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RESEARCH CENTER  
FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
KYRGYZSTAN



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# **RADICALISM ONLINE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEANINGS, IDEAS, AND VALUES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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## List of abbreviations

CA	- Central Asia
CIS	- Commonwealth of Independent States
COVID-19	- Novel coronavirus disease of 2019
CSTO	- Collective Security Treaty Organization
IS/ISIL/Daesh	- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KR	- Kyrgyz Republic
KZ	- Kazakhstan
NGOs	- Non-government organizations
OSCE	- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
IRPT	- Islamic Renaissance of Party of the Tajikistan
PVE / CVE	- Preventing / Countering Violent Extremism
RF	- Russian Federation
RT	- Republic of Tajikistan
UNDP	- UN Development Program
VE	- Violent Extremism

## Key definitions<sup>1</sup>

**Banned Extremist groups** are organizations against which there is a court decision to ban activities in the territory of one of the Central Asian States.

**Communication strategy** includes a description of all participants, conditions and communication mechanisms between stakeholders and the audience. It is a set of actions and tools to achieve communicative goals.

**Communication** is the process of transmitting information from the sender to the recipient through an environment in which the information transmitted is equally understood by both participants. A significant piece of information is called content, and the result of the transmission process is a message.

**Narratives** are a set of ideas, facts, concepts, and experiences that reflect how a person or group of people perceive their place in<sup>2</sup> the world around them. In the field of humanities, narratives are events that have been “selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience<sup>3</sup>.”

**Violent Extremist Narratives** – are not clearly defined among sociologists and experts in the field, and very often are broadly defined as narratives disseminated by radical organizations. Studies that examine the narratives of violent groups highlight the differences between meta-narratives or master narratives (related to cultural identity) and “mono-myths”<sup>4</sup>.

**Ronald Denaux and Jose Manuel Gomez-Perez (2019) propose to classify the narratives of extremist and terrorist groups as follows<sup>5</sup>** (2019) предлагают классифицировать нарративы экстремистских и террористических групп следующим образом:

- Cultural narratives represent cultural identity and are based on tradition<sup>6</sup>. Such narratives are aimed at a wide audience<sup>7</sup>;
- Strategic narratives represent group identity and are based on ideology and correspond to meso-level radicalization<sup>8</sup>;
- Local and individual narratives are stories about specific places and people; they correspond to radicalization at the micro level<sup>9</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> The concepts used are proposed by the research team and are relevant to the work of this study. The proposed concept device may not be relevant to use under other conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Lena Slachmuislder, “Transformation of Violent Extremism: The Peacemaker’s Leadership “Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide Washington, D.C.: “Finding Common Ground” (2017), page 8, <https://www.sfcg.org/Wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Transforming-Violent-Extremism-V2-August-2017.Pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Riessman, Catherine Kohler, Narrative Analysis. In: Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield (2005), pp. 1-7, [http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4920/2/Chapter\\_1\\_-\\_Catherine\\_Kohler\\_Riessman.pdf](http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4920/2/Chapter_1_-_Catherine_Kohler_Riessman.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> WANA Institute, 2017, From Blades to Brains, New Battleground.

<sup>5</sup> Denaux Ronald, Jose Manuel G´omez-P´erez, 2019 Textual Analysis for Radicalisation Narratives aligned with Social Sciences Perspectives.

<sup>6</sup> Such narratives imply specific stories from the history of Islam (e.g., popular stories among modern mujahideen about the Prophet’s early battles for the triumph of Islam, or the rewards promised to the martyrs/shahids). In the case of studying the texts of the radicals of CA, it is important to keep in mind that such stories are designed to give sacred meaning to the actions of radicals, to remove the natural physiological fear of death by the promise of reward in paradise, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Cind Du Bois. Literature Review on Radicalisation. Technical Report October, TRIVALENT, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> A set of critical texts and strategies, understandable in a narrow circle of ideologues of the radical group. Including when building narratives and arguments that discredit “others” (competitors, infidels, bad politicians, etc.)

<sup>9</sup> This is mainly about the use of the strategy of radicals who try to use the personal problems of those involved in groups of violent extremists.

**Violent extremism** is the beliefs and actions of people who promote, support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political goals.

According to a study by the Civil Initiative on Internet Policy (CIIP) and the SecDev Group<sup>10</sup>, the legislative definitions of extremism in the four Central Asian countries include: forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional order, violation of the territorial integrity of the country, incitement to hostility (discord), and the hatred and humiliation of human dignity based on race, nationality, religious affiliation or membership of a certain social group.

**Online radicalization** to violence is a process in which a person is drawn into a system of ideological messages and beliefs that differs from the generally accepted belief system through extremist views, mainly by the use of online media<sup>11</sup>.

**Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)** is an activity aimed at persuading individuals or groups to reject radicalization and recruitment by violent extremists and from using ideologically motivated violence to achieve social, economic, religious, or political goals<sup>12</sup>.

**Radicalization** is a process by which an individual or group of people begins to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies<sup>13</sup>.

**Vulnerability to radicalization** is a condition arising from personal risk and protective factors that can make a person more susceptible to the “driving forces of violent extremism” at the community level and, ultimately, to radicalization that leads to violent extremism<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> CIIP, the SecDevGroup, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2018), [http://157.230.24.116/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online\\_public\\_rus.pdf](http://157.230.24.116/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online_public_rus.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> .S. Department of Justice, Online Radicalization to Violent Extremism (2013), <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/RadicalizationtoViolentExtremismAwarenessBrief.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Search for Common Ground, Hedaya, Countering Violent Extremism: An introductory guide to concepts, development programs and best practices/ Adapted for the Central Asian region, (2019) [https://www.sfcg.org/countering-violent-extremism/SFCG-Countering\\_Violent\\_Extremism-An\\_Introductory\\_Guide\\_Russian.Pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/countering-violent-extremism/SFCG-Countering_Violent_Extremism-An_Introductory_Guide_Russian.Pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

# Glossary

**Ajami (Ajams)** – are non-Arabic-origin Muslims.

**Amir** – (Arab: commander, chief, head). In the studied content attached to the heads of armed groups of 20 and up to 100 people.

**Wahhabism** – is an ideological and theological doctrine founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). In the last three decades, it was fueled by petrodollars from private foundations of Gulf states. The most radical wing of this anti-modernist ideology advocates a return of the Ummah to strict adherence to Shariah principles.

**Da'wah/Da'wat** – From the dictionary means “invitation, appeal, the public proclamation” (meaning calling people to embrace Islam). The studied content is used as “propaganda” in the context of propaganda and the legitimization of jihad.

**Dar al-Zulm** – (Arabic: Territory of oppression.) A territory where Muslims are persecuted. In the studied content, it is attached to the countries of Central Asia, Russia and Europe. The only condition for transforming Dar al-Zulm into Dar al-Islam is the Shariah governance's imposition instead of authoritarian or democratic rule.

**Dar al-Harb** – (Arabic lit. territory of war.) It refers to the territory where a war goes against the Muslims.

**Jihad** – (Arabic: effort, zeal). According to hadiths, there were two types of jihad: “Great Jihad (against one's profane attachments, mastering knowledge of Islam, etc.); “Minor Jihad,” understood as a war against non-Muslims. In the studied content, it is used mainly in the meaning of the fight against apostates (munafiq), “democratic regimes” and those who do not support the ideology of the mujahedin.

**Ibn Hanbal** – Abū'AbdillāhA'mad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal Ash-Shaybānī (780-875) was the founder and eponym of the Hanbali madhab. For the propagandists of the violent extremism, his works (“Musnad” commentaries on the Qur'an, works on fiqh, anti-Mu'tazilite refutations, etc.) are viral for confirmation of their arguments, including as a justification “the obligation of universal jihad” for modern Muslims.

**Kafir** – (Arabic: infidel). Applied to members of other faiths, atheists, and rationalists. The derivation of “takfir” denotes ex-communication from Islam. The Muslim who violates basic the dogmatic or legal precepts.

**Madhab** – (Arabic: method, way). It is commonly related to theological and legal schools (e.g., Sunni) and major offshoots (e.g., Shi'ism).

**Mujahid** (pl. mujahidin) – It is a warrior fighting against “infidels” or defending the Dar al-Islam. In the studied content, it is attached to armed groups involved in conflicts or to lone terrorists.

**Murtad** – (Arabic: apostate). This is applied to believers who deviate from Shariah norms, preferring to combine them with “national customs” or holidays borrowed from other traditions.

**Munofiqlar** (Arabic: apostates, hypocrites). These are Muslims who do not follow all the ritual and dogmatic precepts of Islam or do not support jihad and refuse to recognize its religious legitimacy. The texts also relate to imams of officially opened mosques and politicians.

**Salafism** is a fundamentalist Sunni movement, very heterogeneous in composition, which preaches a return to the way of life of the “pious ancestors” (as-salaf as-salihun) or the “golden era” of the Prophet and his closest associates. Modern scholars of Salafism usually divide Salafism into three streams:

- A) The Quietists (who make up the majority), who adhere to the principle of “at-tasfiyawatarbiya” (purification and education). This principle is directed toward “purification of religion from innovations (bid’at),” to return to the religion of the time of the Prophet, as well as renounce their customs, including national ones.
- B) Political Salafism is a militant and political understanding of Islam. The strategic line of activity is creating political parties, trade unions, and Islamic associations to peacefully gain power or put pressure on authorities in case of an electoral preponderance of Muslims. The modern tool of propaganda is understood as politics;
- C) Jihadism or revolutionary Salafism. The only way to spread the victory of Islam is in a war in the name of Allah.

**Sunnah** – is the combination of the Prophet’s words and deeds that inspire every Muslim. The term is sometimes applied to the entire body of Sunni theological texts.

**Takfir** – The accusation of disbelief (“kufir”).

**Taghut** – is a Qur’anic term (Nahl, 36; Zumar: 17-18), meaning a misleading idol. In texts, it is attached to presidents, officials, loyal imams, and theologians.

**Ustoz**– (The teacher) – The nickname of propagandists in virtual space as related to famous propagandists’ names and nicknames.

**Fard al-’ayn** – (Arabic: obvious prescription/obligation). It refers to dogmatic and ritual injunctions, such as recognizing monotheism, the Prophet’s status, daily prayers, etc. The studied content qualifies jihad as “F-’a,” while Hanafi theologians consider it “Fard al-kifaya” - an obligation that only a part of the community is sufficient to fulfil.

**Hijratwa-al-jihad** – is immigration from one’s home country to join the jihad for religious reasons.

**Hukm** – is a theological and legal solution to any issue of faith, personal, family, social life, and the political sphere.

**Shahid** – The one who died in jihad.

## Research Summary

The Centre for Religious Studies of Kyrgyzstan conducted a study of values/meanings, ideas and views, messages of content created and distributed online by banned extremist groups among the local communities of the Central Asian region.

The centre conducted a desk analysis, a content analysis of 1,610,164 messages containing religious rhetoric, and a field study of 4,005 respondents.

The study provides insight into the meanings and ideas of the messages of radical Islam preachers, the target audience and the channels for the dissemination of messages of protagonists of violent extremism, the impact of their ideas on the target audience, as well as the possible direction of communication strategies to counter the spread of radical ideas.

### *Ideas, meanings, and content of radical messages*

Radical messages account for 0.56% of the total public information field devoted to understanding and professing Islam.

Radical group messages are not intended for an unprepared user. They abound in specific, difficult-to-understand terms that are too complex for an unprepared audience when seeing such content for the first time. Thus, the information space formed by followers of radical ideas is not a place of primary radicalization. Instead, such information space reinforces and deepens the commitment to these ideas of those users who have already received enough information to understand these messages and have a certain life experience that makes them sympathize with the ideas of radicals.

The information space of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is influenced by the ideas of the same protagonists of Islam, while in the case of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, their local country content has more influence.

The study made other important observations to assess the real effectiveness of measures used by the governments in Central Asia (CA) to counter the spread of radical ideas in cyberspace. The prohibitive measures they used (blocking violent extremist sites and channels, restrictions on their access, etc.) are ineffective, as the ability of modern electronic means to deliver information is variable.

Moreover, the attempts of “theological answers and refutations” used in their channels and websites by independent theologians and so-called “state mullahs” in the dispute with radicals also show that “forbidden information” is readily available to them and their audiences. This means that violent extremist channel

*Only 0.56% of messages containing religious rhetoric have radical meanings.*

*All messages by radical propagandists have a common ideological orientation, inscribed in the socio-economic and socio-political context of each country in the region.*

administrators are fully integrated into the global network system and have developed multi-channel access strategies for potential recipients (e.g., through duplicate channels in various platforms, chat rooms, personal messages, reposts, etc.). Consequently, the general public retains access to information of radicality, contrary to prohibitive measures.

On the other hand, prohibitions make it difficult for researchers and responsible agencies to control networks, specifically, the necessary monitoring of the dynamics of message meanings, the dynamics of visitor growth, the properties of comments, etc., necessary to develop evidence-based communication strategies for countering violent extremism (CVE).

All of the extremist groups' messages have a standard ideological orientation and promote purity of faith, mutual assistance to fellow believers, a fight against infidels and apostates, a rejection of secular power and its decisions, the desire to create a caliphate and anti-Semitism. A common trend is to support the existence of a world-wide conspiracy theory and calls to resist it.

The denial of traditional and other secular "pro-Western" values is another common trend for all messages.

The reports of representatives of radical groups have a direct connection with a country's socio-political and socio-economic context. Thus, in Kazakhstan, such context is an inter-ethnic confrontation. In Kyrgyzstan, radical groups call to ignore elections and fight against civil society institutions. In Tajikistan, they call to protect their fellow citizens in other countries. In Uzbekistan, the peculiarities of the country context are in the calls for immigration on religious grounds, justification for the need to destroy traditional relationships at the family level and justification for past defeats of radical groups that may indicate doubts about the success of the doctrine among the target audience.

#### *Target audience and channels for receiving information*

According to the desk study, the main target audience of distributors of radical content is young people aged 18-30. The risk of engaging with radical content does not depend on the gender or place of residence of the target audience but depends on the level of education and occupation.

Advocates of radical ideas duplicate their messages and use as many resources as possible to disseminate them. Each resource has a moderated discussion, saturated with religious, social, and political narratives, which illustrate teamwork and the presence of many assistants.

According to the *automated content analysis*, the popularity of online platforms, where radical religious content (not necessarily calling for violence) and the language of hostility vary from

*The interest of propagandists lies in both the personal participation of the target audience in their actions and in the search for financial and social support.*

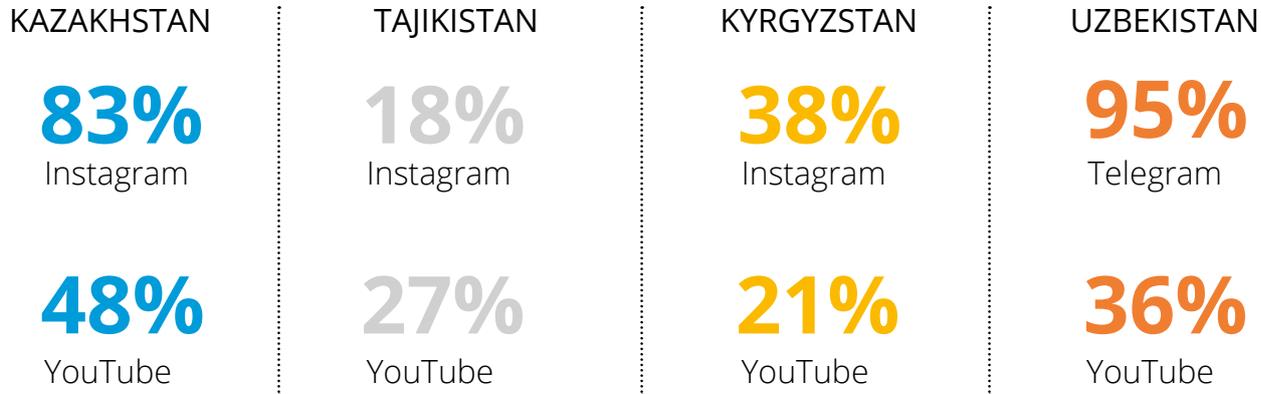
country to country. The most popular social media sites in Tajikistan are Facebook (56%) and Odnoklassniki (OK) (37%); in Kazakhstan: Vkontakte (74%) and Facebook (20%); in Kyrgyzstan: Facebook (48%) and Odnoklassniki (28%); in Uzbekistan: Facebook (55%) and Odnoklassniki (37%); and in Turkmenistan: Vkontakte (37%), Odnoklassniki (28%) and Facebook (25%)<sup>15</sup>. This does not mean that recipients only visit one channel. Visits are more dynamic and depend on the most simplified and complete access.

Field research found social networks such as Instagram and YouTube are the most used platforms among young users from Kazakhstan (Instagram: 83%, YouTube: 48%), Tajikistan (Instagram: 18%, YouTube: 27%), and Kyrgyzstan (Instagram: 38%, YouTube: 21%). YouTube is the second most popular social network in Uzbekistan (36%), but the most popular social network in Uzbekistan is Telegram at 95%.

Russian is the preferred language of obtaining information in Kazakhstan (53%), and Kyrgyzstan (54%), while respondents from Uzbekistan (88%) said it was important for them to receive information in Uzbek, and respondents from Tajikistan give equal preference to Tajik (31%) and Russian (32%) for receiving information.

Young people in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan prefer to receive information from neighbors and loved ones – in-person communication – while Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan youths receive more information from social networks and news portals. Television remains one of the sources of information, but over time, its popularity has waned.

Table 1. Frequently used social networks in Central Asia



<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that after the secondary purge of content in Turkmenistan, 120 messages remained, and manual processing showed almost no NE content produced in Turkmen in the country itself. The above percentages belong to 120 publications that contain religious, sometimes radical, content.

In all four countries where the survey was conducted, the most common reasons for using social media are (1) communication with friends and/or family, (2) reviewing the news and (3) watching videos.

According to the data collected, users in all four countries value information content the most. However, there are some differences between the countries. For example, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan they consider information about family and friends (26%) to be more valuable, while in Kazakhstan they value educational content more (38%).

WhatsApp messenger was the most popular communication app among respondents from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Uzbekistan, Telegram is the most popular app, while in Tajikistan – among various messengers – the most used app for video communication was Imo, which is similar to Skype. Imo is also popular in Turkmenistan.

#### *Values of youth and influence of the ideological attitudes of the protagonists of radical Islam*

**Compassion and complicity, as well as a sense of justice, are values that radical propagandists widely use.**

Field research and content analysis reveal that radical preachers have a wide enough audience to disseminate their messages and recruit among the minority of the population who feel their justice and security have been violated.

The field research also demonstrated that the most vulnerable target audience is young people ages 18-21, regardless of gender or place of residence. The level of education can also be a factor in the number of sympathetic youths joining, as people with only secondary education are more likely to trust their elders, especially if their parents or relatives themselves promote such ideas or demonstrate a high level of tolerance for them.

Young people in older age groups (up to 35 years old) may also be of some interest to the propagandists of violent extremism because they have already reached a certain level of financial independence. A part of this audience that has embraced violent extremism can provide financial support toward the implementation of radical ideas.

**Local media activity on social media can significantly reduce the target audience for promoters of radical content.**

A low level of commitment to the values of personal development and self-affirmation, the preference for group and social values over the personal, and the belief that faith in God is an indicator of a young person's success open the way for those individuals to accept the ideas of preachers of violent extremism. The large number of messages, ideas and narratives identified in the first chapter is aimed at arousing feelings of compassion, inducing the protection of the neighbour by supporting the ideas of radical Islam, and abandoning the personal benefit of the group by supporting radical groups.

*Conceptual frameworks for strategies to respond to the messages of radical propagandists through the media*

The conceptual strategies of radical Islam's propagandists are systematic, thoughtful, and in no way a spontaneous response to existing challenges. Evidence that radical propagandists track the official information environment and stay ahead of it through counterarguments is a clear indication that national and regional media, with their standardized approaches, policies, and principles, cannot be key players in implementing counter-propaganda strategies. Rather, their role is in creating a positive background information space, exposing conspiracy theories, and fighting for an audience that should perceive them with having a measure of credibility.

Given the concentration of violent extremism propagandists and their narrow target group, it seems that increased representation, dynamism, and the attraction of local media using social media can significantly dissipate the target audience who is exposed to their ideas. Discussion of local news and consumption of local entertainment and educational content can divert the attention of potential consumers of radical content.

An analysis of the recruitment technologies and the value-psychological foundations of radical propaganda, strengthening communication strategies of local governments, and public organizations providing diverse services to the population (including protection of rights and psychological assistance) can compete with propagandists of radical content and significantly reduce the number of potential consumers involved.

***Strengthening communication between local governments and community organizations is critical to prevent young people from being involved in radical ideas.***

# Introduction

The vulnerability of Central Asian countries to violent extremism is still a pressing problem<sup>16</sup>. The absence of well-established democratic institutions and public consciousness lead to a public search for radical solutions to these crises. The post-Soviet development of all countries in the region is characterized by the presence of many natural systemic crises, expressed in corruption, political clannishness and tribalism, a desire for authoritarianism, biased justice, economic recession, and a general decline in the standard of living of the population. The absence of stable democratic institutions and public consciousness leads to a public search for radical solutions to these crises. This either results in a series of prolonged political instability, entailing social and economic turmoil and a threat to security, or to conserve the political system in the regime of regional authoritarianism. However, even with external stability, authoritarianism also carries the same vices as development: corruption, tribalism, restriction of freedoms, inequality, and injustice.

