced across all levels of government. This information cis confirmed by the U.S. Department of State, which states:
There were no legal restrictions on the participation of women in politics; however, with the notable exception of President Roza Otunbayeva, traditional attitudes at times hindered women from holding high office or playing active roles in political life. Twenty-eight women representing five political parties occupied seats in parliament as a result of the parliamentary election code mandate that male and female candidates cannot be more than three spaces apart on party lists and that no more than 70 percent of candidates on a party list can be of the same gender (state.gov).

However, the lack of women’s empowerment and education prevails in rural areas of the republic, where strong traditional tendencies limit a woman’s role to being a mother and a wife. The increasing number of early marriages, with higher rates in rural areas than in urban areas, still hinders the ability of women to take advantage of potential opportunities. The Social Institute and Gender Index writes: “roles within the household are premised on rigid gender and age hierarchies, with women and girls expected to defer to husbands and other male family members (and daughters-in-law to defer to mothers-in-law), and be responsible for the bulk of domestic labor,” which leaves no time for participation in the political life of the country (genderindex.org).

Data Analysis: Turkmenistan

Political Representation
According to the data presented by Turkmenistan, the “proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments” has dropped from 26% in 1997 to 17% in 2011, and women in Turkmenistan do not hold any ministerial level positions. “Turkmenistan’s authoritarian practices of fierce retribution against policy challengers limit the impact of decision-making processes instigated by female representatives and can be responsible for decline in women’s political participation” (usaid.gov). Further research has showed that women’s advances in politics were hampered during the presidency of Saparmurat Niyazov. Every citizen of Turkmenistan was obligated to study the president’s spiritual guide book Ruhnama, which was required in schools and universities. Ruhama strongly supports gender stereotypes. Ruhnama suggests that Turkmen women should treat their husbands as gods. One section reads:

While a Turkmen man “should lead his family efficiently and direct them in goodness,” a Turkmen woman should work to enhance her husband’s position in society. The Ruhnama asserts that by keeping the house “clean and tidy,” and by being hospitable to visitors while the husband is absent, a Turkmen woman’s fame will spread like her husbands (www1.umn.edu).
Despite the change in the presidency, the predominance of such ideas in education for over a decade has planted the seed of traditional stereotypes and patriarchal practices, affecting progress of women in political participation.

Data analysis: Tajikistan

Political Representation

According to the data on Tajikistan, "the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament" has increased by 16% between 1997 and 2011 to 19%. There was no data concerning women holding any ministerial level positions.

However, these optimistic numbers do not characterize the reality of the female awareness of their political rights and political decisions. A U.S. Department of State report on Tajikistan concludes that "cultural practices discouraged female participation in politics, although the government and political parties made efforts to promote their involvement. Women were underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels of political institutions" (state.gov). The information provided by an independent researcher Gratschew on
Anastasia Kocher

the territory of Tajikistan provides a direct challenge. It reads: “The small number of women in elected positions in Tajikistan remains a critical concern,” according to Maria Gratschew, a gender Officer at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan (osci.org).

Data Analysis: Uzbekistan

Education

According to the data on Uzbekistan, the literacy rate is high at 100% for the male and 99% for the female population ages 15 and above. There are no legal restrictions on women attaining higher education in Uzbekistan. Looking at the latest data obtained in 2009, males complete 12 years of education; and the secondary school completion rate has increased by one percent since 2000. The same indicator for women has stayed steady for 11 years, which is one year shorter than males.

Thus, it appears that most young girls do not complete secondary education. Such data can be explained in part by the legal age of marriage, established by Uzbek government. Specifically, “it is 17 years for women and 18 years for men, but special dispensation can be
Anastasia Kocher

Anastasia Kocher

granted up to one year before this limit if there are ‘valid reasons or exceptional

Anastasia Kocher

circumstances’” (SIGI). Starting a family at such a young age requires a great deal of sacrifice
from both partners; and oftentimes education is no longer a priority.

