

Islamic radicalization in Central Asia is not one-dimensional, scholar says

January 19 2017, by George Diepenbrock

As Turkish authorities have arrested an Uzbek man as the alleged gunman accused of killing 39 people on New Year's Day at an [Istanbul nightclub](#), a University of Kansas researcher who studies Central Asia said it would be a mistake in response to view Islamic radicalization as one-dimensional in the former Soviet states. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, claimed responsibility for the mass shooting.

Mariya Omelicheva, associate professor of political science, is available to discuss issues surrounding religion and the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia. Omelicheva's broad research focuses on international relations, [security](#) policy, state security and human rights, and Russian foreign policy. She has authored several recent [articles](#) and [essays](#) on politics in Central Asia.

"While Central Asian republics are second only to the Middle Eastern states in terms of the numbers of those who left their countries to join the ISIS as foreign fighters, the events like the one in Turkey grossly exaggerate the extent to what Central Asian Muslims are prone to radicalization," Omelicheva said. "Further, they perpetuate the narrative of Islam as a violent and dangerous force. The reality of Islamism in Central Asia and other parts of the world is more complex, and the [authoritarian governments](#) in the region are an important part of the 'radicalization' processes."

She said instead of focusing on security solutions in response, the international community could seek to better understand issues Muslims

in Central Asia face daily, especially living under authoritarian regimes.

"The narratives of radical Islam call for security policies, which further violate religious rights and are, therefore, counterproductive," Omelicheva said. "A better approach would be the one that addresses the complex root causes of political violence and calls on the Central Asian governments to desist from tightening individual freedoms under the pretext of countering religious extremism."

Provided by University of Kansas

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