Such a situation, given the dominance of traditional values in society, is fraught with public disillusionment with the values of the democratic system and the secular nature of the state. An acceptable, or maybe the only, alternative to such a political system may be the Islamization of society and the state in the eyes of society. An example of such a social movement seeking an alternative to secular development is the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979<sup>17</sup>.

The vulnerability of the Central Asian countries is caused by the possibility of external ideological and informational influence on the citizens of these republics through large migration flows. Migrant workers, like other vulnerable groups who fall into actual social, cultural, linguistic, and religious exclusion, are a very convenient target of radical religious propaganda<sup>18</sup>.

Another factor in the radical Islamization of the region is the influence of the unstable situation in Afghanistan and the threat of terrorist activities emanating from there against the Central Asian states<sup>19</sup>. In Afghanistan itself, ISIS is challenging the Taliban and/or the Afghan government to gain control of various territories, leading to yet another potential line of conflict and violence<sup>20</sup>. Afghanistan remains unstable, gaining control of the Taliban and other factions, and will remain a source of serious security concern for all Central Asian states<sup>21</sup>.

With the development of information and communication technologies, the internet and messaging applications became the main space for promotion of religious messages, including radical ones. At the same time, the information space of the Internet

<sup>16</sup> Steve Swerdlow. Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to the Prevention of Violent Extremism. Case Study: Central Asia, October 2019, UNDP.

<sup>17</sup> The Islamic Revolution in Iran: Past, Present, Future., Collection of Articles, M., Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1999, - 214 s.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix Desk Analysis.

<sup>19</sup> Arkadiy Savitsky, "ISIS in Afghanistan: Central Asia Faces Risk of Spillover," Strategic Culture, July 2018. At: <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2018/07/26/isis-afghanistan-central-asia-faces-risk-spillover.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)", CSIS, 2018: <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threatsproject/terrorism-backgrounders/islamic-state-khorasan-k>.

<sup>21</sup> Situation in the northern regions of Afghanistan: Risk and Threat Analysis for Central Asia (28/09/2020) Url: <https://cacds.org.Ua/?p=9643> The future of radical groups in Afghanistan inter-Afghan peace process. Url: <https://cabar.asia/ru/budushhee-radikalnyh-grupp-v-afganistane-v-usloviyah-mezhafganskogo-mirnogo-protsesta/>.

is used not only as a tool to promote ideology and recruit followers, but also as an information platform for coordinating their radical activities, mobilizing, and consolidating sympathizers.

Thus, the problems of preventing and countering violent extremism and promoting violent content online are gaining more and more relevance for the countries of Central Asia. Despite the intensification of the efforts of the international community to counter violent extremism and the removal of relevant content on the World Wide Web, the issues of countering extremism online increasingly gain momentum<sup>22</sup>. The latest SecDev study notes that despite monitoring by social platforms and governments, violent extremism (VE) content can still be found in social media in Central Asia. From August to October of 2018, the SecDev's analysts identified 140 Central Asian social media accounts actively distributing VE content to more than 324,000 subscribers<sup>23</sup>.

Recommendations of international organizations emphasize the ineffectiveness of the practice of blocking and removing VE content. As Christina Archetti points out, the narrative is not just a story; it is a story that is constantly being retold. The assumption that the spread of radical narratives can be stopped by interfering with the group's communication channels is based on the idea that the story is told unilaterally<sup>24</sup>. There are too many channels to stop the spread. The author also notes that narratives are only partly promoted by the leadership of organizations; the reason it continues to exist is that it is constantly retold and republished by a wider audience<sup>25</sup>.

Although there is significant research on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in Central Asia, the direct narratives of these groups, the values they convey, and what resonates with the population, why these narratives are beginning to be relayed by the audience all remain to be studied very little. Of course, we can assume some things based on an understanding the drivers of radicalization, but this does not give the full picture. Moreover, it cannot be considered sufficient for the development of appropriate counter- and alternative narratives. A clearer understanding of how this process is carried out, what values are transmitted and received a response, will help to develop more grounded policies and practices, a communication strategy to counter the information spread of religious extremism in the region.

This is exactly what the project "Strengthening Resistance to Radicalization and Disinformation in Central Asia" is aimed at, within the framework of which this study was conducted.

## Project information

The project "Strengthening Resilience to Radicalization and Disinformation in Central Asia" is being implemented by Internews in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan with financial support from the European Union. The main goal of the project is to help strengthen citizens' resilience to radicalization and disin-

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Lee Countering Violent Extremism Online: The Experiences of Informal Counter Messaging Actors, 11 July 2019, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/poi3.210>.

<sup>23</sup> Sec Dev, VE in Central Asian cyberspace: A survey of digital violent extremism in Central Asia, SecDev/Насильственный экстремизм в Центральной Азии (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Archetti, C. (2017) "Narrative Wars: Understanding Terrorism in the Era of Global Interconnectedness," in A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, and L. Roselle (eds) Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 218-245. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269\\_Narrative\\_wars\\_Understanding\\_terrorism\\_in\\_the\\_era\\_of\\_global\\_interconnectedness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269_Narrative_wars_Understanding_terrorism_in_the_era_of_global_interconnectedness)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

formation leading to violent extremism by supporting the media, civil society, government institutions, religious leaders, and active citizens in Central Asia.

In order to develop relevant communication strategies for responding to radical content in Central Asian countries, Internews commissioned the Center for Religious Studies (Kyrgyzstan) to study the problems of radicalization leading to violent extremism in the countries of the region. This study builds on the results and recommendations of two regional studies carried out as part of the completed project "Promoting Peace and Stability in Central Asia," which was implemented from 2018-2019<sup>26</sup>.

## The purpose of the study

*The purpose of this study* is to explore the meanings, ideas and views, messages, and content created and disseminated online by banned extremist groups among the local communities of the Central Asian region.

## Research tasks

Based on the purpose of the study, the objectives are:

1. Determining and assessing the views, concepts, ideas, values and content disseminated by banned extremist organizations on the Internet and receiving the greatest response from young people in Central Asia;
2. Analysing the sources of distribution and language of radical ideology at the local level: content in local languages (Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Russian) and on an external global level mixed and disseminated on social networks and messengers. Exploring the communication concepts of radical groups, including communication channels and instant messaging applications aimed at Central Asian audiences;
3. Analysing the language of hostility and hatred spread by radical groups. Examining the role of hate speech and hatred in the radicalization of young people in Central Asia;
4. Analysing the involvement of young people in the controversy and discussion of the calls of banned radical groups on social networks, instant messengers, and instant messaging applications. Looking at what questions are asked and what questions are being discussed.

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<sup>26</sup> "Information flows and radicalization leading to violent extremism in Central Asia". «Violent extremism in Central Asia»

# Methodology

An interest in narratives stems from the growing awareness that neither terrorism nor the fight against it are limited to material and military aspects, but take place in the field of communication, perception, and persuasion<sup>27</sup>. David Betz, examining the struggle between Western democracies and al-Qaeda, says the “global war on terror” includes, along with military action, “a virtual information space in which warring parties fight with words and images to create strategic narratives that are more convincing than the narratives of the other side, and better structure the reaction of others to developments”<sup>28</sup>. This approach has led to the development of theories explaining the phenomena of violent extremism and radicalization<sup>29</sup>. While no single theory can explain all radicals, understanding the multiple theoretical causes helps to understand the motives, behaviour, and worldview of this population group much more than the simplistic notion that they are “irrational actors with clinical psychological problems.”<sup>30</sup>.

Experts identify three of the most promising theories<sup>31</sup>: the theory of social movements, social psychology, and conversion. Social psychology explains the interaction within already established groups and organizations. Conversion theory, widely used in religious studies to understand conversion to new religious movements, sees this process more as a spiritual and religious quest. The theory of new social movements examines the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the formation of movements, their construction and dissemination of meanings or frames that excite the audience and their acceptance of these narratives.

Based on the research objectives, the latter theory was selected as the main conceptual framework for the study. In relation to the research topic, this helped to focus on the ideas, values, and communication practices of extremist organizations. That is, extremist narratives in this case were seen as deliberate efforts by extremist groups to promote their own identity in the region. Social movement theory also provides a framework for the further development of relevant communication strategies. So, in relation to a given project task, the greatest reaction or response to a message (frame) is obtained when they correlate with the preferences and aspirations of an individual or a group – value orientations – of a specific audience. This statement is also key in developing PVE communication strategies. Recommendations for the development of alternative and counter-narratives also point out that “it is important to create a narrative not only by relying on what emotions it evokes, but also by conveying certain values”<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Archetti, C. (2017) “Narrative Wars: Understanding Terrorism in the Era of Global Interconnectedness,” in A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, and L. Roselle (eds) *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 218-245. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269\\_Narrative\\_wars\\_Understanding\\_terrorism\\_in\\_the\\_era\\_of\\_global\\_interconnectedness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269_Narrative_wars_Understanding_terrorism_in_the_era_of_global_interconnectedness).

<sup>28</sup> Betz, D. (2008) “The Virtual dimension of Contemporary Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 19(4): 510-540. P.510. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233096326\\_The\\_Virtual\\_Dimension\\_of\\_Contemporary\\_Insurgency\\_and\\_Counterinsurgency](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233096326_The_Virtual_Dimension_of_Contemporary_Insurgency_and_Counterinsurgency).

<sup>29</sup> C. Crossett and J. Spitaletta, *Radicalization: Relevant psychological and sociological concepts* (Ft. Meade, MD: U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, September 2010), 10. <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-RadicalizationConcepts.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Там же.

<sup>31</sup> Borum, Randy. “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories.” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2012): : 7-36. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1/>.

<sup>32</sup> Исследование альтернативных и контрнарративов в медиапространстве Кыргызстана. ГИИП, 2019 - <https://internetpolicy.kg/2019/06/29/issledovanie-alternativnyh-i-kontr-narrativov-v-media-prostranstve-kyrgyzstana/>.

The limitation of the framing model is that the theory focuses on the social movement and those who create the recruiting framework and does not fully assess the causes at the individual level. This theory does not explain why some people are more committed to the ideologies of extremist movements, and others are not and requires further psychological analysis. As a result, the objectives of this study do not include an attempt to answer the question of why the majority does not radicalize toward violent extremism, given the same drivers of radicalization.<sup>33</sup> Таким образом, в задачи данного исследования не входит попытка ответить на вопрос, почему при одинаковых драйверах радикализации, большинство не радикализируется в сторону насильственного экстремизма.

To achieve the study's objectives, the implementing partner, the Research Center for Religious Studies (Kyrgyzstan), collected and analysed data in five Central Asian countries over the course of 10 months during 2020.

The following basic research and analysis methods were applied:

- **The desk analysis included a** review of studies already conducted on this topic in the period from January 1, 2019 to April 1, 2020;
- **The content analysis of online platforms**, through which key narratives (ideas and values) were identified, broadcasted by VE organizations and individuals in the social space of Central Asia. Content analysis combined an automated one, using the Brand analytics system, and qualitative analysis (case analysis / case study). The automated one made it possible to collect data in terms of keywords, qualitative data to analyze and determine the values broadcast by violent extremist groups, videos, blogger posts and official appeals that gained the greatest response and popularity, as well as comments to them in six languages (Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen). Content analysis included publications for the period from January 1, 2019 to May 1, 2020. In addition, closed groups and terrorist sites that could be accessed were separately studied;
- **Field research.** The definition of the value orientation of Central Asian youth was obtained through a survey of the region's population in the 18-35 age range. In addition, the objectives of the survey were to identify the media preferences of young people in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A total of 4,000 people were surveyed. Turkmenistan was not included in the field study due to the specifics of the political situation in the country.

## Desk analysis

The desk analysis was mainly carried out by examining available online publications on the topic of research<sup>34</sup>. In particular, the websites of international and research organizations, which in recent years have implemented projects that in one way or another touch on the issues of violent extremism and terrorism in the region, were reviewed. Source materials were selected from materials published between January 1, 2019, and April 1, 2020. However, in the conditions of countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan), where this area was less studied – and based on expediency – the review includes works that go beyond the specified time frame.

<sup>33</sup> Wheelans C. (2016), Analyses of Government Responses to Stem the Flow of Foreign Fighters. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:930091/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> The use of mainly online sources was dictated by the introduction of quarantine and restriction of movement associated with the proliferation of COVID-19.

The material was identified by means of a keyword search, selected based on the experience of experts, and the “snowball” method was also used, (i.e., tracking citations in the literature) referring to site recommendations (articles on similar topics). For the purposes of this review, any article related to PVE has been included regardless of the specific definition of violent extremism adopted. In addition, the authors consulted libraries on countering violent extremism from various research institutions such as RAN, Hedayah, ICCT, RUSI, and others.

The study included an analysis of existing studies on the following topics:

- The threat of violent extremism in CA;
- Drivers of radicalization leading to violence in CA;
- Banned extremist groups in CA;
- VE’s narratives: meanings, messages and values;
- Authors/audience of the sender and communication channels;
- A review of CA’s public policy in the field of PVE;
- An examination of the current context (political, economic, cultural, etc.);
- A review of communication strategies and experiences on countering extremism online in CA;
- A review of previous studies on the values of young people in each target country (except Turkmenistan).

## Content analysis

Data collection in the Brand Analytics automated monitoring system (hereinafter referred to as the System) was launched at 10a.m. on July 9, 2020, and ended at 11:42 a.m. (Moscow time) on July 19, 2020. The monitoring covered all sources indexed by the System’s algorithm: media, forums, blog platforms, social networks and information channels of the Telegram messenger. The total number of references from January 1, 2019, to July 19, 2020, was 1,610,164.

Search queries were formed taking into account the Brand Analytics requirements<sup>35</sup>. Since the system has a limitation of 50 keywords/phrases, search queries were divided into four topics, thus providing a full coverage of the media space without restrictions on geography and language (see Appendix 4: Categories and units of content analysis).

The resulting array was cleared of irrelevant content in three stages:

1. At the stage of the formation of search queries within the System, all key phrases were tested and “stop words” were identified, the presence of which does not imply that this mention refers to the research topic. When information with these words was found on the Web, the references were not entered into the array, thereby not increasing the amount of information collected. The data after the first cleaning phase was 637,488 mentions.
2. After the completion of retrospective data collection, the array was scrubbed using filters inside the interface. For example, 62 communities about electronic music and more than 6,000 references to the work of an Arab DJ with the creative pseudonym Jihad were removed by the keyword “jihad/Jihad.” A cleansing of irrelevant sources was carried out in all sources. The accounts of legally existing public organizations and socio-political communities, whose commentators allowed the use of keywords outside the context under study, were deleted. Upon completion of the

<sup>35</sup> Search Query Guide. - <https://br-analytics.ru/blog/sozdanie-poiskovyh-zaprosov-1/>.

second stage of processing, the number of mentions, already excluding exclusively Russian content that was mainly coming from the North Caucasian republics, decreased to 267,828.

3. Manual processing of the data set consisted of profiling the authors of the most relevant messages and identifying the degree of virality of both publications and specific terms. For this, six volunteers, who had preliminary training on working with how the system was conducted, were involved. The results of the third phase of the selection of relevant messages, which consisted of manual sorting of the data set by volunteers, led to a result of 8,673 mentions.

## Field research

The survey period in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan consisted of four stages:

- Preparation (translation of questionnaire, coaching and piloting): November 16-21, 2020
- A mass poll: November 21 to December 5, 2020<sup>36</sup>;
- Cleaning and processing of the data (translation of answers from national language to Russian): December 6-8, 2020
- A frequency and correlation analysis of data: December 9-11, 2020

In Uzbekistan, the timing of the survey had to be agreed upon with local authorities, and therefore was shifted to December 24, 2020.

According to the research methodology, the sample was representative, and a random selection procedure (in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and a snowball (in Kazakhstan<sup>37</sup>), was used, since representativeness had to be made at the level of the region and type of settlement (urban and rural). In addition, the age quotas (18-21, 22-25, 26-35) were set at no more than 30 percent in each age group. A gender limit also was set with no more than 55 percent of one sex being represented.

To calculate the sample in the target countries, data from National Statistical Offices for those aged 18-35 at the beginning of 2019 in each country were used. In general, for each country, the proportion of the target audience to the total population was calculated, and then, based on data by region, gender and area of residence, the number of respondents was calculated. A total of 4,005 respondents from four countries were interviewed:

KAZAKHSTAN

**1002**  
respondents

KYRGYZSTAN

**1003**  
respondents

TAJIKISTAN

**1000**  
respondents

UZBEKISTAN

**1000**  
respondents

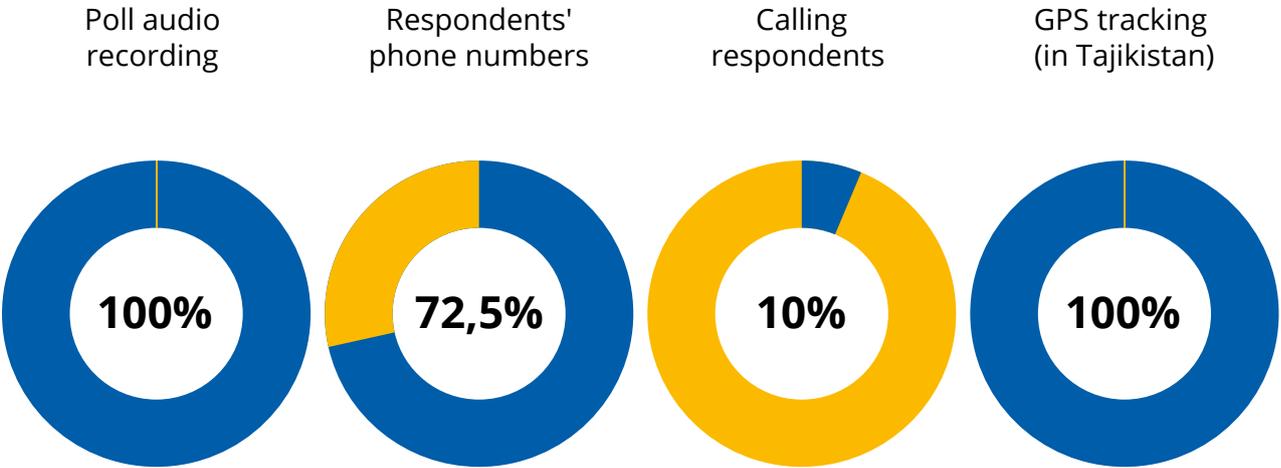
<sup>36</sup> In Uzbekistan, the timing of the survey has shifted to December 24, 2020 due to the need for approval from the local authorities.

<sup>37</sup> Due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic

The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire, and it took an average of 15-20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire contained 19 main questions and consisted of the following blocks:

- 1 Media habits;
- 2 Values;
- 3 Drivers;
- 4 Intonation;
- 5 Image and reputation;
- 6 Trust;
- 7 Respondents' characteristics.

Depending on the peculiarities of the country context, the following data collection methods were used - face-to-face and remotely (by phone and Skype / Zoom). To control the quality of the survey, 100 percent of audio recordings of all surveys and 72.6 percent of telephone numbers from the total sample were conducted (728 out of 1,002 because 274 people refused to provide their numbers).



Details of methodology, tools, usage, and results are available in the appendix.

Chapter

# 1

## AN ANALYSIS OF EXTREMIST GROUP MESSAGES



This chapter contains the findings of content analysis, field work, a desk study that included a literature review (Annex 1), as well as an analysis of information presented in the reports “Information Flows and Radicalization to Violent Extremism in Central Asia,” by the NGO Search for Common Ground and “Violent Extremism in Central Asia”<sup>38</sup> by the NGO Search for Common Ground and “Violent Extremism in Central Asia”<sup>39</sup> by the NGO “Civil Initiative on Internet Policy” and SecDev.

Researchers encountered several limitations while conducting this content analysis and field work. The most potent obstacle was the lack of clear legal definitions of the concept of extremist content and the criteria by which material should be considered extremist or radical as well as the level of public threats posed by certain views, ideas, and statements contained in specific messages.

Based on previous research, this content analysis focused primarily on social media messages, as most users recognize this as a primary source of information and spend a large amount of time using it, enough to impact their world views and positions<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, closed social media groups which were accessed during the research were studied separately.

The second significant limitation is the difficulty of identifying the common drivers of radicalization, which tends to come as the result of a combination of a variety of factors and causes. According to experts, the search for various forms of identity (individual, group, religious, national, etc.) is the most potent factor influencing a vulnerability to radicalization. An overwhelming majority of researchers and experts also note the importance of structural factors, such as socio-political and economic relations (see Appendix 1).

Based on these restrictions, the content analysis was focused on identifying and analysing key words most often used by extremist organizations in the five countries and key narratives and messages which have been previously recognized as extremist by relevant rulings in national courts<sup>41</sup>.

***“None of the countries in the region have specific criteria for evaluating the level of radicality of informational messages.”***

<sup>38</sup> [https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Information-flows\\_public\\_rus.pdf](https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Information-flows_public_rus.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> [https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online\\_public\\_rus.pdf](https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online_public_rus.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Information flows and radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism in Central Asia, pg. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Categories and analysis were presented in a number of regional studies, including: Linguistic patterns for identifying content related to violent extremism from a study by CIIP and SecDev, see [https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online\\_public\\_rus.pdf](https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online_public_rus.pdf). The units were added by the authors, based on the desk study results (see Appendix 3: Categories and units for content analysis).

**Only 0.54% of messages on religious topics contained dangerous ideas, views, and thoughts**

The content analysis carried out using the Brand Analytics<sup>42</sup>, system from 1 January, 2019, to 1 May, 2020, identified 1,610,164 messages containing religious terms or phrases which have been previously used in the context of hate speech and the incitement of interreligious enmity as well as the names of people who are considered propagandists of radical sentiments.