In some cases, girls were in arranged marriages as early as 15 years old. “In 2006, 4.9
percent of girls aged 15-19 were married or in union, where the marriages of 61.3% of married
women aged 15-19 had been arranged without their consultation” (The Coalition of Uzbek
Women’s Rights NGOs). NGOs conducted interviews with women in Uzbekistan and revealed
women’s frustration with the decreased opportunities in education and as a result in professional
spheres of the workforce since independence.

Discussing the increasingly common marriages of girls as young as 15 and 16,

women spoke of economic necessities, dread, and social pressure, not of love,
desire, or anticipation. They spoke of arranged marriages and the onerous duties
imposed on new brides in caring for the husband’s extended family as greatly
resented deprivation of freedom, not as important socially or religiously defined
roles (Cooper 64).

Although legally banned, polygamy continues to exist, driving young and vulnerable women to
accept such conditions, due to a lack of resources, and their inability to support themselves. With
the hierarchical structure in Uzbek families, the youngest wife resumes all the responsibilities for
the whole household, including her in-laws. In this environment, everyday chores and having
children has become an obstacle to continuing education. It is especially common in the rural
areas of Uzbekistan.

While most education has been free in Uzbekistan since independence, it is also
important to note the following.
The government continued to limit academic freedom and cultural events. Authorities occasionally required department head approval for university lectures or lecture notes, and university professors generally practiced self-censorship. Numerous university students reported that universities taught mandatory courses on books and speeches of the president and that missing any of these seminars constituted grounds for expulsion (state.gov).

In addition, there is no subject related to women’s or gender studies in academia, which promotes women participation and makes women aware of their rights.

Data analysis: Kazakhstan

Education

According to the provided data, in 2009 the literacy rate stood at 100 percent for the entire population, ages 15 and above. Education is mandatory through the eleventh grade. There are no legal restrictions on women attaining higher education. At every level of education women’s representation is higher or equal to that of men’s. The primary education completion rate was 100% for females and 99% for males in 2011. The trend continued at the secondary education level with both men and women at 100%. How reliable is this data you think?
Women in the work force have on average a higher educational level than their male colleagues, but women’s opportunities in work and employment are severely limited by the segmentation of the country’s labor market along regional and gender dimensions. According to the information provided by the International Women’s Rights Action Watch:

Despite high educational achievement, women are underrepresented in high administrative positions, decision-making roles and offices both within the government and in the private sector. A traditional gender pyramid has developed— the higher the level of authority, the fewer the women (www.i.unm.edu).

Data analysis: Kyrgyzstan

Education

In Kyrgyzstan, there are no legal restrictions on women attaining higher education. According to the provided data from 2009, the literacy rate is high at 100% for the male and 99% for the female population ages 15 and above. Looking at the latest data obtained in 2009, females are expected to complete 13 years of education. The completion rate has increased by 3% since 1994. The data for men held steady at 12 years, since 2000. Female literacy rate was 1% lower
than the male rate (female 99% vs. male 100%), as last noted in 2009. Primary school completion rate at 97% in 2010 is 1% higher for girls than for boys.

Nevertheless, the employment opportunities for women are very limited to spheres with salaries “at least two times lower than salaries in traditional male sectors. “They are rarely paid for the work they do in their family’s businesses and farms (Bassiuoni 2012).

According to the Kyrgyz information on primary education, the law provides for required and free education for the first nine years of schooling, and secondary education is free and universal until age 17. However, the information of the independent observers on Kyrgyz territory reported to the U.S. Department of State:

Financial constraints prevented the government from providing free basic education for all students, and the system of residence registration restricted access to social services, including education, for certain children, such as refugees, migrants, and noncitizens. The law carries penalties for parents who do not send their children to school or who obstruct their attendance. This law was only sporadically enforced, particularly in rural areas. Families who kept children in public schools often had to pay burdensome and illegal administrative fees. Legally, all textbooks should be free of charge, but the government was unable to provide them to all students (state.gov).

