

*Localization of norms making: a comparative perspective on human rights, gender and ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*

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The aim of research is to analyze the ways local actors in transition countries adapt/localize external norms. All post-soviet countries experienced the process of adapting themselves to external norms that came in the wake of collapse of the soviet system. Yet the third component of the so-called triple transition (the change of ideology, besides market reforms and changes of political institutions) has been understudied and particularly in Central Asia. The region, which is foremost of all post-communist countries distant from the west, experienced transition and the process of acceptance of external norms in its own way.

This study looks at diffusion of selected norms in Central Asia in a comparative perspective. It looks at how ruling regimes and non-state actors in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the post-soviet period were adapting and localizing norms in areas of human rights, gender and ethnicity. Countries were selected on the basis of general proclivity to accept external norms – from Kyrgyzstan being the most acquiescent to the most defiant Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan being in the middle. Issue areas were selected on the basis of norm disputability – with it use gender it uses being the least and ethnicity being the most contentious arena, with human rights providing a selectively used collection of norms. The primary norms to look for on gender is whether women in power are viewed as a norm, on ethnicity – the norm of acceptance of ethnic diversity and presence of a minority, on human rights – whether a liberal notion of rights becomes a norm.

This research aims to contribute to the studies of transition countries even though the transition paradigm called to be ended (Carothers, 2002), how hybrid regimes function at the micro level, which menu of manipulation (Schedler, 2002), or discursive strategies (Shatz, 2009) it uses. It also adds to the study of diffusion of norms and adds to localization of norms by local actors (Acharya, 2004), but looks, unlike many studies in this area, not from an international, but from a domestic perspective.

The units of analysis for this study are the formal normative statements/commitments as well as official rhetoric of political leaders. These would indicate formal recognition as well as framing of norms by political regimes. This part of the study would be done by collecting and analyzing normative acts (signed and ratified treaties, as well as national laws), as well as content analysis of speeches of presidents. Besides normative and official rhetoric, actions of non-state actors (civil society organizations) would be analyzed through interviews and study of secondary literature.

As a result it is expected that this study would produce a nuanced analysis of change of norms by state and non-state actors in different (country/regime specific) circumstances and would not only contribute to studies of norm diffusion and particularly how it takes place in Central Asia, but also would provide better understanding how norm entrepreneurs (including democracy promotion actors) should effectively work.