Following a three-stage cleaning of unrelated messages from the data mass (Appendix 2: Technological process of data cleaning and scrubbing and its results), researchers found 8,673 messages which experts identified as containing extremist ideas, attitudes, views, and meanings. Ideas containing extremist messages include both violent extremist content and publications containing incitements to violence, hate and humiliating human dignity based on race, nationality, religious affiliation, or being part of a social group<sup>43</sup> Thus, the messages containing extremist religious terminology and rhetoric make up 0.54% of the total array of messages.

It is necessary to note that extremist content, distributed in public social networks is quite general in nature and is not considered content for direct recruitment of adherents by representatives of banned movements. Based on the data from the literature review, recruitment takes place in the following way, and contains several stages:

1. Preliminary stage. Including targeted information in group chats, then inviting those who are responsive into individual or group chats. Information at this stage is usually neutral in nature (for example, teaching the basics of ritual practice), however it is already purposeful, laying the foundations of group identity by including short phrases in the lessons about the ethics of a “pious Muslim.” According to one respondent, in videos about the order of ritual cleansing (tahara / taharat), the “teacher” usually included phrases like “We Muslims are the nation with the cleanest bodies. The infidels and mushriks do not attribute as much importance to the purity of the body, so they smell bad. That is why they had to come up with colognes and perfumes”<sup>44</sup>. At this stage, the foundations of collective identity are already beginning to be laid, since prayers (along with sermons) act socially and psychologically as a factor to strengthen the social identity.

The “Ustaz” or “teacher” analyzes the questions or comments of their recipients, identifying those who have personal problems, psychological trauma, or an amorphous identity. According to one of those who was caught in one of these groups, the “teacher” demonstrated all the qualities of a father figure, who everyone went to for words of comfort and counsel.

<sup>42</sup> <https://br-analytics.ru/about/>

2. The second stage is associated with the selection of the most suggestible recipients to join (or subscribe to) “a separate chat of the brothers.” Individual work (correspondence) with recipients is carried out more frequently and purposefully. This stage of involvement is associated with a narrow socialization of the recipient’s consciousness, aimed at forming a group identity. From this moment onward, the recipient has direct contact with the main propagandist, who answers their questions and gives personal advice. The propagandist, using sympathy and consolation, tries to instill a sense of victimization in his “students,” reframing their individual problems to appear as part of those impacting all Muslims.

In cases where this took place in a group chat, the recipients had a real sense of belonging to a “secret society” at this stage, which also became a stimulant for group identity and helped to connect their reality with virtuality. At this stage, the forms of macro (“all Muslims”) and micro (“Mujahideen brothers”) group identities are consolidated. Other confessional indicators (“true Muslims,” “pure Islam,” etc.) are also introduced into the consciousness.

The selection of specific narratives (in the form of audio and video clips) that form the sense of an inner group (“we”) is another tool that reinforces group identity. These are clips from films about the first years of the young Islamic community, which conquered its spiritual and geographic space with “the sword and the Qur’an” (stories about the Prophet and his companions, etc.). Amateur films about the history of Muslims in the Soviet era or about the civil war in Tajikistan are also included in this material, as examples of the armed suppression of Muslims, their historic resistance and victory, and so on.

The main purpose of these messages is to feed the prejudices related to targeted “out groups” (“infidels,” “hypocrites,” power structures, current politicians, etc.), which serves as one of the ideological grounds for forming a general identity of “oppressed Muslims” (as an example of an in group). At this stage, most likely, deeper psychological motivations are predominantly at work. While the goal of propaganda and recruitment is most often achieved by a set of rather limited methods of influence, the reaction of the groups of those involved is sometimes positive. The recipients’ imaginations are filled with images of “selfless heroes” ready to give their lives “for Allah and the sacred faith.” These virtual images become a part of real life, suppressing their ability to rationalize and think. Moreover, religion becomes the basis of their group identity, which a priori suppresses agnosticism and reduces the ability to comprehend reality.

***All radical messages contain a heavy religious terminology and target knowledgeable audience who can digest such content.***

***Visualizations based on heroics and war novels have more of an influence on the audience, than the messages’ contents. Moreover, it inspires real action.***

**Propagandists with a low level of religious training often resort to arguments based on ethnic hatred, are prone to direct appeals to violence, and defend the idea of changing the political and social order.**

**Major propagandists of radical Islam in one way or another concentrate their attention on changing the state system. Their messages have varying levels of impact on the audience, and some contain direct calls to violence while others do not.**

3. The third stage is a direct call (da'wat). At this stage, the recipients receive videos which are divided into two main blocks: the first block contains religious rationale for jihad (which references the Qur'an and hadiths); the second block includes direct reports from the battlefields (primarily from the Middle East), which include short interviews with young militants or amirs (unit commanders). They directly appeal to "Muslim brothers who are not indifferent" with a request to help the mujahideen, or better yet, to join it.

In this way, the authors of radical messages disseminated on social networks carry out the first and second stages of the recruitment process, influencing the formulation of certain beliefs and the corresponding field of information.

## **Extremist messages**

The content analysis identified a set of extremist messages which is broadcast on social media and serves as the basis for various radical content distributed by individual users. The author's role in the reposting process should be noted. Even when the individual users alter the original content for their audience, they leave the name of the content's original author (as the source). In this way, radical content gives weight not just to the message itself, but its author as well. Authors of violent extremism identified in this study include Abdullah Zufar, Abu Saloh, Mahmud Abdulmumi, Abdullo Bukhari, Rovshen Gazakov, and others (see Appendix 5. Protagonists of Violent Extremism).

## **Kazakhstan**

According to the content analysis, calls to oppose infidels and stay away from them, as well as the demonization of symbols of other religious and secular life are popular in Kazakhstan. For example, there is a post on the channel "Hanafi Region" saying you should beware of "holidays of enemies of Allah," imitation of other religions, and that congratulations to kafirs on their holidays is haram and apostasy. Those who have just embarked on the path of Islam are the target group for this message. At the same time, to create a favorable perception of the material, the author uses a generalized idea of Kazakhs as people who love to imitate other nations.

*"It is well known that Kazakhs are peaceful people who love to imitate others. We imitate other people even though it goes against our religion and traditions. The most dangerous thing is to congratulate other religions on their holidays..."<sup>45</sup>.*

The second most popular strategy is sending messages aimed at the struggle with apostates (taghuts).

<sup>45</sup> Translated from Kazakh. From the research archive.

Sheikh Abdullah Kosteksky mentions the rulers of some Central Asian countries in his video “Fight the servants of tyrants,” saying they oppress Muslims in their countries, prohibiting them from growing beards and wearing hijabs (he mentions Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular). In his messages, he calls on his followers to resist taghuts, publicly call out their mistakes, hate them with all their hearts, and even fight against them like the mujahideen, and in doing so, do a good deed for Muslims all around the world.

The author cites a story from the life of the Prophet as the basis for his position. In part, reciting how Muslims once lived peacefully with Jews, but soon needed to drive them from the Holy Land for violating a peace agreement and trying to kill the Prophet: “When the Jews broke their agreement with the Prophet and wanted to kill him, the prophet made a hukm to kill them. He killed 700 Jews. And why? Because they wanted to kill the prophet”<sup>46</sup>.

The author condemns all those who support taghuts, building relationships with them and promoting their values, because, both then and now, Jews and other taghuts continue to suppress Muslims.

Aside from the historical theological examples, the authors of these messages employ rhetoric aimed against the judicial system of Kazakhstan, claiming that secular authorities do not have the right to judge Muslims.

The topic of limiting the sphere of influence of taghuts in the face of secular authorities has become widespread in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was a post published on a page on VK with Islamic content about how people fear the coronavirus, but do not fear Allah. “When the taghuts say ‘fear this virus and do not leave your homes,’ you obey this command without question! But, when you are told to fear the One who created you, you do not take it seriously!!!”<sup>47</sup>.

In another case, a video from a popular Kazakh YouTube channel Namys.TV (which has 196,000 subscribers) claims that the coronavirus was created so that people like Bill Gates could introduce a universal vaccine to reduce the world population. The video claims that the Western billionaires purposefully spread the myth of Covid-19 to carry out universal vaccination and in so doing, to make people infertile.

In addition to this content, there is content in the Kazakh media field in which popularizes jihad, promotes conspiracy theories, and demonizes the West. There have also been dangerous

**Messages disseminated at the country level in Kazakhstan contain direct signs of inciting interethnic and interreligious enmity.**

<sup>46</sup> A quote from a video clip. From the research archive.

<sup>47</sup> From the research archive.

***Radical Islamic preachers in Kazakhstan are themselves followers of conspiracy theories or support them.***

***The propagandists' main efforts are aimed at maintaining influence through the struggle for the purity of faith, tradition, and behavior of the followers.***

messages aimed at inciting ethnic hatred based on religious segregation or superiority.

Ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan and the Chinese are the main targets of hate speech in the content identified.

An indicative case is the publication of a regular Facebook user who is outraged by the fact that a Kazakh woman is married to a Chinese citizen. The post's author describes how he went to Astana to break up the wedding and raise the issue of Chinese expansion in Kazakhstan and the possible negative consequences for the country. The main point of the message is that the 1.5-billion-person population of China is a threat to Kazakhstan, and that Kazakh people should not allow the Chinese to "enslave" them. The post received numerous reposts on Facebook and caused a flurry of xenophobic comments from other users.

The Dungans are another object of hate speech in Kazakhstan. Even though Dungans are Muslims, their isolation and way of life lead to theological controversy and the assumption that the various groups of Muslims should welcome relationships with those who believe in Allah "correctly," while others are considered apostates and are subject to anti-apostasy messages.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

An analysis of the Kyrgyz segment demonstrates that religious topics are actively discussed on social media with the use of religious, and sometimes extremist terms, but more often with terms of a neutral nature. Religious rhetoric is more often presented in the context of quoting the Qur'an and hadiths containing one of the keywords specified in the sample. The most frequently encountered concept is kafir or infidel, which more likely relates to hate speech than well-thought-out extremist or terrorist propaganda.

Except for specialized channels (for example, Chechim Islamda/ The answer in Islam), hate speech is spread by regular users. The documented accounts with violent extremist content did not write their own messages, but more often use reposts and cited external sources. For example, the account of Almaz Soltonoev (an actual account), contains various topics including studying Arab and worship issues. However, on this channel there are also links to various Salafi and jihadi videos, for example, video clips from Said Buryatsky (Alexander Tikhomirov), describing the events in Syria and Palestine. These links redirect to YouTube channels like Takvabook.com, IslamicFront, Sharqi-Armi, and others.

Radical Islamic propaganda is available in three languages: Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Russian, and is dominated by Uzbek-language content, comprising more than 70 percent.

In Kyrgyzstan, the protagonists of radical and violent ideology represent a scattered audience, which in some cases is represented by autonomous (independent) authors (for example, Zufar), and in other cases by authors affiliated with banned organizations (for example, Abdulmumin or Abu Saloh). Media activists from banned organizations (for example, Faruq Shami) play an important role in distributing material and aiding in recruitment.

Messages in the Kyrgyz segment include the following themes:

Arstan Alai and Tengrianism encroach on the dogmas of Islam and denigrate God. This message became popular against the backdrop of the scandal that erupted around the statements of Arstan Alai about his divine nature and ability to control political and natural processes. More religious audience reacted quite negatively to these claims; hate speech and expressive phrases were widely used in the heated and lengthy discussion which ensued.

Interrelations between Muslims and members of other religions are also widely discussed. It is worth separately highlighting the attitude toward those who have “converted” from Islam to another faith, which is characterized by an extremely hostile attitude. The same Abdulmumin, answering the question “My neighbor is a Jew; can I work with him?”<sup>48</sup>, noted that it is necessary to distinguish the difference between converts and members of other religious movements. The author relies on a practice which previously existed in Muslim countries, which first called on the apostate to return to the faith; if the call was left unheeded, he was publicly executed. Peaceful Muslims should stop communicating with apostates. Their wealth is not considered nobly acquired property, and therefore is not left to heirs, but is destroyed. The live video ends with the words “the state gathered the people and executed the apostates of the faith”<sup>49</sup>. In the absence of a direct appeal, listeners are left to decide for themselves what to do in modern conditions.

Secular holidays (Nooruz, Valentine’s Day, New Year, Halloween, etc.), especially Western holidays, are a threat to traditional values and spirituality of Kyrgyz society. This message is consistent with those messages broadcast in all of the countries of the region, and represents the general direction of radical propaganda.

There are also calls for the rejection and/or extermination of the Chinese and Russia. Often, the issue of interaction in Russia is raised among Kyrgyz migrants. Russia is positioned as a war zone (Dar al-Harb) and migrants working there are considered to be adherents. No interaction is impossible, and murder is

***The Kyrgyz language segment of social media is more likely to relay the ideas of the regional protagonists of Islam than to produce its own unique content.***

***The topics of radical messages in Kyrgyzstan support interreligious and interethnic enmity***

<sup>48</sup> From the research archive.

<sup>49</sup> From the research archive.

not considered a sin. In the rhetoric of banned organizations with activities in Syria, these narratives relate to Russia's participation in the war in the Middle East and "occupation of Syria.

Anti-Chinese rhetoric fixates on the situation of Muslim Uighurs, Chinese expansion (planning of a Chinese logistical center, the purchasing of mines), and the spread of Covid-19. Posts of this kind contain comments calling for "the extermination of Chinese infidels." Islamists themselves, both moderate and radical, publish most of this type of material.

The confrontation between the religious community and secular authorities is expressed much more vividly and aggressively than in neighboring Kazakhstan. In addition to opposing a restriction on wearing the hijab, visiting mosques during quarantine, and opportunities for youth to receive religious education, as is common throughout Central Asia, Kyrgyz propagandists and users are also calling for the separation of the Muslim community from civil society.

Propagandists call on Muslims to not recognize elections, not participate, campaign, or join political parties founded by infidels. They say there is a double standard for observing quarantine restrictions, allowing for parliamentary election campaigns while closing mosques, criticizing secular authorities and so-called "state mullahs." They call all imams, and mufti "traitors to the faith," "idiots," and "liars" if they misrepresent canons of Islam in favour of secular power. They compare legislators to a "flock of sheep" who imagine themselves to be lawmakers but do not recognize the laws of God, thereby creating a kufr system. These materials close with an appeal to all true Muslims to come to their senses and act out against secular authority, otherwise they risk remaining under the onslaught of infidels.

A significant portion of the information space is also occupied by jihadist-takfirite narratives and propaganda, which are focused on the idea of committing a hijra, the legitimacy of jihad as the duty of all Muslims and helping Muslims who find themselves under the yoke of infidels: "Jihad is a duty (fardhuain) throughout the world, because infidels have taken control of all the lands, they set up their own laws. These apostates will not establish the Hukm of Allah."<sup>50</sup> Referring to Ibn Taymiyya, propagandists claim that jihad is an obligation (fardhuain) when infidels attack the lands of Muslims. All nearby Muslim countries should come to their defense, and if they are unable, then it is the duty of all Muslims. All who are near should help. If they are unable to handle it, then all should rise up. "After faith in Allah, the chief responsibility is

***The idea that public organizations are propagandists of Western values and the LGBT community creates the image of an enemy and hardly contributes to the fact that representatives of civil society institutions can become a reliable bulwark against the propaganda of violence.***

<sup>50</sup> From the research archive.

to defend from the attacks of enemies"<sup>51</sup>. This narrative of aiding Muslims, women, and children who are subjected to violence by apostates and infidels is central to the content distributed in various languages in Kyrgyzstan.

A group of messages calling to resist social non-profit organizations and institutes of civil society, especially their events dedicated to defending women and sexual minorities, require separate attention. They consider these actions to be an appeasement to the Western world, with the goal of eroding the traditions and spirituality of Kyrgyz society.

## Tajikistan

The context of the Tajik information field for propaganda of violent extremism is largely focused on the influence of state policy which secular authorities pursue against religious communities. Because Tajik citizens have been known to participate in military operations in various countries, and the threat of radicalization, Tajikistan has instituted serious limitations on the sphere of religious practices, which meet significant opposition.

In addition to the messages and content typical for other countries, which are directed at protesting against limitations to clothing, religious education, worship by women and youth, and control over religious institutions, the Salafi and fundamentalist groups and organizations' narratives occupy a significant share of the information space in Tajikistan.

The content analysis of the Tajik segment of social networks exposed a significant prevalence of materials with the main message being an accusation of disbelief in relation to those who do not observe certain canons of Islam (namaz, fast, dress code, behavioral norms, etc.), members of other religious movements, opponents (all who they would consider an "other"), and those who use occult services. The central message is that "those who do not read namaz are infidels."

A certain share of the social space covered by the monitoring is occupied by messages containing incitements of sectarian hatred, using elements of hate speech. The questions discussed relate primarily to the interactions of Shiites and Zoroastrians: "It is not forbidden to use the dishes of infidels and majus (fire-worshippers)."<sup>52</sup> While there seems to be a certain tolerance for that group, the messages directed toward Tajiks who identify as atheists is more aggressive: "The first time I see that kind of Tajik infidel, I swear by Allah to kill such a person is jihad"<sup>53</sup>.

***In Tajikistan, along with inter-religious and religious-secular conflict, intra-religious conflict between different trends in Islam is identified,***

<sup>51</sup> From the research archive.

<sup>52</sup> From the research archive.

<sup>53</sup> From the research archive.

***In addition to the global geopolitical context, radical messages in the information field of Tajikistan touch upon the problems of local confrontation between Sunnis and Shiites.***

What separates Tajikistan from the other Central Asian countries is that powerful external resources of both Salafis and, in part, aggressive Shiites are directed at the information space. There are many internet resources published in the Tajik (Persian) language using Cyrillic script, and most of these messages are based on their teachings and ideology. These movements are active in social media networks and distribute their convictions through audiovisual production which they mask as Hanafism, which is traditional for the region.

There is a significant anti-Shiite and anti-Western component in the publications and comments: “Eshon Nuriddin became a Shiite? Who is the Shiite? Can you say the Shiite is a Kafir?”<sup>54</sup>. This post criticized a well-known religious figure in Tajikistan, Eshon Nuriddin<sup>55</sup> for his statement that the day of the execution of the Messenger’s grandchildren is a day of mourning for all Muslims.

The following post is a poem in which the author accuses the United States, the religious and political leadership in Iran, and the Sunni governments of the Persian Gulf for all the problems of Muslims in the Middle East. In his opinion, all the wars are because of oil and mercenaries such as the Islamic State, the Taliban, and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. “Bad Yankees, ohundas (meaning Shiites, the religious and political leaders of Iran), and Sheikhs (meaning Sunnis, the religious and political leaders of the Persian Gulf), have turned the world into chaos...”<sup>56</sup>.

The identity of a Muslim and its difference compared to members of other religions include religious consciousness vs. a national consciousness, as well as the characteristics and specifications of “pure Islam” and its propaganda. This group of messages include those condemning all innovations, propaganda against celebrating New Years, Nooruz, and other traditional and secular holidays. In recent years, jihadists expressed a particular criticism of secular intelligentsia for its “conformity” to official authorities. This narrative also includes the rationale of Salafi tenets, like prohibiting music and accepting the principles of a struggle with apostates, including Sunnis, Shia, and secular authorities.

The propaganda of jihadists is worth highlighting as it includes the popularization of the rules and justifications for waging jihad and establishing an Islamic state based on Sharia – a single Caliphate. In the Tajik context, jihadists are a relatively small, but most active, group of radical propagandists. As a rule, they belong to concrete political organizations, primarily

<sup>54</sup> From the research archive.

<sup>55</sup> The head of the Turajon family, elder brother of the ex-Qadi of Tajikistan Khoja Akbar Turajonzoda.

<sup>56</sup> From the research archive.

ISIS, Ansorullah, and Hizbut-Tahrir, which reject armed jihad at the present time, but consider it the final phase of their political program.

It should be noted that messages of radical groups in Tajikistan are unique in that they contain rather harsh video sequences, using scenes of violence, “hellfire” and other visualizations that can negatively affect the psyche of viewers and convince them of the dire consequences of apostasy or tolerance in relation to other ways of life.

Another distinctive feature of the messages of radical groups in Tajikistan is that the ideas of countering unbelievers relate not just to global geopolitics and world-wide conspiracy theories, but also relate directly to the regional geopolitical context.

In general, these messages are directed toward international relations in the Fergana Valley. A video clip from Shah Kenjaev is an example of this type of propaganda: “News of the war (in Vorukh) for those who have become martyrs (shahids) or been wounded. You are welcome.”<sup>57</sup> This clip is a rap video containing images of the suffering of peaceful citizens of Tajikistan. The message of this publication is that because of a problem on the border with Kyrgyzstan, Tajik citizens are being wounded and killed. The rappers equated the killed civilians with martyrs (shahids) and called for a quick solution to this problem. The use of religious terminology in this video primarily aims to mobilize the masses, since, according to the canons of Islam, protecting one’s home is the most important task of a devout Muslim.

In addition to this, and despite the opposition of secular authorities and religious groups, the words of Rahimzoda Ramazon Hamro, the Minister of Internal Affairs for Tajikistan about how “the best jihad is the defense of national borders and the honor and dignity of mothers and sisters”<sup>58</sup>, have become very popular in the Tajik information space and were seized upon by radical propagandists. The message, spread with the aim of strengthening patriotism and awareness of the importance of protecting the state border (disputed areas between Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan), shows how the concept of jihad can take national-patriotic forms.

## Turkmenistan

In contrast with other Central Asian countries where radicals actively use the internet for distribution of their narratives, the Turkmen segment of the internet (including social media) currently lacks systematic and intensive propaganda aimed at strengthening the influence of radical Islamic groups with-

<sup>57</sup> From the research archive.

<sup>58</sup> From the research archive.