The chief concern is that two-thirds of the Kyrgyz population, due to the country’s geographic location, lives in rural areas. Kyrgyz rural areas are predominantly characterized as the poorest areas with lack of opportunities and infrastructure. The families who live there have to sustain themselves through individual farming. For a poor rural family in the Kyrgyz Republic, the financial burden of education, amplified by the common gender stereotypes and necessity to rely on extra help for the household can be detrimental toward educating girls.

Data Analysis: Turkmenistan
The only available data on Turkmenistan pertained to the male and female population literacy rate. In 2009, it was high and consisted of 99% for the females and 100% for the male population for ages 15 and older.

The independent sources list the information on expected years of schooling:

Children now attend school for significantly less periods of time than they did under the Soviet system, and the quality of education has declined exponentially. In the past decade, the Turkmen government has reduced compulsory education from 11 years to nine years. Students now begin school at age seven and usually finish at 15 years. The government’s closure of most of the country’s Russian schools has further resulted in a decline in the quality of education (www.l.umn.edu).

Early marriages, which are officially permitted at age 16, and traditional views make women’s pursuit of higher education or working outside the home very challenging. A woman’s role as a mother and a caregiver, with numerous responsibilities for her own and husband’s extended family, make it virtually impossible.

Data Analysis: Tajikistan
According to the data, Tajik’s literacy rate for the female and male population in age category 15 and older was 100% in 2009. A variable on expected years of schooling indicated 10 years for female population and 12 years for males. In both cases, it has increased by one year since 2000. There are no legal restrictions on women attending a higher education. However, according to the U.S. Department of State, the government of Tajikistan placed a ban on wearing a hijab in schools and has enforced the law by expelling students and teachers from Tajik National University for wearing a hijab. “According to imams in Khujand, many parents kept their daughters from school rather than allow them to go without the hijab” (state.gov). Such policies can be damaging for the female population’s pursuit of education.

United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Tajikistan indicated that even though the primary education attendance was equally good for males and females, the location was a crucial factor for females in furthering their education. In rural areas, girls were kept at home after completion of their primary education (9 grades is the official Tajik requirement) to take over household responsibility or to work in agriculture (unicef.org). Currently, the World
Anastasia Kocher

Bank considers Tajikistan “very unlikely” to reach gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2015. In addition, there is an evident pattern of educational choices of study, where few women are entering technical fields, choosing the fields more commonly associated with a women’s domain such as education and social services.

Cross-Regional Findings

It is important to highlight key findings related to Central Asia, as a whole. The existing gender stereotypes emphasize women’s role as mothers and housewives, thus women spend much more time doing housework than men do. The traditional stereotypes and absence of the prior infrastructure that governed economic and social activity have reduced women’s participation in labor force over the nine selected years of 1991 through 2010. Women’s choice of the profession is limited also, to those that can be useful in family. Therefore, agriculture and the services sectors are the predominant source of employment for women in Central Asia. Industry does not represent an important sector for women’s employment in the Central Asian regions. In all five countries the data on women’s and men’s wages was not available. According to the information provided by nongovernmental organizations and scholars working in Central Asia, there is a wide earnings gap between women and men, as those women who are employed receive lower wages than men. The difference in income and wealth between the richest and poorest segments of society has grown between rural and urban areas in Central Asia. In addition to working in the lowest wage sectors, a significant proportion of women in Central Asian countries have no say with regard to ways in which their own cash earnings are being spent.

Overall, in Central Asia, women are poorly represented in political and decision-making areas. The average proportion of women in the lower or single houses of parliament increased in
Anastasia Kocher

selected years of inquiry, in Central Asia. However, women are underrepresented in national parliaments, and Central Asia has the lowest proportions of women among ministers worldwide. The quota system was introduced, but never implemented in Central Asia. There is a lack of awareness amongst women in Central Asia of their political rights and political decisions. Overall, cultural practices and traditional stereotypes prevent the public and women themselves from recognizing their leadership capabilities.

