

## **Mahalla-Based Dispute Resolution in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan: Where are the “White Beards” and How are Disputes Now Processed in their Absence?**

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Up until the mid-1900s the two mahallas in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan were self-governed by respected *oqsoqols* (literally “white beard” or male elders) who planned community events; organized service projects; and resolved disputes. Today, however, these mahalla committees of respected elders no longer exist. With the global promotion of democracy and the rule of law one might think that in the absence of community *oqsoqols* people now take disputes to lawyers for advice and state courts for adjudication. This, however, does not appear to be the case.

Therefore, the author’s current research in Tokmok asks why people no longer take disputes to community elders (e.g. globalization, ethnic diversification) and how they process disputes in their absence. It asks whether and to what extent people seek advice or help from other state (aksakal courts and neighborhood police), community (block and diaspora committees), and male (*domla*) and female (*otin*) religious leaders. It also asks to what extent people do nothing or resolve disputes without the advice or help of third parties. To gather this information the author will conduct oral histories about the former mahalla *oqsoqols*; semi-structure interviews with a stratified sample of the state, community, and religious leaders mentioned above; and a structured survey of a random representative sample of the people in the two mahallas. The preliminary results of this study will be presented at the CASI conference.

A better understanding of why historical dispute resolution processes no longer exist and what takes their place will contribute to Central Asian studies and help inform the design of rule of law projects in the region. Understanding whether and how Muslim leaders help process disputes will also contribute to the literature on the diversity and revival of Islam in Central Asia.