**Severe restrictions on the activities of religious groups in Turkmenistan make it difficult to study the information space, but do not prove its absence**

in the country. It is indicative that using Brand Analytics for searching from 1 January, 2019, through 1 May, 2020, there was an insignificant result of Turkmen language resources<sup>59</sup>.

The presence of only a small number of materials found in the Turkmen language connected with the topic of this project can be partially explained by the extremely strict government control over the Internet. Turkmenistan is in the top 10 countries in the world with the most severely restricted internet, ranking at number 4. No other country in the region is in the top 20<sup>60</sup>.

The current restrictions are unprecedented in Central Asia<sup>61</sup>. In the past three years, the Russian social media site Odnoklassniki (OK.ru) was blocked. Some users have access to blocked sites through VPN services, however access to those is also blocked and one must constantly search for new ways to get around the blocking<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> With regard to all the content in different languages, the Brand Analytics (hereafter, BA) program identified just 120 materials (texts, reposts, comments, etc.) on social media networks for the specified period presumably related to Turkmenistan and containing terms from the vocabulary determined within the project methodology. A review of the accounts of the authors of this material (excluding a small number of accounts that were blocked, deleted, or private) showed that the authors of less than half of the materials identified by BA regularly turn to Islamic topics. The overwhelming majority of them showed interest in various aspects of Islamic topics not related to the scope of this project. At the same time, not all authors who indicated their location as Turkmenistan were actually in this country or were associated with it. Thus, Julaybib Ibn Ahmad, allegedly living in Ashgabat and who used on his pages some jihadist symbols (<http://ok.ru/profile/553099539961>), judging by the content of his page and friends list, is a native of the Uzbek community in Southern Kyrgyzstan. His material appears to have no relation to Turkmenistan. The Julaybib Ibn Ahmad account (with 91 subscribers) is the most radical of those BA found in the "Turkmen segment" of social networks. From others in the "Turkmen segment" we can note an ethnic Azerbaijani from Krasnovodsk, Habil Mahmuduglu, age 43 with 200 friends who posted, among other things, reposts from TikTok of emotional speeches of the North Caucasian Salafi preacher Imam Mitsayev in Russian (<http://ok.ru/profile/507803264853>). The user Ishankuli Fayzullaev (<http://www.facebook.com/ishanjuli.fayzullayev>), likely was also born in Turkmenistan. On his Russian-language Facebook page, he declares a rejection of terrorism, but reposts materials about the restrictions of Muslims in the world and asks readers why the world has such a weak reaction to the oppression of Uighurs in China and prisoners in Guantanamo. He calls on Turkmen to boycott French products because of Macron's position on caricatures of the Prophet (28 October, 2020). Judging from a few comments, this is not a young individual. His audience is small. A few other "Turkmen users" identified by BA try to systematically post religious lectures and other material about Islam. From all these authors, it is only Julaybib Ibn Ahmad who may have the foundations for assuming his possible connections with a violent religious extremist organization.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Bischoff. Internet Censorship 2020: A Global Map of Internet Restrictions // Comaritech.com, 15.01.2020 <http://www.comaritech.com/blog/vpn-privacy/internet-censorship-map/>.

<sup>61</sup> Turkmenistan Increases Crackdown On Internet Access As Living Standards Continue Downward Spiral // Free Radio, September 19, 2020 <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-increases-crackdown-on-internet-access-as-living-standards-continue-downward-spiral/30846977.html>.

Moreover, according to a private message received by the authors of this chapter from a source in Ashgabat (28.10.2020), the country has now blocked YouTube, Facebook, LiveJournal, WhatsApp, Viber, Twitter, VK, OK, WeChat, Line, and others.

<sup>62</sup> For a description of this problem, see The holiday approaches. The internet speed drops sharply in Mary // Radio Azatlyk, 17.09.2019 (<http://rus.azathabar.com/a/30168340.html>).

In this regard, based on the analysis of the availability of tools to get around the blocks through Google, it is assumed that citizens of Turkmenistan gain access to radical religious content while outside the country.

Because of the existing limitations, the analysis focuses on the research of available expert opinions and media material, as well as the results of content analysis, which confirmed the presence of some radical content created by Turkmen authors for a Turkmen audience. At the same time, due to these limitations, the researchers made an attempt to create a picture of the radical information space in the country based on available data, but researchers do not express confidence that it fully reflects reality.

A study of the resources available as a result of the content analysis showed the presence on social media of several large collections of audio and video lectures and speeches of three preachers, two of whom, Atageldi Aga and Rovshen Aga, are well-known figures of the Turkmen Salafi movement and are still popular among Turkmen Muslim youth. The third preacher, Abu Omar at-Turkmen, is less well-known and it seems he was a participant to foreign jihadi organizations during the peak of the Syrian crisis.

Rovshen Gazakov (Abu Abdulla) has become a striking representative of the new generation, being born in 1980 and arrested in Syria in 2013<sup>63</sup>. Today, the recordings of speeches by Atageldi and Gazakov, available on social media, are not just of historical importance, but are also actively demanded by the section of Turkmen youth who are interested in Islam and who travel to work or study outside Turkmenistan.

The central theme of most of these sermons is elaborating on the meaning of faith and recitation of namaz in the life of Turkmen Muslims.

Addressing a Turkmen audience, Atageldi criticizes the pursuit of wealth and mercantilism of Turkmen who ignore Islamic values, the fact that in many Turkmen families not all members read namaz, and that women do not observe Islamic norms of dress and behavior, such as dancing and singing at weddings, etc. He also repeatedly and sharply criticizes the tradition of wearing aladzha (evil eye talismans worn on the wrist), which is widespread in Turkmenistan. "What is that? Your aladzha? It will not help you atone for your sins. It does not show your intentions in Islam! Reading namaz is what reflects how much you are true to your faith"<sup>64</sup>.

***Turkmen radicals are more cautious in relaying their ideas, nevertheless, their messages carry an identical meaning to those in other countries.***

<sup>63</sup> Syrian Jihad Turns the Opposition into Radicals - <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1881219>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2MUkoRfWxE>.

<sup>64</sup> From the research archive.

Atageldi calls on Turkmen Muslims to clearly separate themselves from infidels, “We are not those who will follow them (infidels), it does not matter how important or necessary they are in this world ..., it is not important how much we need them, we will not be with them. We have our Allah.” “We should leave the books of infidels alone.”

“There is namaz between a Muslims and an infidel,” Atageldi emphasized, “He who does not read, or stops reading namaz becomes an infidel. Allah does not love infidels!”<sup>65</sup>.

To remedy the situation of insufficient affirmation of Islamic norms in the life of Turkmen, he suggests in one of his speeches that his listeners spread information about Islam on their own streets, and that over time these religious values will be accepted by the majority. In the available recordings, he almost does not mention relations with the Turkmen government.

Rovshen Gazakov is another visible Islamist adherent of Turkmen origins. His own pages on social media are unavailable, but his files are posted by many other Turkmen users. The files include lectures on a wide range of topics presented, according to some estimates, constantly and competently, in good Turkmen. They include an explanation of religious concepts and terms, comments on individual surahs of the Qur’an, etc. However, several files contain aggressive and emotional rhetoric directed at infidels, and against the traditions widespread among Turkmen, which, in the author’s opinion, do not correspond to the principle of monotheism.

Gazakov’s messages contain the following themes:

*Condemnation of traditional values and behavior.* Gazakov sharply criticizes the tradition of visiting graves of “the saints” in the Dashoguz region. He emphasizes that despite 360 graves of “the saints,” Dashoguz is the poorest province in Turkmenistan economically. The people buried in Dashoguz, he says, require the mercy of Allah, and not the monetary donations that beggars at the graves use later to buy heroin or perform other dirty deeds.

*Antisemitic statements.* The author believes that the Turkmen have lost their own spiritual heritage due to the influence of Jews. Instead of Assalam Aleykum, they began to use the greeting Salam, which is a derivative of the Hebrew Shalom. Gazakov discusses the readiness of Turkmen to accept foreign and contradictory approaches to their past, not based on Islam, because of which they experience an identity crisis. “If I want to be like my ancestors, they say ‘you are a Wahhabite’. Then all the statues we make are statues of Wahhabis! ... I

**Also, similar to representatives of radical movements in other countries, Turkmen authors broadcast antisemitic messages, tend to promote conspiracy theories and call for active action against its members.**

<sup>65</sup> From the research archive.

am the son of my father, not the son of Jews or monkeys!”<sup>66</sup>. In another recording he criticizes Turkmen who “try to be everything,” particularly who hide their faith when traveling to India, in order to “see Krishna.”

Several speeches touch upon the problem of global confrontation between Islam and infidels. He emphasizes that Muslims must defend their religion and strive for unity.

Musulmanlara terror Diyip Garalamak’s entries mention that the Muslim world has become American, European, Chinese, and Russian colonies. “There are no infidels who have not colonized this ummah.” Salafi Muslims who strive to revive true Islam and free Muslims from colonial dependence are slanderously characterized by words like *terror*, *extremist*, *radical*, *Wahhabism*, *Wahhabite*, *fundamentalist*. “But the true Muslim” Gazakov emphasizes, “has no other name than *Muslim*.”

Some entries contain attacks on Christians, Jews, Communists, Darwinists, and Freemasons. In passing, George Bush’s attempts to portray Muslims as terrorists are mentioned, but there is not extensive criticism of America as is characteristic of the material of many Islamist groups.

## Uzbekistan

Information materials that are popular in Uzbekistan have their own distinctive features. First, they are characterized by vivid visualizations, not only in video, but in audio materials.

Audio clips are accompanied by alternating images; photos of modern jihad propagandists, brief information about the channel, the addresses and phone numbers of recruiting agents, and most often, texts of hadith legitimizing jihad and especially “jihad in Syria” (Sham). Sometimes these images are symbolic drawings, borrowed, for example, from collages explaining Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Of course, these texts contain references to the Qur’an and Sunnah (hadith), including stories of the Prophet and his companions. Here, quotes from the religious texts in Arabic are especially significant, establishing a sense of authority that these texts represent the meanings and norms of correct behaviour (using the language of *religious truth*).

The most common stories relate to immigration for religious reasons (hijrat) and involvement in the “holy jihad in Sham.” The primary goal of propagandists is also the most difficult, as it is necessary to prove the “obvious religious duty” (Farze-Ain) of these actions from the perspective of religious legitimacy. The main message of this multi-stage propaganda is to prove that jihad is not being waged on “foreign territory,” but

**Messages aimed at convincing the target audience of the need for immigration for religious reasons dominate Uzbek-language content**

**Content of the Uzbek-language information field of radical Islam is distinguished by its high quality and the presence of many techniques aimed at increasing the level of interest and involvement in messages.**

<sup>66</sup> From the research archive.

in the “territory of Islam” (Dar al-Islam) and that participation in it is the obligation of all Muslims. All propagandists agree that those who make the exodus (hijrat) are on the first step toward jihad.

Behavioural norms (etiquette) of the mujahid are included in the “lessons” of each of these propagandists, typically with titles such as “Etiquette Lessons.” This series is addressed either to those involved, or more often to the mujahideen, as there have been massive violations of Muslim ethical norms. Among them are: an addiction to alcoholic beverages (and sometimes drugs) and cases of gang rapes by the mujahideen of captured Zaydite and Shiite girls, etc. This prompted these propagandists to create a series of lessons to systematically teach the behavioural ethics of the mujahideen.

***The Uzbek content contains significant specifics, promotes the heroics of the holy war and the image of war, and is aimed at the destruction of primary social ties at the family level, increasing the level of awareness of fatalism and controllability of its followers.***

*The image of the victorious mujahid.* Here, it is obvious that they are imitating ISIS video production. They show the mujahideen as a brotherhood of steadfast and ideological warriors who are ready to give their lives “for the triumph of Allah’s commands” and bring victory to Islam throughout the world. They support this image of a conqueror over “the disbelief of infidels” with spectacularly filmed footage from the battlefields. Young mujahideen risky marking in formation or shooting on the run, who give interviews in moments of lull and share their clearly prepared remarks about their part in the “sacred mission of the mujahideen,” and call on their peers join them instead of sitting at home in vain. The video sequences are accompanied by jihadi songs (nasheed), which are popular in this environment.

*Should I ask my parents for permission for hijrat or jihad?* This topic is widely discussed, and potential recipients often ask about it. Typically, most modern Sunni theologians refer to a hadith from the Prophet when answering this question, where a companion asked him for permission to go on jihad. However, the Prophet was aware of the plight of his parents and advised him to look after his father and mother, declaring that “this will be the best jihad” for him. A similar topic was found in the Tajik content.

Propagandists reject the veracity of this hadith and resort to both dogmatic and rational tricks. In their reasoning, jihad is elevated to the rank of faith (iman) and ritual duty (‘ibadat). From this, they conclude that you should not ask your parents for permission for either hijrat or jihad.

Eschatology (especially the discussion of Judgement Day signs) is one of the preferred methods of persuading the mujahid, who “has fallen a great mission to participate in the last jihad prophesied by the Prophet, against the crusaders in the Sham region (historical Suria/Syria)”, where the Messiah (Mahdi) is expected to appear. The comparison is strengthened with

references to hadiths and an early history of the Prophet and his companions (*sirat*). A manipulation of history, with often irrational interpretations, helps to give an emotional (*sacred*) meaning to both the war itself and the heavy burdens and hardships of the day. In this sense they retell and interpret a mass of stories about the heroism of the Prophet and that of his companions, along with a whole host of the heroes of Islam during the Arab conquests of the seventh and eight centuries.

Criticism of “incorrect jihad,” justification of defeats. The row of ISIS defeats in the war in the Middle East are explained by propagandists in essentially the same ways: a lack of moral discipline and moral staunchness among the mujahideen, discord between field commanders, intoxication with victories, and the cowardice of Syrians.

*“Us” and “them” in the context of conflict with “others.”* A misapplied Islamic dogma serves as a foundation for the concept of a total separation of all Islamic radicals (especially jihadi propagandists) from “others.” It guides the ideas and actions of jihadists. Separation from *infidels* and *polytheists* is a trait of Islam recorded in many verses of the Qur’an, sent down at a time when the small Islamic community had to conquer geographic and intellectual space surrounded by *infidels*, often through armed conflict. Precedents of hostility toward *others* are also found in the Sunnah. This determined the endogenous rejection of *infidels* in Islam. Incidentally, such alienation was and remains a natural “birthmark” in other monotheistic religions. These historical events reflected in the Qur’an and Sunnah are exploited by radicals, especially by jihadists.

It should be noted that these messages and their target audience largely overlap due to the global nature of the information channels and the prevalence of the language of these messages.

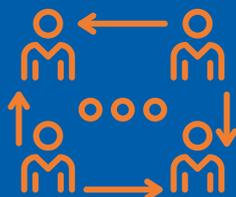
## Chapter 1 Findings

- Radical messages make up just 0.56% of all of the informational field discussing understanding and following Islam.
- Radical groups' messages are not meant for unprepared users who do not have a base understanding of Islam and its terminology. They are replete with specific, hard-to-grasp terms which are too complex for a general audience new to such content. Thus, the field of information formed by followers of radical ideas is not a place of primary radicalization, but rather reinforces and deepens the adherence to the ideas of those users who have already received enough information to understand these messages, and also have certain lived experience that make them sympathetic to the ideas of radicals.
- The same actors have an influence on the information fields in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, while Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are more influenced by localized content.
- Prohibitive measures taken at the state level do not stop the existence of radical ideas, and do not make them inaccessible to a wide audience. Prohibitions do make it impossible to track the dynamics of content development, changes in the themes and messages, which can lead to the fact that the dynamics of the development of radical ideas will be missed along with their followers, and the explosion will become unexpectedly strong.
- Messages from the various extremist groups share a common ideological orientation. They promote the ideas of purity of faith, mutual assistance to fellow believers, the struggle against non-believers and apostates, the rejection of secular authority and its decisions, the establishment of a caliphate, and antisemitism. These groups also share a general tendency to propagate theories about a world-wide conspiracy and call to oppose it.
- Another common tendency in these messages is an opposition to traditional and other secular "pro-Western" values.
- Unique messaging by radical groups has a direct connection to the socio-political and socio-economic context of the countries. In Kazakhstan, this is centred on interethnic conflicts. In Kyrgyzstan, there are calls to ignore elections and fight with the institutes of civil society. In Tajikistan, we find calls to defend compatriots in other countries. In Turkmenistan, there are calls for self-preservation. The context in Uzbekistan leads to calls to immigrate for religious reasons, justifying the need to destroy traditional family relationships, and making excuses for past failures of radical groups, which may indicate doubts about the success of the doctrines among the target audience.

Chapter

# 2

## TARGET AUDIENCE AND CHANNELS FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION



## Channels for content distribution: content analysis results

According to the results of an automated content analysis, the popularity of online platforms where radical religious content (not necessarily involving calls for violence) can be found and its language varies from country to country. In Tajikistan, the most used social media sites are Facebook (56%), and Odnoklassniki (37%); in Kazakhstan, VK (74%) and Facebook (20%); in Kyrgyzstan, Facebook (48%) and Odnoklassniki (28%); in Uzbekistan, Facebook (55%) and Odnoklassniki (37%); in Turkmenistan, VK (37%), Odnoklassniki (28%), and Facebook (25%).<sup>67</sup> It is necessary to note that the proportional calculations for Turkmenistan are significantly less representative than calculations from the other countries. The research bias for this country is caused by a disproportionate sample compared to other countries, which is due to strict restrictive measures applied to religious groups by the country's authorities.

In all of the countries, social media sites such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram were used less often. Monitoring of closed groups showed that radical extremist and terrorist content is more often found on Telegram and Odnoklassniki (70% of the selected material). Videos are largely shared both on the actual terrorist sites and on YouTube.

We can also conclude from the results of the content analysis that propogandists of radical Islam also actively use a variety of messenger services, especially those that provide strong encryption.

*Table 1. Radical content distribution channels in Central Asia*

Channels and social networks	Forms and types	Audience
Odnoklassniki (OK)	Primarily individual user pages	Primarily less-educated parts of the population: migrant workers, youth, simple users
Facebook	Various open and closed groups as well as individual user pages	Students, educated youth, intelligentsia, middle class
YouTube	Private video and digital TV channels, video blogs, thematic videos.	All social groups
Twitter	Private pages, blogs, distribution of messages and appeals	Primarily the more educated population
Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram	Groups, channels, and public chats which are most often private, blogs distributing messages and appeals	All social groups. Telegram is focused on those with more education
Partner channels	Personal channels and blogs, primarily on YouTube. In recent years, there has been significant increase in the number of channels and blogs by migrant workers and amateur journalists	A significant portion of these video media is directed toward migrant workers in Russia and diasporas abroad
	Channels and blogs relating to various political expats living abroad, in Russia, Turkey, Iran, or the EU	Diasporas, migrant workers, youth, students

<sup>67</sup> It is worth mentioning that after a secondary cleaning of the content related to Turkmenistan, 120 messages remained. A manual analysis showed that there was practically no extremist content in the Turkmen language in the country itself. The percentages listed above relate to 120 publications which do contain religious, and in some places, radical content.

**Facebook**<sup>68</sup> unites the more educated part of the Central Asian population, primarily civil society activists: journalists, experts and analysts, businessmen who belong to political parties, civil servants, employees of banks, credit organizations, and mobile companies, the intelligentsia, workers at scientific or research institutions, students at schools and universities, etc. Over time, Facebook has evolved into a platform for alternative information, discussion, an exchange of ideas and public mobilization. Accordingly, the material on Facebook is of a higher level of analysis and discussion when compared with that on VK or Odnoklassniki.

**Odnoklassniki (OK)** hit its peak of popularity in the 2000s, after which the more active, educated, and socially active users have mostly left to competing platforms. However, our research found that to this day OK remains a popular social media network in Central Asia, especially among labour migrants, youth, those with secondary or incomplete higher education, and those employed in unskilled or low-skilled labour. It is easy to subscribe to material here (such as reposts, etc.), because administrators do not control the content. In such applications, the content is extremely simplified and accessible to poorly educated youth.

Overtly jihadist content has dropped sharply on this platform as has the activity of various propagandists and supporters of political Islam. To a large extent, this can be explained by the fact that Odnoklassniki (like other Russian social media networks) is not considered to be sufficiently closed and safe in terms of maintaining anonymity. However, as this remains a popular source for Uzbek language users such as labour migrants, it is often used as a platform for posting radical content.

**Telegram** – is a messenger service that serves as a platform for exchanging messages and media files of various formats. At the same time, it is the most closed of the internet resources mentioned here. Its management pays great attention to information security, protecting user data, and anonymity. Accordingly, Telegram is seen as the safest and most popular platform for opposition and radical groups. Due to the closed nature of this messenger, its representation among automated monitoring of social network sites was not very high. However, monitoring of closed groups showed a high usage of this app by extremist and terrorist groups, especially in the Russian and Uzbek languages. The previously established high popularity of Telegram<sup>69</sup> is confirmed by this research. Additionally, Central Asian users can access closed Russian language groups which focus on a post-Soviet audience.

**YouTube** is the most popular internet resource for sharing videos. The audience of this site is the most diverse, including members of a wide variety of social strata, ethnic and religious groups, ages, etc. Due to the strict censorship and content control imposed by this video hosting site in the past two years, Salafi and jihadist channels cannot share their propaganda openly, at least in comparison with earlier times. As a result, the latter group employs more flexible tactics, operating more actively on other private channels,

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<sup>68</sup> Hereinafter, materials from the following resources are used:

Digital Central Asia: Social Networks and Messengers - <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/12907>

Social Internet networks: General characteristics and usage. General characteristics of social networks General social networks - <https://passportbdd.ru/rabota-s-pk/socialnye-internet-seti-obshchaya-harakteristika-i-napravlennost-is-polzovaniya-obshchaya-harakteristika/>.