In addition to women’s participation in decision making within the political and economic spheres, education contributes to building a more prosperous, equitable and peaceful society. Whereas primary school enrolment rates remain generally high, with the exception of minority groups in remote areas of Central Asian countries, the quality of education has diminished and corruption of higher educational institutions has bloomed. Nearly all youth in the Central Asia region are literate. Despite the basic knowledge to read and write, there is still a large population of women in Central Asia who lack the knowledge and skills to participate actively in society. Most of the Central Asian schools and households do not have means to afford a computer, or, if they do have a computer, they lack Internet access. A dynamic educational system that utilizes the necessary knowledge of technologies helps students to adjust to always changing technological environment. The lack in technological advances, such as Internet use, put women at risk of being marginalized, leaving them without resources to attain potential opportunities. Access to education is only one side of women’s success in life, as the affordability of education remains a significant constraint for many women in Central Asia. There are no financial incentives, such as scholarships or grants, to assist poor students in attaining a university degree. The cost of education is disproportional to family’s income; this is especially true for the rural areas where people live for less than $1 a day. Reduced household
incomes throughout Central Asia due to rising poverty and the traditional view of men as a key breadwinner lower the chance of girls to continue their higher education. Central Asia lacks inclusive policies and programs in education to reach female students from disadvantaged rural areas.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The decades of Soviet rule had its positive influences of egalitarian practices in all five regions; yet, it also left countries in political stagnation. All five countries are described as presidential republics governed by power-craving autocratic rulers. Since 1991, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have yet to experience a transition in their leadership. Kazakhstan president Nursultan Nazarbayev, Tajikistan president Immomaly Rakhmonov, and Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov, assumed their power during the independence and continue their political career's today. It is hard to rely on the data provided by governments, where economic mismanagement, strict censorship, and control thrive inside the state and are main reasons for the deterioration of women's rights and stagnation in democracy building. Although principles of gender equality have been established in the law, all five of the constitutions lack a definition of discrimination. Governments do not encourage women empowerment, and implementation of already existing gender equality laws is weak.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, face their individual challenges since their independence. Yet, during my research, I was able to recognize their commonalities, which I ascribe to a shared political regime. Since independence, each Central Asian country has tried to define its national identity. So far, it has resulted in the deterioration of women's rights based on redefined cultural norms that prioritize women's role as a housewife.
and mother. This tendency is reinforced by poverty, political stagnation, and lack of a former
established system of child care and elder care institutions. In the words of former Director of
National Intelligence John D. Negroponte:

Central Asia remains plagued by political stagnation and repression, rampant corruption,
widespread poverty, and widening socio-economic inequalities...In the worst, but not
implausible, case central authority in one or more of these states could evaporate as rival
clans or regions vie for power-opening the door to an expansion of terrorist and criminal
activity on the model of failed states like Somalia and, when it was under Taliban rule,
Afghanistan.

How do We Improve the Status of Central Asian Women in the Future?

There is a clear need for the Central Asian governments to promote policies that
strengthen gender equality through various means, including legal and political reform, and
interventions to give women greater access to resources. It is vital for the whole Central Asian
region to confront social and family barriers that avert women from wider political, economic
and social participation.

To improve women’s status in Central Asia the state’s leadership in each country of focus
must provide a welcome atmosphere to external international agencies and organizations. With
the Soviet social security safety net no longer in place, Central Asian countries can benefit from
inviting women’s international organizations and advocacy groups. Various international
organizations are instrumental in providing material support, as well as organizational
mentoring, to encourage and assist in the establishment of women’s associations. Those
organizations will focus on encouraging women to be active participants in the political process
through seminars and workshops. The main objective of the seminars would rest in teaching
women the fundamentals of the political election process and also in providing workshops for election participants as candidates for public office, candidate assistants, election observers, and so forth. These activities would emphasize the development of leadership skills and building self-confidence for participation in the public arena, and help women become elected to political office. Furthermore, the international organization can bring a valuable expertise to foster a well formulated legislature relevant to women’s welfare and improvement in working conditions. Thus, involvement of the international communities in the Central Asian region can produce positive changes in women’s status at two levels: at the micro level where women can gain support and knowledge that gives them greater control over their position and well-being within the family, and at the macro level, where women can gain greater public recognition of their issues and their rights and gain increasing access to higher-level positions. This international involvement will help create an environment in which women can actually and fully exercise their fundamental rights of equality as it was proclaimed during the First World Conference of International Women’s Year, as early as 1975.