Characteristics of Social Networks -<https://sites.google.com/site/socialnyesetischool24/--1> and the conclusions of the authors of this study based on the content analysis obtained using the Brand Analytics system.

<sup>69</sup> According to the media, Telegram was actively used by ISIL in 2015. According to intelligence agencies, propagandists of this organization distributed material to 14,000 subscribers in more than 30 channels in various languages. See: They Brought Trouble: How Islamists Discussed and Coordinated Terrorist Attacks in Paris via Social Media <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/11/15/ismedia/>

working more closely on the content, presentation, material, and so on. At the same time, despite the censorship, the amount of fundamentalist material on YouTube continues to grow. In Tajikistan for example, the number of channels belonging to proponents of parties and movements banned in Tajikistan but based outside the country has risen sharply in recent years<sup>70</sup>.

**Vkontakte (VK) and Instagram** are not particularly popular among users in this study and extremist material there is minimal. The research did not identify specific active groups with radical religious themes, although some individual user pages were found to share extremist, and occasionally terrorist, content.

Each of these channels make it easy enough to create group chats, post material, comment, and repost with a single click onto the pages of “clients.” They allow you to open several accounts at the same time to communicate with different groups. Ideologists and propagandists from extremist and terrorist organizations use online platforms to instruct their followers about the rules for using these platforms including how to create groups and repost content. Many of them embed usage tips into their sites or channels.

Depending on the capability of the online platform, they create both open and closed profiles in which religious and theological issues are actively discussed. Groups often have a neutral name (for example: “What does the Quran talk about?” “Conversations about Islam,” “Solution in Islam,” etc.), but they become a place for discussion between radical and moderate Muslims. For personal profiles, it is also common for the same user to open a page for a tight circle of visitors (usually under a neutral name) and a public page with its own pseudonym<sup>71</sup>. The public page is designed for a sufficiently prepared audience, with sufficient skills to read and understand the religious arguments and those who follow world events. These pages contain a mix of content in Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Arabic (in Arabic, mainly the works of modern ideologists of jihad, such as al-Albani). They also show the most difficult lessons on jihad, which make the most of arguments legitimizing jihad. This type of content (most often in audio clips) is designed for mid-level propagandists who are preparing labour migrants and small groups for recruitment.

The same agent (propagandist) will often spread their material on various platforms using various accounts. For example, the propagandist mentioned earlier, Abdullah Zufar, mixes in his materials in moderation on 15 different channels. Propagandist channels and chats on similar sites become a type of “discussion club.” Administrators sometimes leave negative ratings or criticize comments made against the propaganda of radical ideas. Negative or critical comments spark heated discussions, which sometimes turn into aggressive attacks by the mujahideen or established proponents of violent extremist ideologies, using profanity and prison slang. It appears that by regulating the quantity and quality of the content, administrators use criticism and retaliatory attacks by the ideologically prepared recipients (who make up most of the group) to overcome the doubts of those who might waver.

In Turkmenistan, the underdevelopment of the Internet is an element that limits the use of online resources for the dissemination of radical content within the country.

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<sup>70</sup> For the most part, these channels view what is happening in Tajikistan through the lens of state-religion relations. These channels include: ‘Tojikoni Poland’ (Tajik political expats in Poland), ‘Group 24’, Isloh.net, Payom.net (expats in Iran), Politic.tj, New Tajikistan, Darvesh Tariqat, and Kuhistan.TV (religious channels), Taj.Net.TV, etc.

<sup>71</sup> Abdulloh Zufar is an example of this from the research

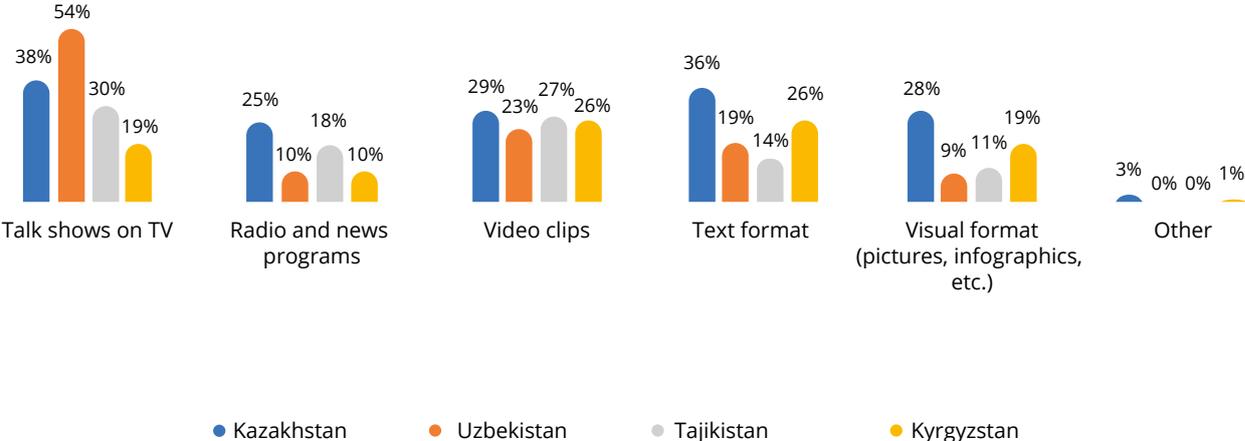
Only 26 percent of the population has access to the internet, and the cost of connectivity is an obstacle for the average family budget. Internet speed in Turkmenistan is the lowest in the world.<sup>72</sup> The network of internet cafes is not well established and is tightly controlled. There are also problems with low-quality internet connections in the outlying regions (though these problems can exist in regional centres as well). In the residential areas of Ashgabat adjacent to the presidential route, there is an increased level of connectivity blockage to, according to a local source, hinder “possible live streams of images through webcams.”

All these conditions seriously limit the opportunities of radical groups to use internet platforms to directly influence their audience in Turkmenistan. One can assume that these factors influence the fact that foreign religious extremist groups, facing the conditions in Turkmenistan, are not too eager to spend resources on overcoming these difficult barriers or on expanding their Turkmen-language propaganda content. Moreover, large numbers of Turkmen citizens live in Turkey or other CIS countries, presenting a much more convenient object for ideological influence.

**Target audience and their preferred channels for receiving information: field research results**

The results of the content analysis correlate with the results of field research relating to the preferences of formats for receiving information and found similar preferences in the choice of communication channels. According to the survey results, the most popular formats for receiving information in all four countries are: 1) TV talk shows, 2) videos, and 3) written text (see image 1). Talk shows are the most popular in Uzbekistan (54%) and least popular in Kyrgyzstan (19%). Interest in videos is similar in all four countries, ranging from 23-29%. Written text is most popular in Kazakhstan (36%) and least popular in Tajikistan (14%). Television is popular in Kazakhstan, where 10% of respondents reported spending more than five hours watching TV, while in Kyrgyzstan, only 21% of respondents said they watch more than 30 minutes of television a day.

Figure 1: Preferred formats for receiving information (by percentage)



<sup>72</sup> When compared to 176 countries. See Speedtest Global Index for October 2020 (<http://www.speedtest.net/global-index>).

Most common information sources were listed for respondents, who were asked to select the one they prefer most of all. Table 2 shows the distribution of information sources and the time spent on them in each country.

Table 2. General statistics of information sources and consumption time (by percentage)

Kazakhstan						
	Less than 30 minutes	30-60 minutes	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	More than 5 hours	Do not use
Television	25%	28%	30%	7%	10%	0%
Chats and messaging with friends	25%	34%	30%	7%	4%	
YouTube	46%	32%	19%	1%	1%	1%
In-person interaction	37%	31%	24%	6%	2%	0%
Social media feeds	31%	30%	21%	3%	13%	2%
Thematic communities and channels	50%	34%	12%	2%	1%	1%
News portals	53%	29%	11%	5%	2%	
Neighbors	58%	31%	9%	1%	1%	
Colleagues	65%	21%	10%	2%	2%	
Teachers	25%	28%	30%	7%	10%	0%
Religious organizations (mosque, church, etc.)	26%	33%	30%	7%	4%	
Other	46%	32%	19%	1%	1%	1%
Uzbekistan						
	Less than 30 minute	30-60 minutes	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	More than 5 hours	Do not use
Television	23%	33%	20%	4%	2%	18%
Chats and messaging with friends	27%	27%	17%	3%	2%	24%
YouTube	18%	20%	16%	2%	1%	43%
In-person interaction	21%	26%	24%	7%	6%	16%
Social media feeds	26%	33%	20%	3%	2%	16%
Thematic communities and channels	24%	16%	7%	1%	0%	52%
News portals	30%	20%	8%	1%	0%	41%
Neighbors	21%	14%	6%	0%	1%	58%
Colleagues	17%	15%	9%	3%	11%	45%
Teachers	17%	15%	8%	2%	2%	56%
Religious organizations (mosque, church, etc.)	10%	7%	7%	0%	1%	76%

Tajikistan						
	Less than 30 minute	30-60 minutes	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	More than 5 hours	Do not use
Television	40%	29%	27%	3%	1%	0%
Chat and messaging with friends	52%	23%	17%	4%	2%	2%
YouTube	39%	28%	26%	3%	3%	1%
In-person interaction	62%	14%	10%	2%	11%	1%
Social media feeds	42%	30%	20%	4%	3%	1%
Thematic communities and channels	41%	33%	21%	2%	2%	1%
News portals	55%	21%	19%	3%		2%
Neighbors	74%	15%	7%	1%	2%	1%
Colleagues	59%	18%	9%	7%	5%	2%
Teachers	27%	30%	24%	13%	5%	1%
Religious organizations (mosque, church, etc.)	67%	17%	17%			
Kyrgyzstan						
	Less than 30 minutes	30-60 minutes	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	More than 5 hours	Do not use
Television	36%	14%	5%	1%	1%	43%
Chats and messaging with friends	34%	23%	16%	4%	3%	20%
YouTube	29%	24%	24%	4%	3%	16%
In-person interaction	36%	27%	18%	4%	3%	12%
Social media feeds	37%	26%	18%	6%	3%	10%
Thematic communities and channels	30%	12%	6%	1%	1%	50%
News portals	44%	17%	7%	2%	1%	29%
Neighbors	24%	5%	3%	1%	0%	67%
Colleagues	30%	14%	8%	2%	3%	43%
Teachers	20%	12%	7%	2%	3%	56%
Religious organizations (mosque, church, etc.)	15%	11%	7%	0%	1%	66%

As for the preferred language for receiving information, in Kazakhstan (53%) and Kyrgyzstan (54%), it would be Russian. Respondents from Uzbekistan (88%) indicated that it is important for them to receive information in the Uzbek language. Respondents in Tajikistan have a nearly identical preference for Tajik (31%) and Russian (32%). See Table 3.

Table 3. Language preference for receiving information.

Kazakhstan				
English	Russian	Kazakh		
2%	53%	45%		
Uzbekistan				
English	Russian	Uzbek	No preference	
0%	9%	88%	3%	
Tajikistan				
English	Russian	Tajik	Uzbek	No preference
2%	32%	31%	5%	30%
Kyrgyzstan				
English	Russian	Kyrgyz	Uzbek	Kazakh
3%	54%	41%	1%	1%

## Trust in information sources

The survey results show that the most trusted source of information for most respondents is news that is broadcast on TV (54% in Kazakhstan, 50% in Uzbekistan, 71% in Tajikistan, and 46% in Kyrgyzstan). Information portals are the second most trusted information source in Kazakhstan (50%), Uzbekistan (43%), and Kyrgyzstan (46%). The second most popular source in Tajikistan is printed newspapers (55%). The least trusted in each of the four countries is postings sent to groups in various messengers. (Table 4)

Table 4: General statistics of the level of trust respondents place in information sources

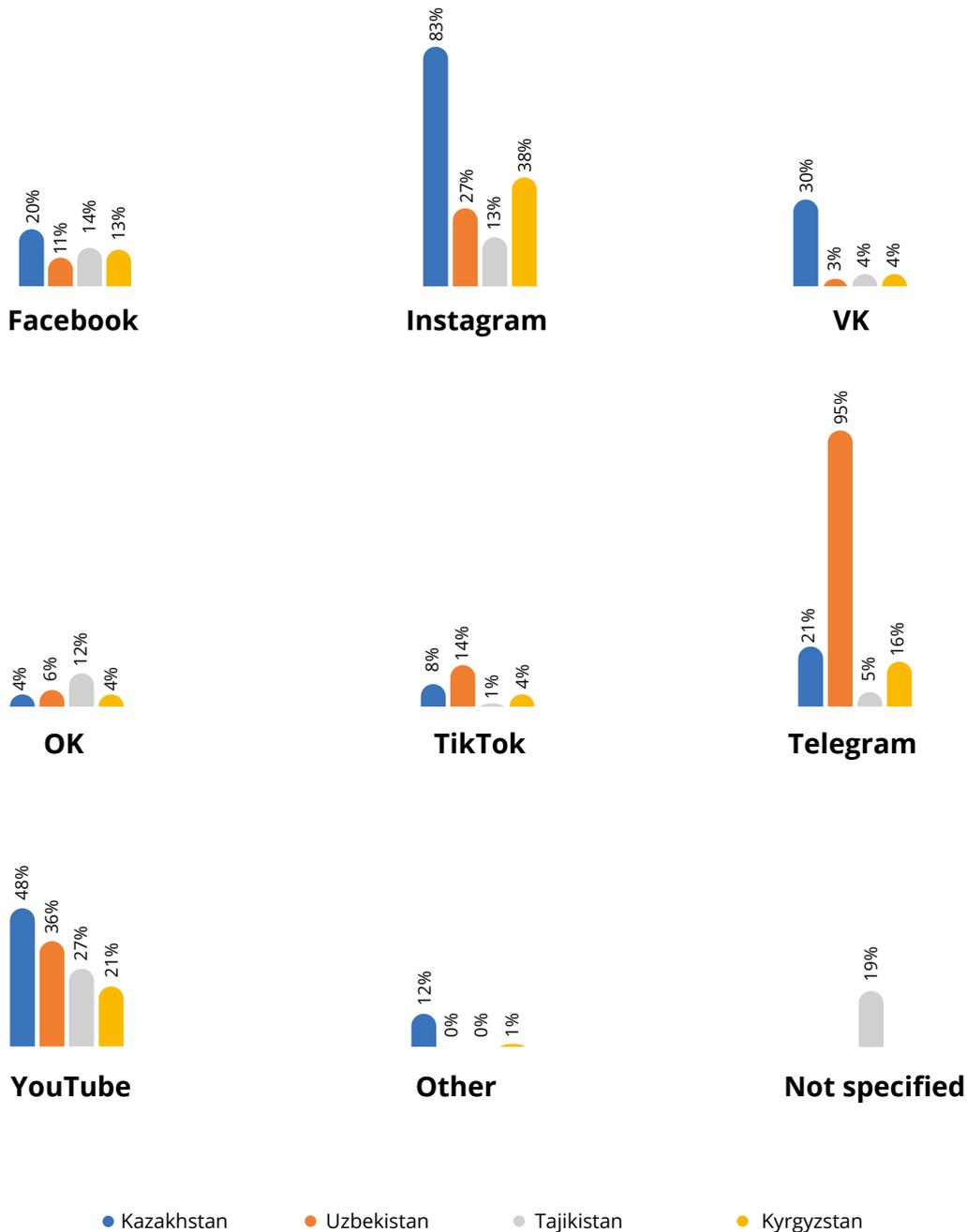
Kazakhstan						
	Completely trust	Generally trust	Sometimes trust	Generally do not trust	Do not trust at all	Do not use
News broadcasts on TV	24%	30%	32%	5%	6%	3%
Radio broadcasts	15%	26%	30%	7%	9%	13%
Social Media (OK, Facebook, etc.)	9%	21%	49%	9%	9%	3%
Information Portals	20%	30%	27%	7%	6%	10%
Printed newspapers (local and national)	23%	25%	22%	4%	8%	18%
Messages in messenger groups (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.)	3%	9%	35%	17%	33%	3%

Uzbekistan						
	Completely trust	Generally trust	Some-times trust	Generally do not trust	Do not trust at all	Do not use
News broadcasts on TV	35%	15%	35%	4%	10%	2%
Radio broadcasts	20%	10%	21%	2%	17%	28%
Social Media (OK, Facebook, etc.)	7%	6%	27%	10%	36%	14%
Information Portals	30%	13%	26%	3%	18%	10%
Printed newspapers (local and national)	26%	10%	19%	2%	19%	24%
Messages in messenger groups (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.)	6%	5%	24%	7%	50%	8%
Tajikistan						
	Completely trust	Generally trust	Some-times trust	Generally do not trust	Do not trust at all	Do not use
News broadcasts on TV	57%	14%	22%	1%	4%	2%
Radio broadcasts	38%	14%	20%	2%	9%	17%
Social Media (OK, Facebook, etc.)	8%	8%	20%	5%	20%	39%
Information Portals	18%	11%	17%	4%	24%	26%
Printed newspapers (local and national)	42%	13%	16%	2%	9%	18%
Messages in messenger groups (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.)	11%	8%	19%	7%	37%	18%
Kyrgyzstan						
	Completely trust	Generally trust	Some-times trust	Generally do not trust	Do not trust at all	Do not use
News broadcasts on TV	22%	24%	33%	6%	10%	5%
Radio broadcasts	14%	23%	30%	9%	14%	10%
Social Media (OK, Facebook, etc.)	10%	18%	41%	11%	17%	3%
Information Portals	17%	29%	31%	7%	12%	4%
Printed newspapers (local and national)	17%	23%	25%	5%	17%	13%
Messages in messenger groups (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.)	4%	5%	20%	16%	51%	4%

## Use of social media and messengers

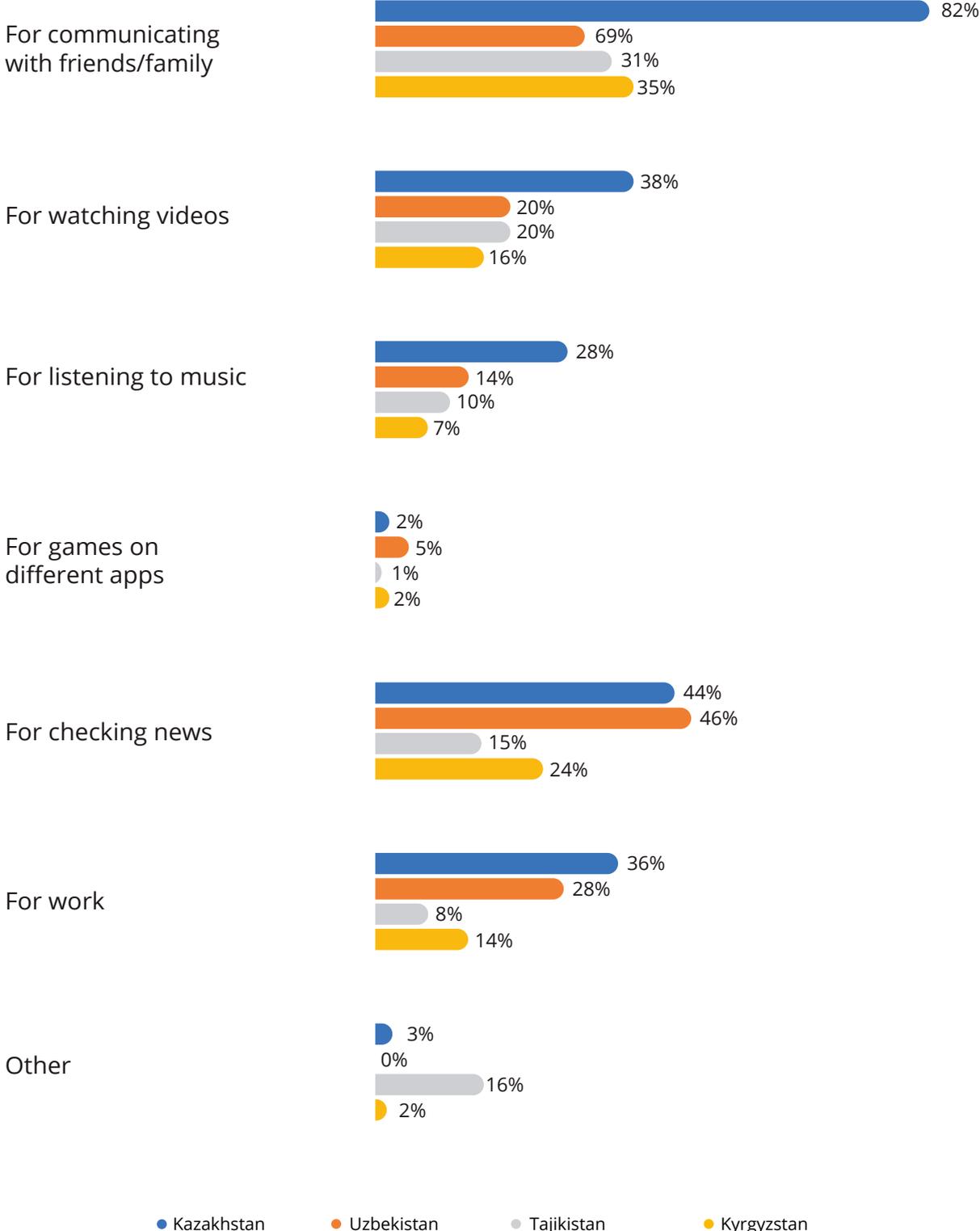
Survey results showed that Instagram and YouTube are the most used platforms in Kazakhstan (83% use Instagram, 48% use YouTube), Tajikistan (18% use Instagram, 27% use YouTube), and Kyrgyzstan (38% use Instagram, 21% use YouTube). YouTube is second most popular in Uzbekistan (36%), while Telegram is the most popular (95%). As the image below shows, Telegram is also popular as a social platform in the other three countries, as is Facebook.

Figure 2: Distribution of social media usage in all four countries.



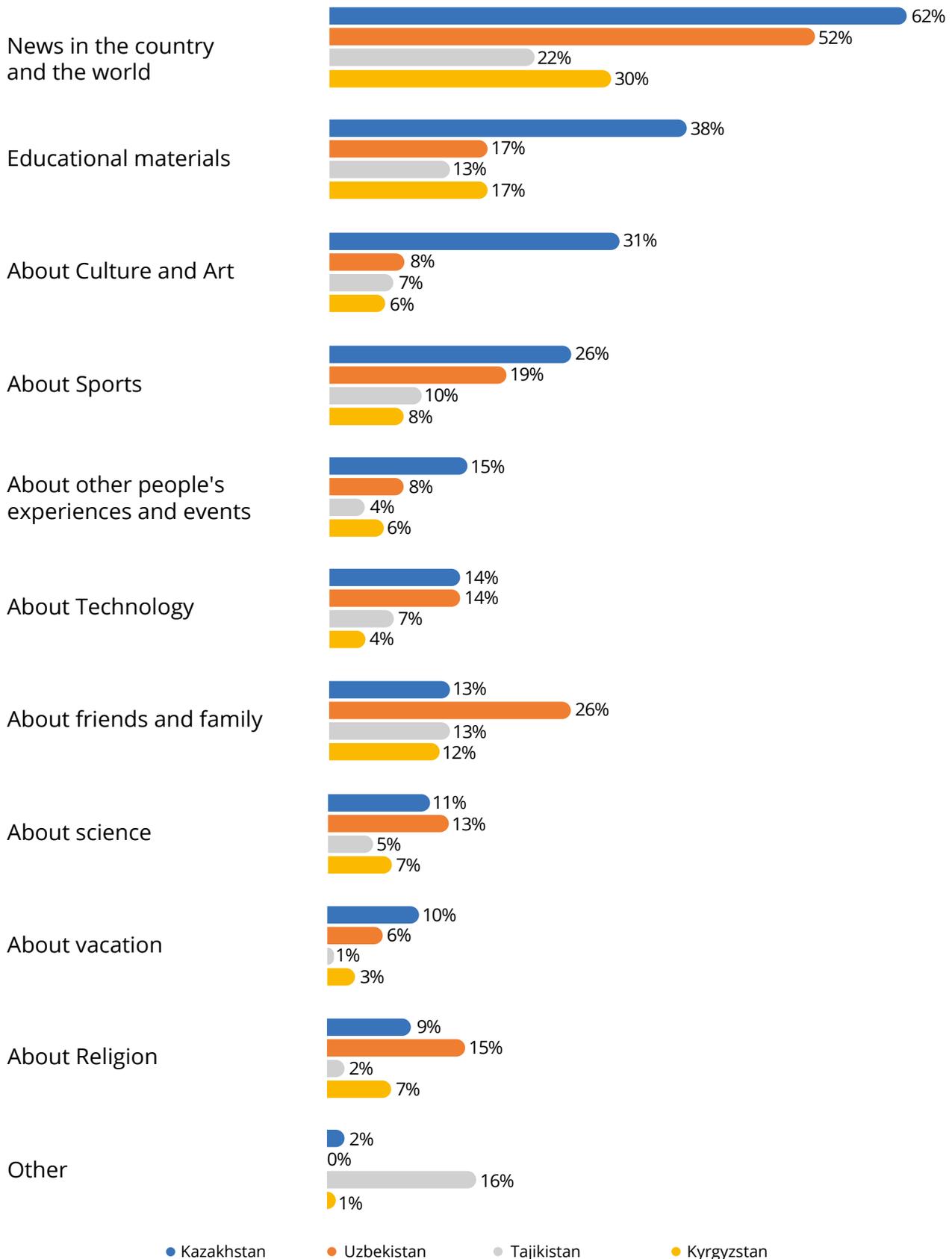
In all four countries, the most common reasons for using these social sites is: 1) communication with friends and family, 2) news, 3) watching videos. Social media is used least for playing games within their various apps. (See image 3.)

Figure 3. Motives for using social media (by percentage)



According to the data collected, users are most interested in informational content. Thus, most respondents in each country noted the importance of national and world news (Image 4). However, in Uzbekistan the most important information was about friends and relatives (26%), while in Kazakhstan they are more interested in educational material (38%).

Figure 4. Assessment of the value of information in social networks (by percentage)



## Instant Messengers

WhatsApp is the most popular messenger service among respondents from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Almost all respondents from these countries indicated that they use WhatsApp daily (96% in Kazakhstan and 95% in Kyrgyzstan). Significantly smaller groups use WhatsApp daily in Uzbekistan (11%) and Tajikistan (21%).

Telegram was the second most widely used messenger service generally but is used daily by 82 percent in Uzbekistan. Facebook Messenger, Agent mail.ru and Skype are used daily by a small portion of those surveyed from each country. Most respondents indicated that they use these apps just a few times a year or almost never. Tajikistan was unique in that the most widely used messenger service is the video messaging app Imo, which is like Skype. (See Table 5.)

Table 5: General statistics of messenger usage (by percentage)

Kazakhstan						
	Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Difficult to say
WhatsApp	96%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Telegram	28%	30%	11%	3%	28%	0%
Skype	4%	4%	10%	7%	74%	1%
Agent Mail.ru	8%	10%	9%	7%	65%	1%
Facebook Messenger	13%	12%	10%	4%	60%	1%
Uzbekistan						
	Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Difficult to say
WhatsApp	11%	9%	4%	1%	70%	5%
Telegram	82%	12%	2%	0%	3%	1%
Skype	1%	1%	1%	1%	90%	6%
Agent Mail.ru	1%	2%	1%	0%	89%	7%
Facebook Messenger	6%	6%	3%	1%	78%	6%
Tajikistan						
	Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Difficult to say
WhatsApp	21%	15%	5%	2%	56%	1%
Telegram	10%	6%	4%	1%	78%	1%
Skype	1%	1%	1%	0%	95%	2%
Agent Mail.ru	2%	2%	2%	1%	92%	1%
Facebook Messenger	11%	8%	3%	1%	76%	1%
Other_ IMO	58%	30%	11%	1%	0%	0%

## Kyrgyzstan

	Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Difficult to say
WhatsApp	95%	4%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Telegram	44%	27%	3%	1%	25%	0%
Skype	2%	3%	4%	5%	86%	0%
Агент Mail.ru	3%	3%	3%	2%	89%	0%
Facebook Мессенджер	20%	19%	10%	3%	49%	0%
Other_Viber	0%	1%	1%	1%	97%	0%
Other_IMO	1%	2%	1%	0%	96%	0%

## Chapter 2 Findings

As the content analyses have demonstrated, the propagandists of radical ideas duplicate their messages and use as many resources as possible to distribute them. Each resource has a moderated discussion, which may be an indicator of teamwork and many assistants.

Field research also shows that today's youth in the region prefer several social accounts and messengers. Such social networks as Instagram and YouTube, are more commonly visited by users from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. YouTube is the second most popular social network in Uzbekistan. However, Telegram is the most popular there.

The WhatsApp messenger, according to the survey, turned out to be the most popular application for connections among respondents from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Telegram application is the most popular in Uzbekistan, while in Tajikistan, among others, the most frequently used messengers turned out to be the Imo application, designed for video communication and its technical functions are similar to Skype. Imo is also popular in Turkmenistan<sup>73</sup>.

Table 7. Preferred formats for receiving information

	KAZAKHSTAN	UZBEKISTAN	TAJIKISTAN	KYRGYZSTAN
TV talk shows	54%	50%	71%	46%
video clips, and written text	50%	43%	55%	46%

In all four countries, the most popular formats of receiving information appeared to be: 1) TV talk shows, 2) video clips, and 3) written text. The overwhelming majority of respondents from all four countries trust TV news broadcasts as information. Information portals are the second most trusted source in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Print newspapers are the second most trusted information source in Tajikistan. The least trusted information source in all four countries is the use of messages sent to groups in various instant messengers.

Russian remains to be the most preferable language for receiving information in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Uzbekistan, they prefer to receive information in Uzbek, while in Tajikistan there is an even divide between Tajik and Russian.

Youths in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan prefer to receive information from neighbours and people close to them – through live interaction – while in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan they receive more information from social networks and news portals. Television remains a source of information, but its popularity is waning with time.

In all four countries where this survey was conducted, the most popular reasons for using social media are: 1) communication with friends and/or relatives, 2) reviewing the news, and 3) watching videos.

According to the collected data, receiving informational content is the most important value to users in all four countries. However, there are several country variances. For example, in Uzbekistan, they value information about friends and relatives (26%), while in Kazakhstan they place more value on educational material (38%).

It should be noted that the results of the content analysis have a corollary connection with the results of the field research in the following ways:

1. Radical propagandists actively use YouTube, and it is a universal platform for all types of content and is used by youth in all countries.
2. Messengers are also popular communication channels and are universal in nature.

The study identified communication channels with weaker correlations. These are Facebook, VK, and OK. Use of these platforms varies from country to country, and each platform has a different level of control over the content that users can share. Based on the results of the content analysis and field research, a clear connection can be traced between the country, the channel of communication, and the radical ideas being disseminated. At the same time, Instagram, the most popular network, contains the least amount of radical content.

Radical content is distributed in a similar way through communication channels, but the less control from the network, the more outspoken are the radical preachers and their readers. It can be said that radical preachers and their followers are more outspoken and tend to speak on personal topics in private groups on Telegram and on OK and VK, while on Facebook, public discussions of a political or general religious nature, with some elements of hate speech, prevail.

Chapter

# 3

## **THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES ON THE PERCEPTION OF REALITY AND THE VALUES OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST PROPAGANDISTS**



*Understanding how radical ideas resonate with personal and social values, how they affect what is important to the individual, is key to effective strategies to counter youth involvement in violent extremism.*

This section describes the values of youth in the Central Asian region, as well as the values broadcast by propagandists of violent extremism. The level of influence and attractiveness of radical ideas is evaluated based on the harmony between extremist ideas and the actual values of youth in Central Asian countries as well as the socio-psychological foundations of the influence of radical content. The data for this section was obtained as the result of a field research and final correlation with the content analysis data. A detailed methodology of the field research is contained in Appendix 4.

## **Values of Central Asian Youth**

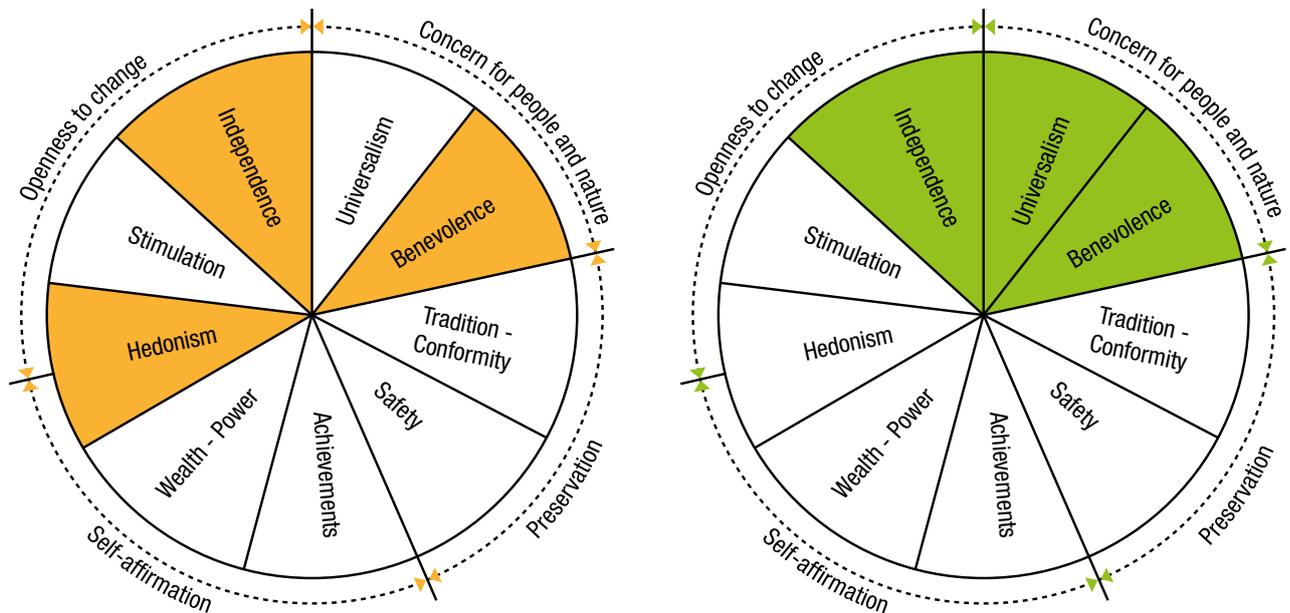
The values of Central Asian youth were determined based on the research of two groups of values – personal and societal. The following set of personal values were studied within this research<sup>74</sup>:

- Independence, which includes freedom of thought and action (choice, creativity, cognition) conditioned by the individual's need to be autonomous.
- Stimulation – the fullness of life sensations, novelty, and competition in life, which are necessary to maintain an optimal level of physical activity.
- Hedonism – pleasure, sensual pleasure, enjoyment of life.
- Achievement – achieving personal success within shared cultural standards and, as a result, gaining social approval.
- Power – achieving social status, prestige, and influencing other people.
- Safety – stability, safety, and social, familial, and individual harmony.
- Conformity – limitation of actions and motives that cause harm to others and violate social harmony.
- Tradition – Respect and upholding of customs, acceptance and recognition of ideas that exist in a particular culture or religion.
- Benevolence – maintaining and enhancing the well-being of people with whom the person is in contact.
- Universalism – understanding, gratitude, tolerance and maintaining the well-being of all people and nature.

The survey showed that the prioritization of these values among the youth of the region is rather universal; field research demonstrates differences only in the context of

Kyrgyzstan. Thus, in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, the priority value sample is represented by the “benevolence-independence-universalism” triad, while in Kyrgyzstan it is “independence-benevolence-hedonism.” Data for Turkmenistan is not available due to the inability to conduct field work and surveys there.

Figure 5. Priority values of young people in (1) Kyrgyzstan and (2) Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan



Negative values, outsider values are presented as follows: Tajikistan: “stimulation-power-conformity,” Kazakhstan: “achievements-power-conformity,” Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: “achievements-conformity-power.”

During the survey, the respondents assessed the significance of the value for themselves. The table below shows the number of people who indicated this value for themselves as of the utmost significance. The dominant values noted during the field research are also presented there.

Table 8: Prevalent values of Central Asian youth

Value	Descriptions	Responses (%)			
		Taj	Kaz	Kyr	Uzb
Benevolence	A person should always take care of his relatives and friends.	97,4	87,3	88,2	84,2
Universalism	A person wants everyone to be treated fairly, even with people he does not know, especially the weak	91,1	78,8	82,5	71,7
Independence	A person should always be free in planning and choosing his activities.	92,8	87,6	94,0	75,9
Hedonism	A person should always enjoy life	88,6	74,6	84,4	71,9

*The presence of this need for care can be realized in the country itself, a communication strategy indicating the direction of this assistance will allow this need to be realized in a socially approved way.*

As can be seen from the table, 'benevolence' is a prevalent value for the youth of these Central Asian states.

Thus, almost 90% of the surveyed young people in Central Asia emphasize the importance of being healthy, faithful, having and providing for a family, and taking care of loved ones. It was this orientation that found the greatest response in the narratives of the VE, namely the call to help Muslims suffering in the Middle East at the hands of unjust rulers, Muslims who position themselves as brothers and sisters of a single ummah that received the greatest representation and response.

At the same time, in the VE narratives, those who can be close (for example, brothers or sisters in faith) are clearly differentiated from who should not be considered as close under any circumstances (tagut, kafir, apostate, etc.). Kinship is no longer determined by blood ties, but by adherence to a common idea. People who are not in the inner circle are deprived of the right to care and are automatically labelled as "them" instead of "us."

The presence of this need for care can be realized in the country itself, a communication strategy indicating the direction of this assistance will allow this need to be realized in a socially approved way (assistance to the elderly, orphanages, and other vulnerable groups).

The next value that dominates the hierarchy of value orientations of Central Asian youth is 'universalism,' which is expressed in the importance of help and charity to other people, justice and well-being of all people, and the establishment of peace.

This value is most significant in Tajikistan (91%) and Kyrgyzstan (82.5%), slightly less in Kazakhstan (79%) and Uzbekistan (72%). This value orientation is most clearly expressed in the narratives of the formation of the image of a hero who comes to the aid of the weak, saves them from the injustice of the modern world (Dar ul-Zulm). Both the image of the hero and the image of the enemy are formed according to these narratives. The enemy is an abstract collective image from which one needs to protect, but rarely a specific person. When it comes to a specific individual, the level of hostility is noticeably weaker.

This need, like the first, can be realized with an emphasis on helping vulnerable groups in their country, but with an emphasis on publicity, expressed gratitude, scale and visibility of the assistance provided.

Independence is also a significant value orientation for young people in the Central Asian region, which is understood as the importance for a person to make decisions on his own, to be free, self-reliant, and experience the world.

Field research indicates the high importance of this value for Kyrgyz (94%), Tajik (93%), and Kazakh (87%) youth. Independence is less significant, but still in the group of dominant values for Uzbek youth (76%). In turn, radical narratives affect only a certain part of a given value: curiosity and interest in the world. Content analysis revealed that involvement in closed groups where individual recruitment takes place is due to the main theme “Learn more about Islam” and calls to see a real war and participate in significant historical processes (holy war, the emergence of the caliphate, etc.). The realization of this need within the country is possible through the active involvement of young people in vibrant and eventful activities.

‘Hedonism’ represents the importance of getting pleasure from life and enjoying the fullness of life. This value is included in the triad of priority values only among the youth of Kyrgyzstan (84.4%). Nevertheless, the youth of Tajikistan (88.6%), and Kazakhstan (74.6%), and Uzbekistan (71.9%) also consider finding pleasure in life to be significant.

Meanwhile, the studied narratives show that VE ideologists prefer to talk about limited physical pleasures (rejecting feasts, music, dances) and that any pleasure should be evaluated through the prism of “the pleasure of Allah,” that is, from the point of view of the norms and ethics of Sharia as interpreted by the VE ideologists.

Thus, the polls show that most young people only partially or almost entirely do not adopt the religious rigorism imposed by the ideologists of radicalism. For example, field research found regarding the concept of “fullness of life,” most respondents include material wealth (money), success in personal business and, at the same time, adherence to Sharia norms and service to God in addition to typical family values.

Consequently, the respondents themselves, especially young people, do not see serious contradictions in such a combination of ordinary physical pleasures (family and other celebrations with music, concerts, etc.), with everyday profit-seeking on the one hand, and restrictive religious ethics on the other.

Treating hedonism as a part of earthly life, with the restrictions of a religious order, shows that the bulk of young people are quite able to combine simple religious precepts, without asceticism, rigorism, and fanaticism. Consequently, the enjoyment of life is allowed in socially approved forms. It is this tradition that is important to consolidate when it comes to the ideological aspects of counterpropaganda.

Age groups do not impact the hierarchy of values. (Respondents are grouped as follows: 18-21, 22-25, 26-35.) There are no significant differences in the level of education and the type of area (city-village).

*The polls show that most young people only partially or almost entirely do not perceive the religious rigorism imposed by the ideologists of radicalism.*

*A high level of tolerance should not be misleading and should not minimize the perception of the threat of radicalization. The ideas of radical preachers are directed towards the minority, which feel oppressed because of the rejection of their beliefs by the majority.*

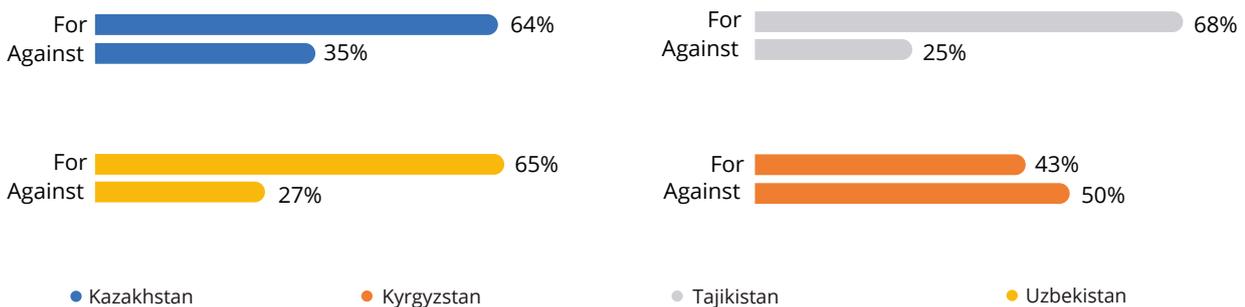
During the pilot study, in addition to personal values, the researchers studied political and ideological attitudes, young people's perceptions of success, and triggers to the emotional state and trust in others.

### Political and ideological values and guidelines

To assess the political and ideological attitudes of youth, respondents were offered several statements concerning the perception of other ethnic and religious groups.

Young people were asked to assess the acceptability of interethnic marriages, in the context of xenophobia and the division of people into "us" and "them." Most respondents in Kazakhstan (64%), Kyrgyzstan (65%), and Tajikistan (68%) responded positively to interethnic marriages. In Uzbekistan, far fewer respondents were tolerant to marriage between people of differing nationalities (43%). The percentage of people who did not agree with the statement in Kazakhstan was 35%, 27% in Kyrgyzstan, 25% in Tajikistan, and 50% in Uzbekistan.