Policy Recommendations:

In order to achieve gender equality, where women enjoy equal opportunities as men and contribute to the social, economic, and political development of their countries, women must be aware of their rights and encouraged to participate in political and economic decision-making organizations. Some suggestions can be made, after the analyses of the women’s condition in three selected areas: employment, education, and women political representation.

1. Due to women’s domination in agriculture, we must ensure agricultural assistance in those rural areas, which have difficulty sustaining themselves. Provide women with the support
Anastasia Kocher

to develop managing skills in farming and agriculture. Promote and monitor gender equality in all sectors of employment. Implement the existing gender equity constitutional policy in practice.

2. Initiate gender focused organizations to promote gender education in schools for both the female and the male students to overcome gender stereotypes, which are present in all five of the Central Asian regions. Further integrate information on women’s labor rights issues, sex discrimination, and domestic violence into academia.

3. Promote women’s political participation at all levels of government: national, regional, and local. Recognize and train successful female candidates to become effective legislators. Utilize financial resources for pre-election and election campaigning. Embrace legislation aimed towards gender quotas.

Where do I go from here?

There is no short-term solution to the domestic situation for all five of the states, but raising women’s legal and political education could facilitate a major transformation in the right direction. I wish to bring change to the women’s status, but I face a challenge. The challenge in my research is beyond the mere understanding of the deterioration of women’s rights in Central Asia. My main goal is to make women aware that under the veil of searching for countries identity stands a simple desire of leaders, who are men, to control, dominate, and oppress their women. Almost everything that was prohibited during the Soviet era has been renewed and encouraged by the region’s governments on the grounds of returning their countries to their longstanding traditions, of which they were forcefully deprived by Soviets.

I recognize that my ultimate aim of improving the status of women in Central Asia is a long journey. It requires not only the awareness, involvement, and support of the international
women's advocacy groups and international organizations to start the desirable change in women status; but also, the change needs to come from women inside of the states themselves. Until women no longer accept and tolerate their current unstable situation, until they are no longer silent about domestic violence, until they no longer allow their daughters to be kidnapped every year and forced into marriage, until they no longer tolerate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, their rights will continue to decline.

My Honors Capstone project is a small part of a broader endeavor in the Central Asian political transition. Through my research, I have demonstrated that collapse of an authoritarian state is not necessarily going to bring a positive change to the independent countries. On the contrary, the assessment of women’s rights shows that the 1992 independence brought unexpected setbacks, in such areas like political representation, employment, and education, where women played a prominent role during the Soviet rule. Indeed, the breakup of the Soviet Union transformed the entire world's political situation, leading to a complete reformulation of political, economic and military alliances all over the globe. But it also brought an increasingly fragmented society, protracted political stagnation, socioeconomic instability, continual dictatorships, domestic conflicts, and corruption to the countries in Central Asia. My next step is to conduct field research in the five selected countries to develop an understanding of the political atmosphere, starting with the evaluation of political leaders, regimes, and existing and newly adopted laws. The study of the political atmosphere in Central Asia raises further questions. What are the prospects for Central Asian political transition? How long will the stagnation last? Is Central Asia destined to fail? Does active engagement from the West improve the current situation or should change be initiated domestically?
Works Cited

(I am having trouble when I am trying to indent the second line)

Anastasia Kocher


Concern Worldwide U.S. Inc. “Women’s Rights: Focus on Pakistan: How can we ensure that all women have equal access to their rights?” www.gcc.concernusa.org. Web. 3 June 2012.


Anastasia Kocher


Anastasia Kocher