Figure 6: Attitudes of young people toward interethnic marriages



It is also noteworthy that the majority of Kazakh youth associate with people of other ethnic groups (76%), and the same is true for just 66% in Tajikistan and 64% in Kyrgyzstan. But Uzbek youth barely have any association with people of other ethnicities. Just 34% of those surveyed said they have many friends of other nationalities:



These beliefs are also reflected in the radical message content aimed at inciting or maintaining xenophobic attitudes toward those of other nationalities. Also, we can make conclusions about the transformation of these messages based on the country context. While the format of original messages emanating from the main protagonists of radical Islam discussed mainly Jews, the country segments of social media

networks transform these messages to focus instead on ethnic minorities, such as the Dungans in Kazakhstan.

The next field survey statement, "Muslims and Christians have a lot in common," was aimed at assessing inclusive attitudes among young people. The results showed that young people in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan do not share a common view on this issue. In Uzbekistan, 48 percent do not agree that Muslims and Christians have a lot in common. But in Kyrgyzstan, 48 percent agreed with the statement, along with 47 percent agreeing in Tajikistan. In Kazakhstan, even more (56 %) agreed with the statement.

A desire to see greater participation of religious leaders in the country's political life shows the authority of these leaders in comparison with political leaders. On the one hand, this demonstrates some respondents discrediting political secular institutions of power, and on the other hand the division of society into religious and secular. The latter, in narratives of a violent extremist nature is reflected in calls to fight against the secular state, secular institutions of power and condemnation of the "official" mullahs.

In terms of political reconstruction, the largest number of respondents in Tajikistan agreed with the statement about the importance of observing all the rights of believers (74%) and that women should have the right to wear hijabs everywhere (59%). Most of the Kazakh youth also support the opinion about observing religious rights (70%). Kazakh and Uzbek youth also agree with the statement that women should have the right to wear hijabs anywhere, with 58 percent indicating agreement. But 36 percent of respondents in both these countries did not agree with the statement. In Kyrgyzstan, 73 percent expressed a positive sentiment about the acceptability of wearing religious clothing and accessories in public places, while only 21 percent responded negatively.

In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, 47 percent of respondents have a positive opinion of the influence of religious leaders in political life in the country, along with 44 percent in Uzbekistan. The response to this question was largely ambivalent. Half of respondents would prefer that religious leaders had more influence on politics (50%), with respondents in the youngest age range, 18-21, showing the strongest support (57%). The other half of respondents did not agree that religious leaders should have more political influence. This attitude is more common for older groups of respondents.

The desire to see more participation of religious leaders in the political life of the country demonstrates the authority of these leaders in comparison with political ones. On the one hand, this demonstrates some discrediting of political, respectively, secular institutions of power, and on the other hand, the division of

society into religious and secular. The latter, in the narratives of a violent extremist nature, is reflected in calls to fight against the secular state, secular institutions of power and in the condemnation of "official" mullahs.

The relationship with Western culture is an important indicator of youth ideological value preferences. Concerning hostility toward "the West," respondents consider it necessary to forbid celebrating Halloween in their country, since it contradicts their traditions and culture. In Tajikistan, it is 61 percent of respondents, 53 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 37 percent in Uzbekistan, and 57 percent in Kazakhstan.

At the same time, according to an even larger number of respondents, Western culture, music and films harm the moral and spirituality of their society. In Tajikistan, this is 75 percent of the respondents, in Uzbekistan: 57 percent. The poll showed that among the new generation of Kazakhstanis and Kyrgyzstanis there is no consensus about the influence of Western culture on morality and spirituality in the country: 46 percent of the respondents in Kazakhstan and 49 percent in Kyrgyzstan agree that Western culture is harmful to morality and spirituality to some degree, while 52 percent and 45 percent, respectively, do not agree with this statement.

Anti-Western rhetoric is also widespread in VE narratives, aimed at strengthening the "We-They" juxtaposition. These beliefs are reinforced by the penchant of radical preachers for conspiracy theories and other conspiracy theories that they actively broadcast.

Within the framework of the thesis about the sacralization of religious ideas and symbols, the absolute majority agree that people who offend religion and their values should be severely punished. The survey showed that the respondents in Kazakhstan (80%), Tajikistan (77%), Kyrgyzstan (73%) and Uzbekistan (58%) consider this unacceptable and consider it necessary to punish people for insulting religion:

KAZAKHSTAN

**80%**

TAJIKISTAN

77%

KYRGYZSTAN

**73%**

UZBEKISTAN

**58%**

Regarding criticism of religious content on social media, the results indicate that the most common reaction is to ignore any criticism. This is how about half of the respondents in Kazakhstan (50%), Tajikistan (44%) and Uzbekistan (52%) behave when they are faced with negative statements about their religion. In Kyrgyzstan, the majority of those who ignore criticism makes up 36 percent of respondents. In second place those surveyed said they would ask the critic a

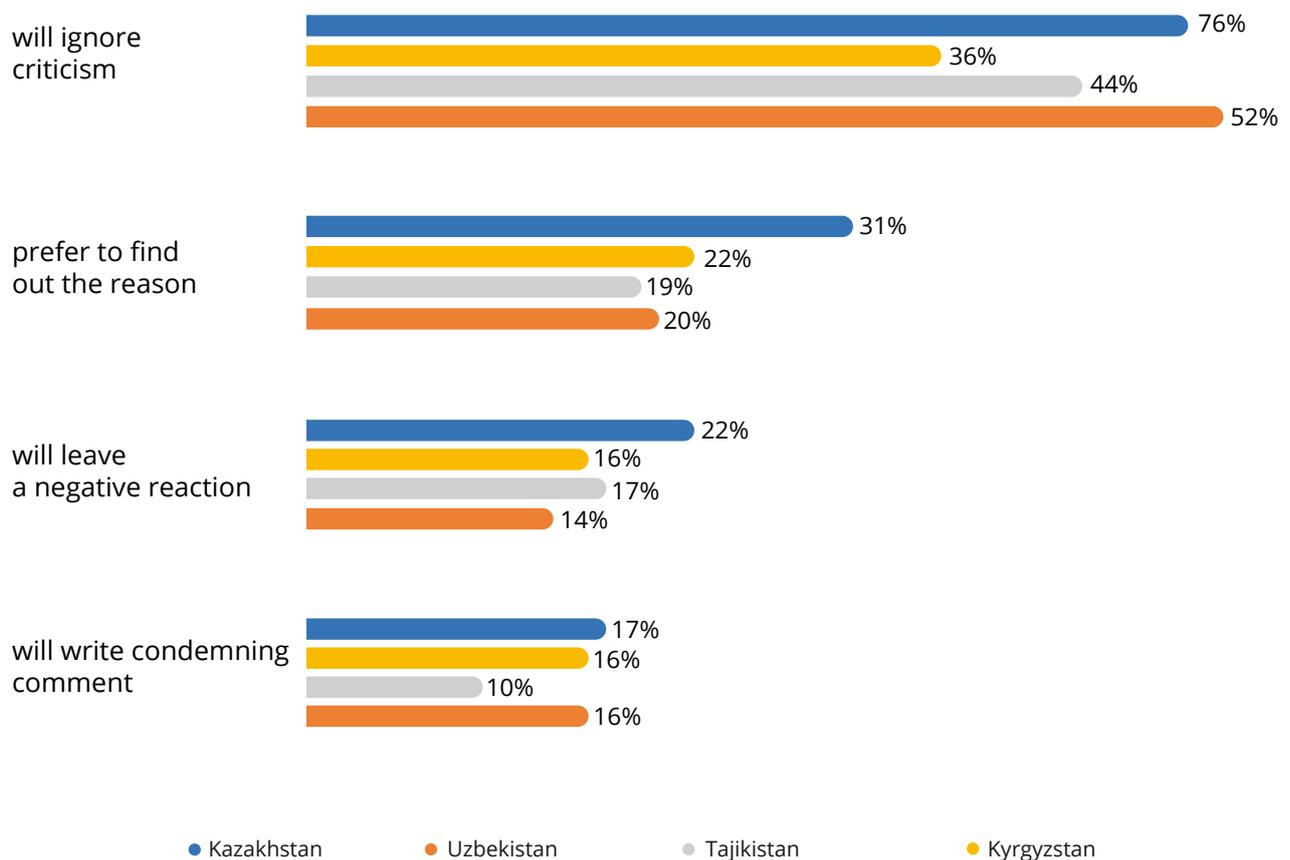
question to find out why he writes this way with the following percentages responding this way: Kazakhstan (31%); Tajikistan (19%), Uzbekistan (20%) and Kyrgyzstan (22%).

In Kazakhstan, 22 percent choose the option "I will write condemning comment" and 17 percent of respondents will leave a negative reaction. In Kyrgyzstan, 16 percent will leave a negative reaction, and another 16 percent will write a condemning comment.

If respondents from Tajikistan see a video or post on social networks criticizing his/her religion or a representative of his/her religion, 17 percent will leave a negative reaction and 10 percent will leave a judgmental comment. Fourteen percent of respondents from Uzbekistan will leave a negative reaction and 16 percent will write a condemning comment.

Similar responses were received to the question of how young people would behave when they came across a negative post/comment on social networks regarding another religion. As in the first case, most representatives from all countries will choose to ignore it. The main difference between the first and second situations is that in the case of criticism of another religion, a noticeably smaller number of users are ready to write a condemning commentary, which is obviously due to the social distance between their own faith and the foreign religion.

Figure 7: Youth reaction to criticism of "their" religion on social media.



*The analysis of values shows that radical ideas and messages can become consonant with 16% of young people*

Among respondents from Kazakhstan 54 percent will ignore it, 27 percent will ask the author a question, 14 percent will leave a negative reaction and 14 percent would write a condemning comment. If respondents from Kyrgyzstan see a video or post on social networks in which someone criticizes another religion or a representative of another religion, 46 percent will ignore it, 17 percent will ask the author why he shared this or writes like this, 13 percent would leave a negative reaction and 10 percent would write a condemning commentary.

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the reaction to criticism of their religion, the majority in Tajikistan (52%) are indifferent to criticism of another religion or its members. At the same time, only 12 percent of respondents will ask the author a question to find out the reason why he writes this way and 13 percent would leave a negative reaction. Of the respondents from Uzbekistan, 68 percent will ignore it as well, 18 percent would ask the author why he shared this or writes like this and 12 percent would leave a negative reaction.

These results indicate that the most vulnerable group of young people in Central Asia is on average 16 percent of young people who are ready to actively defend their religion. These people are potentially easier involved in discussions on religious topics, sometimes in a radical interpretation. This enthusiasm and their willingness to discuss the issue is used by the propagandists of VE ideologies for further indoctrination. In the narratives of the VE, it is in the image of the hero and the enemy that the need to protect one's own religion from attacks and criticism is fulfilled.

## **Understanding of success**

Like the results of the analysis of personal values and political-ideological attitudes, in the process of analysing perceptions of success, personal, family and religious indicators are prioritized.

Most respondents in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have similar aspirations in life. They highlighted the importance of having a strong financial position for themselves (40%). At the same time, those interviewed in Kyrgyzstan have another priority, such as personal development (16%). In Uzbekistan, the priority for 33 percent of respondents is to create a family.

*Evidence that a person believes in God is an important indicator of success for Central Asian youth*

The second priority for representatives of Kazakhstan is personal self-development (40%) and the creation of their own family (32%). At the same time, respondents from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan chose identical aspirations in the creation of their own family (15%). In comparison with interviewees from Uzbekistan who chose serving God (40%), youth from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan only make this issue their third

Table 9: Youth understanding of success

	● Kazakhstan	● Tajikistan	● Kyrgyzstan	● Uzbekistan
Strong financial position for themselves	40%	45%	40%	18%
Strong financial position for their loved ones	45%	45,9%	45%	25%
Personal self-development	39%	18%	39%	16%
Creation of their own family	32%	38%	32%	33%
Serving God	18%	32%	17%	31%

priority. The respondents from Kazakhstan rank having a family only fourth and it is not a priority in their lives.

Financial difficulties are a universally dominant factor that can interfere with the implementation of plans. Opinions were distributed as follows: in Kazakhstan: 50%, Kyrgyzstan: 25%, Uzbekistan: 36%, and Tajikistan: 47%. It is noteworthy that in Uzbekistan 22 percent of respondents said that they do not know what prevents them from implementing their plans and ambitions.

Self-doubt has also been identified as an impediment to the implementation of the plans in all four countries.

Respondents in all countries unanimously chose the success of having a happy family as a dominant factor. More than 61 percent of respondents from Kazakhstan, 24 percent of respondents from Kyrgyzstan, 36 percent of respondents from Tajikistan and 54 percent of respondents from Uzbekistan chose this option.

In second place, seeking a good job was a priority for those surveyed from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, while for Uzbekistan, piety was in second place. For 30 percent of respondents from Kazakhstan, self-confidence and having friends are also important components of a happy and successful person, which is also acceptable for Kyrgyzstan (11%). For Tajikistan, it is a circle of friends (16%), while for Uzbekistan it is to find a good job (14%). Other factors, such

*Presence of a happy family is a universal indicator of success in all countries.*

*Financial stability, peace and the presence of a loved one guarantee a feeling of happiness to young people in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.*

as honesty, discipline, relaxation, were found to be less popular responses for the respondents in all four countries.

Based on these results, we can conclude that for all respondents, financial stability and independence, creating their own family, personal self-development and serving God are indicators of success. The least important indicators of success were the pursuit of fame, the approval of others, and enjoyment of life.

Thus, “unsuccessful” people (those who lack financial stability, work, or are dissatisfied with themselves) are looking for opportunities to realize these desires. It is these needs that radical propagandists go after since the propagandists offer an alternative and clearly implemented method of achieving them; in a just Islamic state, financial well-being, family, and certainly service in the name of God are achievable.

### **Triggers of emotional state and trust in the environment**

More than half of the respondents (58%) in Kazakhstan noted that achieving meaningful goals is one of the decisive factors that can make a person happy. About half of the young people also chose the presence of a loved one and a state of rest. Material security was the fourth characteristic of a happy person, when both family and the well-being of loved ones were the least important factors for the respondents from Kazakhstan.

Similar to Kazakhstan, in Kyrgyzstan the level of happiness of respondents is determined by the achievement of significant goals (31%), the absence of anxiety (30%), the presence of love and a loved one (25%) and material security (12%).

In Tajikistan, a significant proportion of respondents (32%) noted the achievement of meaningful goals as a key factor in making them feel happy. At the same time, the choice of every fifth respondent was material security, with one in four indicating love and tranquillity, respectively.

Remarkable data was revealed in Uzbekistan, where the level of respondents' happiness is determined by the absence of anxiety (66%), by the presence of love and a loved one (25%), with the achievement of significant goals in third place and material security in fourth place.

According to the survey, the factors that most positively affect the well-being of respondents in Kazakhstan are calmness (45%), having money (43%) and having a loved one (40%), while in Kyrgyzstan most respondents indicated the same reasons: calmness (23%), love (20%), and material well-being (13%). The data from Tajikistan was similar to that from the aforementioned countries, so the reasons for well-being for the respondents from Tajikistan was also calmness and a lack of anxiety (26%), and the

availability of money (23%). The Tajiks responded that they are less influenced by feelings of love (15%).

In Uzbekistan, many respondents noted calmness (34%), love (25%), humour (23%), and material well-being (17%) was ranked fourth. However, it is worth noting that family is the least popular choice among those surveyed in all four countries.

Triggers that cause negative emotions among respondents in almost all of the countries were associated with violence, conflict, injustice, and a lack of financial means. For about 55 percent of the respondents in Kazakhstan, violence and injustice in the country evoke the most negative emotions. The respondents also noted that conflicts with other people (33%) and financial difficulties (26%) also negatively affect their well-being.

Many respondents in Kyrgyzstan indicated that the most significant factors causing negative emotions are injustice in the country (27%), conflicts with people (21%), and violence in their environment (18%).

More than a quarter of respondents in Tajikistan cited a lack of money as the main factor causing negative emotions. Those answering that negative emotions came from violence in the environment (20%), bad weather (18%), conflicts with people (16%) and injustice in the country (16%) were at almost the same level.

Most respondents in Uzbekistan also indicated a lack of money (30%), violence in the environment (29%), and conflicts in the country (22%) were a cause of negative emotions and injustice in the country evoked the same negative emotions for 21 percent.

Triggers of negative emotions (injustice, violence, conflict, lack of finances) are also easily identified by propagandists and are key in the narratives of VEs, as mentioned in the first chapter. Note that the majority of extremist messages affect the emotions of the content consumer, rather than its rational assessment.

Injustice, which is a meta-narrative of all violent extremist groups, uses various topical socio-political pretexts in local VE narratives. It is injustice, as shown by a field study that is an emotional trigger to which young people react sharply; accordingly, the VE narrative is consonant with the emotions experienced by young people.

As the data displays, of course, for all respondents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, parents are the most authoritative people when making decisions. Respondents in Kyrgyzstan (22%) and Kazakhstan (56%) are more likely to listen to their own opinions, while respondents in Tajikistan (18%) and Uzbekistan (24%) are more likely to listen to their spouses when making decisions.

*Most extremist messages affect the emotions of the consumer rather than his/her rational assessment.*

This parental authority is a deterrent from radicalization that can be used most effectively in PVE programs. It is no coincidence that in a number of VE content there are messages aimed at breaking parent-child ties. This issue is discussed in the context of the topic 'Do I need parental permission to commit hijra or jihad' (see Chapter 1).

The spouse's own opinion and opinion can also act as an "anchor" in PVE work. However, one should take into account the ambiguous nature of these factors: the priority of one's own opinion can keep one from external manipulation. At the same time, it does not allow one to critically and with confidence receive adequate advice from others. Likewise, the opinion of the spouse can be negatively decisive if one of the partners is a bearer of a radical ideology.

## Chapter 3 Findings

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that radical preachers have a sufficiently wide audience to disseminate their messages and recruit among a minority that shares a strong sense of injustice and lack of security compared to the majority of the population.

Special attention should be paid to people aged 18-21, regardless of gender and place of residence, due to the high level of vulnerability and uncertain value orientations. The risk group includes young people with a low level of education, as people with secondary education are more inclined to trust their elders, especially in the case of when their parents or relatives themselves promote such ideas or demonstrate a high level of tolerance to them.

Young people over the age of 22 may also be of some interest to propagandists of violent extremism because they have already achieved a certain level of financial independence and can provide financial support in the implementation of the ideas of radicals.

There is a clear correlation between the values and attitudes of young people and the messages of the protagonists of the VE and their followers, the specifics of the region and the country. A significant number of messages, ideas and narratives identified in the first chapter are aimed at evoking a sense of compassion, encouraging the protection of a neighbour by supporting the ideas of VE, and abandoning personal good in favour of a group purpose of supporting radical groups.

In general, analysis of the target audience and its values and attitudes in correlation with the messages of VE suggests that radical communication strategies are clearly aimed at a disaffected minority that is able to respond to them, and do not affect the moderate majority. Even though a belief in God is a universal value, radical groups do not need to form a primary information field for their ideas, because both the minority and the majority will independently prepare themselves to understand all types of messages.

Results of the correlation analysis of radical messages and values and beliefs of young people, show that the state, public, and media sectors can antagonize the following theses:

- The secular state is a “territory of oppression” for Muslims.
- Ideas support conspiracy theories.
- It includes xenophobic talking points and broadcasts xenophobic beliefs.

Government authorities, the public sector, and the media need to offer information platforms:

- Information flows offering other forms of identity.
- Streams offering platforms to realize the need to help others.
- Controlled platforms, which discuss everyday issues and ways out of difficult life situations.

Chapter

# 4

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO RADICAL NARRATIVES IN VARIOUS TYPES OF MEDIA**



Developing effective communication strategies directly depends on understanding the conceptual foundations of radical propaganda and methods of subsequent recruitment of supporters. Since communication strategies are a 'living' tool that can change quickly, based on the state of the information field and the availability of content that needs to be responded to urgently. In this sense, this chapter can become a relatively long-term constant, a starting point for subsequent communication work.

1. Definition and assessment of views, concepts, ideas, values and content disseminated by banned extremist organizations on the Internet and receiving the greatest response from young people in Central Asia;
2. Analysis of distribution sources and the language of radical ideology at the local level: content in local languages (Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Russian) and, on the external global level, posted and disseminated in social networks and messengers. Study of communication concepts of radical groups, including communication channels and instant messaging applications aimed at the audience of Central Asian countries;
3. Analysis of hate speech spread by radical groups. The role of hate speech in the radicalization of youth in Central Asian countries;
4. Analysis of the involvement of young people in controversy and discussion of the calls of banned radical groups in social networks, instant messengers, and instant messaging applications. What questions are asked and what questions are being discussed.

## **Media propaganda and manipulation methods**

Based on the materials studied and the survey data, we can distinguish the following approaches to building communications by religious radicals:

- a. Widespread propaganda and preliminary selection of potential members and activists of radical groups in social networks; here the emphasis is on video hosting – primarily YouTube – and the distribution of video materials, as well as open chats, private and thematic blogs, channels, and websites dedicated to religious and theological issues.
- b. The use of closed thematic groups, chats, and messengers by radical groups for further indoctrination (recruitment), communication with their supporters, and coordination of actions within the organization. As described in Chapter 2, Telegram and Odnoklassniki, as well as some instant messengers, are more often platforms for such communications. These platforms are used for the final stage of recruiting: that is for processing and introducing pre-selected and verified candidates into the structure of the organization. Platforms such as Facebook, not to mention various instant messengers, are not considered reliable enough and therefore are not used directly for recruiting<sup>75</sup>.
- c. The maintaining of anonymity and security issues to prevent control by the administration of online platforms and regulatory authorities (special services), the following approaches are used:
- d. The use of neutral titles and topics that make it difficult to identify radical content.

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<sup>75</sup> Wickr.me.

- e. Propagation of their ideas through “partner channels” and religious channels of moderate Islamists and independent private blogs. As a rule, propagandists of radical groups spread their ideas through neutral channels, by posting comments under published materials, imposing their approach and vision of problems, actively participating in discussions and chats. Thus, potential candidates for recruitment are identified, who are then invited to closed groups and chats for further recruiting.
- f. Prompt closure of channels and a transition to alternative platforms. In the case of blocking channels by platforms or regulatory authorities, radical groups quickly open new groups and chats under a different name.
- g. The use of more than one platform to host the material.

Based on the results of the desk analysis, content analysis, and field research described in the previous chapters, it can be said that the preachers of radical Islam quite accurately and timely respond to the state of the potential audience, its values and attitudes (for example, responsiveness to calls for help, the need for self-determination as a religious person, etc.), socio-political events (criticism of secular state power, summing up the evidence base for the premise that secular power oppresses Muslims), social conflicts (using the confrontation of ethnic groups in the region as an argument to confirm their theses). Thus, we are dealing with an attempt to systematize and instrumentalize the propaganda of VE, based on:

- 1) The active use of the capabilities of the Internet and web applications.
- 2) A careful study of the weaknesses of official propaganda, which prefers a standard language and is unable to keep the attention of socially active listeners.
- 3) The use of all methods of raising your own rating. For example, advertising against terrorists, which is intensified but monotonous, is promoted in formal language by the official means of counterpropaganda or the media influenced by them.

In general, the main result of the propaganda activity of the protagonists of radical Islam from Central Asia (including jihadists) over the past seven to eight years has been the formation of an autonomous information space, which has developed its own methods of propaganda, unique strategies of communication and control over the audience, methods of delivering information, and multilateral chats and dialogue platforms.

## Value-based psychological foundations of violent extremist propaganda

To analyze the value and psychological underpinnings of violent extremism propaganda, it is necessary to determine which radical narratives appear to be strategic and how they affect consumers of propaganda. As part of the literature review, it was determined that Denaux and Gomez-Perez (2019), considering strategic radical narratives, allocate three main subgroups<sup>76</sup>:

- **Promoting group identity:** Any narratives that promote a radical group that spreads this message, such as the image of the winner, the social aspects (problems) of the group, the adventures to promote the ideology of the group.

<sup>76</sup> Denaux Ronald, et.al, Textual Analysis for Radicalisation Narratives aligned with Social Sciences Perspectives (2015).

- **Discrediting other groups:** Any narratives that discredit other groups.
- **Sowing discord between groups:** Actions which increase differences between groups.
- **Emphasizing a moral obligation:** Narratives that are based on social and cultural norms to justify a certain type of action.

The work carried out in this study fully confirms the existence of all four subgroups of strategic radical narratives in the information space of the Central Asian region. For example, the promotion of group identity occurs by explaining the rules of behaviour of a Muslim, the system of values of a religious person, his behaviour, and social reactions (as it relates to family, neighbours, society, etc.). Also, within the framework of this narrative, the image of the winner is formed, the heroics of the “warriors of Islam” (more in a non-verbal form, through the corresponding visual series) are promoted.

The discrediting of other groups is expressed in the form of the clarification of the misconduct of non-believers, secular authorities, members of ethnic minorities and other groups, which may be attractive to the preachers of radical Islam depending on the current situation. These same theses are used to sow hostility and discord between groups.

A strong aspect of radical propaganda is the formation of a moral obligation. This moral obligation is to actively participate and assist fellow believers, in the form of personal participation, financial assistance or dissemination of relevant ideas.

It must be recognized that all the messages identified in the study of existing narratives resonate among the region's youth, as they share the value of being a religious person, support xenophobic sentiments and the desire to distance themselves from others, and promote specific appeals and mechanisms to help their neighbour, which is one of the strongest values. There is also an indirect link between the value of the family, financial well-being and stability and criticism of secular power. Often, troubles in the family, caused by material issues, are transformed into dissatisfaction with the existing state devices and increase the sense of social injustice.

It should be noted that the subject matter of discussion in each country always corresponds to problematic situations within the country itself. In addition to country specifics, there are similar features of topics discussed and the broadcast narratives of propagandists:

#### 1. Forming an image of the enemy

This block includes messages about possible objective and subjective restrictions and prohibitions faced by Muslims. There is a clear division of the world into “We” and “They”. We are Muslims who behave correctly, in accordance with the norms of the Koran. They are representatives of the authorities, other religious movements, groups, etc. In order to emphasize otherness, insulting and belittling epithets are offered for certain opposed groups, such as servants of tyrants, infidels, apostates, enemies of Allah, tagut, etc. the same block includes the opposition between religion, a secular state and secular traditions, which is most clearly expressed when discussing holidays that are alien to Islam, as well as the unfavorable influence of the culture of a secular society, which is confirmed by the results of a survey of young people and their attitude to Western culture, secular traditions, etc.

In some countries, the opposition between religion and ethnicity comes to the fore. There are two directions of this confrontation: firstly, it is a discussion about whether a representative of a certain ethnic group (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, etc.) can not be a Muslim, and secondly, it is a directed enmity against a specific ethnic group, or state (anti-Iranian, anti-Chinese or anti-Russian sentiments).

## 2. Forming the image of the hero

The image of the hero is based on emotional appeals, on the recognition of the sacredness of Islam, jihad and the protection of the faith. In rare cases, it is the image of a martyr, the justification for the subsequent award and the justification for the "sacred mission of the mujahid", "inherited paradise"<sup>77</sup>. The character of the hero is formed under the name "true / righteous Muslim." A true Muslim is:

- One who provides obligatory help to brothers and sisters in faith;
- One who fights against the Taguts, who hates them, who points out their mistakes is a mujahid;
- A persistent person, the significance of this quality can be seen from the multitude of messages mentioned above, and additionally, for example, you can specify video content with the name "Forge of Men."<sup>78</sup>

Thus, this image of the hero can be easily compared to the formed image of a successful and happy person, identified in the process of field research.

## 3. Indications of correct actions:

- The construction of an Islamic state based on Sharia law is the only true one, because "Islam is the truth, and everything else is a lie and injustice."
- Not having any contact with the democratic parties created by the infidels.
- A belief that the only path is the path of Islam. Only by adhering to this path will Muslims get rid of problems and correct mistakes.
- A Muslim is obliged to defend his religion, strive for unity, etc.<sup>79</sup>

When comparing tracked content with Schwartz's values (autonomy; stimulation; hedonism; achievement; power; safety; conformity; tradition; benevolence; universalism), the impact of narratives on the following values can be noted<sup>80</sup>:

- Benevolence (the significance of the well-being of people with whom a person is in contact): Expressed in narratives that clearly indicate who in the person's environment should be close to him (Muslims), and who should not be close, such as "servants of tyrants," infidels, "pigs," "dogs," "apostates," enemies of Allah, Tagut, Iranians, Chinese, etc.
- Universalism (the importance of understanding, gratitude, tolerance and maintaining the well-being of all people and nature): In extremist narratives this value is rejected, refuted, since tolerance, understanding leads to an adequately mixed identity, where residents of countries identify themselves with Muslims and combine this with national customs or with completely secular values.

<sup>77</sup> <https://muhajeer.com/watch/1wFdZV2ByQX7huv>.

<sup>78</sup> <https://muhajeer.com/>.

<sup>79</sup> For example, video content "Break the noses of tyrants" <https://muhajeer.com/watch/KeuLIV3Sh1Wrset>

<sup>80</sup> <http://dip-psi.ru/psikhologicheskoye-testy/post/metodika-sh-shvartsa-po-izucheniyu-tsennostnykh-oriyentatsiy>.

- Power as a value (striving for a dignified life, desire to rise above the average level, material well-being, achieving a business career, getting an education): Extremist narratives contain clear instructions on how easy it is to get this power in the course of jihad or building a righteous Islamic state.

The data obtained in the course of this study testifies to the validity of these estimates in relation to the studied region. It can be stated that these strategies and VE content attract young people, due to the universality of the transmitted values and the sensitivity of the audience to these messages, as evidenced by reposts and constant reproduction of this content.

### **Possible goals for media strategies for government institutions, local self-government, public organizations and media**

Counteracting the spread of radical content and involving a significant number of young people in its consumption, distribution, and popularity is a complex task that requires a systematic and delicate approach on the part of government institutions, local government, public organizations, and the media. The conceptual objectives of such a media strategy can be:

Концептуальными задачами таких медиастратегий могут стать:

- The creation and promotion of alternative narratives among groups vulnerable to radicalization;
- A strengthening of the system of cooperation between local and global stakeholders;
- An increase in the level of media literacy and critical thinking among the target audience;
- Community development and the strengthening of group identity in the target audience based on humanitarian values;
- A reduction in the level of disunity on national, religious, and ethnic grounds due to the development of alternative factors to strengthen internal ties among target audience groups;
- A popularization of humanitarian values and culture;
- The promotion of social and cultural values for the systemic formation of personal identity among the target audience;
- The development of family values and strengthening of intra-family ties.

The adoption of such a set of tasks can contribute to the creation of effective strategies – the effectiveness of which is ensured by the sensitivity of stakeholders to the state of the information field and the needs of the audience – as well as to its value orientations and attitudes identified in this study. The creation of alternative narratives will make it possible to weaken the attractiveness of radical appeals, since it compensates for the existing needs for self-identification, self-realization, success, and mutual assistance, which come from studying the values of Central Asian youth.

The proposed media strategies should directly address values based on professional development and education, relationships with loved ones and family, stability, and the economy.

Based on the characteristics of content consumption by the target audience, interactive video content with a strong and attractive visual range is preferable.

Local governments and state authorities at the provincial and regional levels can use their own social media pages to promote local alternative content, messages, and ideas. This measure can fill a certain information vacuum in their activities and provide a sense of the target audience's involvement in the activities of the authorities. The feeling of being involved, in turn, is a significant counterbalance to the feeling of being unnecessary to the state, abandoned, and isolated. The confidence in the care and openness of the authorities, in turn, is a strong opposition to the thesis that a secular state is a bad place for Muslims, in which they are treated unfairly and are oppressed.

Such a strategy can become one of the many available tools for the transition from counter-narratives to alternative narratives that support a different worldview, free from radical interpretations of religion. Any of the four stakeholders can take a leading role in the implementation of this concept, but it is preferable if local government and media (including national and regional media outlets) are engaged in the creation of alternative narratives, since government bodies and civil society institutions are quite strongly discredited both in the general information space and in the specific information field, which is owned by the preachers of violent extremism.

An essential aspect in the implementation of effective media strategies is the coordination of participants' actions. Based on international experience, the most preferable mechanism is the creation of communication coordination platforms where all participants in the process have equal rights and discuss actions based on their own competencies. Also, the issue that needs to be resolved by the participants of the possible coordination platform is the process of monitoring the content and the mechanism for responding to urgent calls.

## Chapter 4 Findings

Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that the conceptual strategies of the propagandists of radical Islam are systematic, well-thought-out, and are not a random reaction to existing challenges. Evidence that radical propagandists monitor the formal information field and outpace it with counterarguments shows that national and regional media, with their approaches, policies, and principles, cannot be the main players in the implementation of counter-propaganda strategies. Therefore, their role is rather, in creating a background positive information space, to expose conspiracy theories, and fight for an audience that should perceive them with a measure of credibility.

Strengthening the representation of local media in social networks can significantly absorb the target audience, which is potentially susceptible to the ideas of radical preachers. Discussion of local news and the consumption of local entertainment and educational content can divert the attention of potential consumers of radical content.

An analysis of recruitment technologies and value-psychological foundations of radical propaganda and the strengthening of communication strategies of local governments and public organizations that provide versatile services to the population (including protection of rights and psychological assistance) can form a reliable basis for an informational counterbalance to propagandists of radical content and significantly reduce the number of potentially involved consumers. Communication strategies developed on the basis of the results of the analysis and taking into account the value orientations and preferences of today's youth in the region will allow for a greater response from the target audience.

The preferred concepts for responding to radical content are both counter-narrative strategies and strategies for creating alternative narratives, strengthening the role of local governments in creating alternative narratives, and strengthening the role of traditional media in creating alternative interactive content for the target audience. Counter-propaganda concepts should be implemented based on open and equal cooperation of all stakeholders with a clear interaction mechanism.

The study has shown that VE narratives, video, and audio clips with relevant or describing events from five or even 10 years ago, continue to circulate and receive a response during the period covered in the monitoring (2019-2020)<sup>81</sup>. Some of the channels (accounts) studied were created directly to promote radical and violent narratives or were inactive (no new posts), but there were reposts of existing messages. This demonstrated their versatility and relevance regardless of the situation and place and confirms Archetti's idea, where a narrative is not just a story, it is a story that is constantly being retold<sup>82</sup>. The reason it continues to exist is because it is constantly retold and republished (mostly via reposts) by a wider audience.

In addition, the content analysis revealed the dominance of previously existing narratives regarding helping oppressed Muslims, performing the hijra, a duty to the ummah, utopian ideas about building a caliphate, criticism of a secular democratic state, opposition of national and religious identity, and much more. Even a new reason in 2020 – the Covid-19 pandemic – was also framed and interpreted in the already known forms of the inevitable punishment of God, or “revenge of the Almighty” for the attempts of the “infidel” states to prevent Muslims from fulfilling their religious duties. In addition, historical events specific to each country are also played out in VE narratives. However, they were made through biased interpretations and with obvious fake sources. For example, in closed Kyrgyz-speaking groups, the uprising of 1916 (Urkun) is discussed within the framework of a general anti-Russian discourse related to Russia's participation in resolving the conflict in the Middle East. Both events were interpreted as a “war against Muslims,” although in the first case, both the rebels and the punishers had no religious motivation (resistance to export to rear services and “military duty”). The same biased approaches are observed in the interpretations of conflicts in Central Asia (interethnic border conflicts, struggles over resources, etc.), which are presented as a source of justification for the oppression of Muslims by “unfaithful” representatives of the authorities. Thus, current or historical events already perceived in society in an extremely simplified and distorted form are transformed into an even more vaguely perceived and extremely biased interpretation and are suggested to their own “commune.” The obvious message is to give a religious-historical and global meaning to the imposed quasi-ideology.

The hypothesis proposed in the study was confirmed in terms of the relationship between the values transmitted by the VE and the value orientations of a specific consumer audience – youth. The results of the content analysis of social networks, closed groups for the presence of hate speech, the propaganda of the VE ideology and the identification of the values of modern Central Asian youth through questionnaires made it possible to formulate guidelines that resonate and support young people. Despite the fact that each country has its own specific topics that are revealed in the narratives of violent extremism, there are general mechanisms for triggering and attracting the attention of the target audience.

The studied narratives can be grouped into the following topics: various narratives

<sup>81</sup> Note that within the framework of the content analysis the most informative were the messages with the largest number of reposts and when moving from link to link, the analysis was able to study more closed groups and radical content.

<sup>82</sup> Archetti, C. (2017) “Narrative Wars: Understanding Terrorism in the Era of Global Interconnectedness,” in A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, and L. Roselle (eds) *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 218-245. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269\\_Narrative\\_wars\\_Understanding\\_terrorism\\_in\\_the\\_era\\_of\\_global\\_interconnectedness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321921269_Narrative_wars_Understanding_terrorism_in_the_era_of_global_interconnectedness).

containing a hostile opposition “Us-Them,” forming a “hero image,” and prescriptions for the ethics of behaviour of a “true Muslim.” The first theme is built on the formation of group identity, the presence of an enemy image in rhetoric, the breeding of religious and ethnic identity, homophobia, etc.

The image of a hero – a mujahid, a faithful, etc. – as the most typical archetype, is contained in almost all channels that systematically promote violent content. Clear and simple, evidently prescribed forms of behaviour give an idea of what a true faithful Muslim should be like – how he should look, behave and react in specific situations to different events and what he should never do. Since these narratives are universal and basic for all strata of society, they can become an effective ideological basis for the formation and implementation of communication strategies to prevent the spread and popularize violent extremist narratives.

These narratives are combined into four dominant value orientations, which are revealed in different ways in extremist content, but are relevant for the entire youth of Central Asian countries: benevolence, independence, universality, and hedonism.

The results of the study – and taking into account the correlation of value orientations broadcast by VE groups and those values followed by the modern youth of the region – formed the basis of country communication strategies developed by the team of media experts for the project (see Appendix 3). Each strategy contains recommendations for communication campaigns by the media, non-governmental organizations, government agencies and religious leaders in order to prevent violent extremism among the population of the region (with a focus on youth). The strategies can be found on the websites ( [www.rcrskg.org](http://www.rcrskg.org)), ([www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org)).

## Questions for further discussion

Further, an attempt is made to comprehend the analysis implemented in the context of the most widespread theories about the common reasons for the radicalization of some young people in Central Asian countries and their reflection in state approaches to countering extremism and terrorism. This issue was not included in the immediate tasks of the study, but deserves special attention, since it casts doubt on the existing approaches of the Central Asian states on PVE.

In recent years, the concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism” have been the most common terms in explaining political violence or military conflicts. Experts, researchers and, moreover, politicians or lawyers have not come to a consensus about the very terms as well as about the creators and carriers of this ideology, especially if it refers to the religiously motivated<sup>83</sup>. However, it is obvious that most often the terms and its derivatives are applied in relation to Islamic radicals (for all the controversy of this designation).

In numerous attempts to explain the phenomenon of “religious radicalization” and to identify the underlying causes of its appearance and permanent regeneration, experts usually combine the psychological, economic, social, religious, and political components of the phenomenon itself.

At the same time, one more factor is included among the reasons for radicalization (especially among young people) in almost all Central Asian countries – “religious illit-

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<sup>83</sup> Sevilla Serrano. Designing the concept of “radicalization” and its implications for the governance of Islam in France. Religions and radicalism in post-secular World / S. Amgar, A. M. Akhunov, I.L. Babich, etc. Under Ed. E.I. Filippova and Yu. Radwany. - M.: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology by N. N. Mikluho-Maklaya RAS, Hotline - Telecom, 2017. Ss. 218-222.

eracy" or, in a milder form, an "ignorance of religious issues." This encourages spending significant administrative, material (financial), and intellectual resources, creating centres, courses and 'academies' designed to study and disseminate "tolerant forms of Islam." However, in the absence of specialists and long-term strategies, such "centres" become stimulators of Islamization, the forms of which the state is unable to regulate. Moreover, such "measures" do not lead to the elimination of the fundamental causes of radicalization, but rather stimulate the politicization of Islam.

For loyalty to the "class of Islamic theologians", states expect reciprocal loyalty, active "opposition" to the ideology of radicalism and refutations against foreign propagandists of VE. Today, there are a number of fatwas and "raddiyas/refutations" compiled by Muslim theologians of the world and directed against "radical Islam." They are also published in Internet resources, although the question of their effectiveness is still open. Based on the results of the study, the number of "refutations upon refutations" published by supporters of the VE ideologies is growing in the same progression.

Speaking about the relative popularity of the VE ideology in Central Asia, one should obviously proceed from the following internal factors<sup>84</sup>:

1. At present, the post-Soviet Islamization of society in Central Asia continues, in general, in an extremely conservative form, complicating the forms of adaptation to modern realities, such as the political structure of a secular nature. This gives rise to conflicts of a religious and cultural nature within society, which are actively used by propagandists of VE to build their criticism;
2. Today, the controversy over attempts to create a "civil religion" under different ideological markers is already evident ("Enlightened Islam," "Tolerant Islam," "Traditional Islam," "Moderate Islam," etc.). These projects cannot be successful because they do not take into account the inseparability of the norms of dogma in Islam, implying, in particular, the implementation of a mega-project to Islamize the whole world, which is perceived by theologians as a natural process ("illumination with the light of the truth of faith"). Differences among theologians on the ways and methods of achieving this goal are only noticeable in the forms of the Islamization of the world (jihad, or "peaceful Islamization" using existing liberal-democratic or ideological instruments). Such goal-setting and dogmatic features of Islam are natural (as for most mono-religions). However, according to the norms of political correctness, they are silent, and the proposed liberal alternatives of some theologians to create forms of "neo-Islam" are not at all perceived by believers. On the contrary, VE ideologists necessarily exploit these features of "Islam for the whole world," having at their disposal serious argument from the Holy Texts.
3. The absence of a church hierarchy in Islam and, as a consequence, the absence of codification of legal and dogmatic norms, leads to the dominance of individual evaluations of theologians of any phenomena, as well as interpretations of dogmas and norms of life. Consequently, the discussion of any issues related to attempts at modernization have turned and will continue to turn into heated discussions.

From the listed factors and similar factors, directly or indirectly contributing to the politicization of Islam, researchers can designate in a different sequence, depending on specific cases, countries and even depending on the preferences of the political establishment. However, to view "Islamic radicalism" as a direct consequence of the

<sup>84</sup> The paradox of these factors is that they can simultaneously serve as a breeding ground for radical forms of Islam, as well as to serve as restrictions in the spread of religiously motivated radicalism.

notorious “religious illiteracy,” or adherence to the “wrong form of religion” and similar well-established clichés, would mean deliberately narrowing down the causes of the emergence of radical and terrorist groups, especially in relatively prosperous societies. Interpretive models of this kind do not in any way explain the immunity of hundreds of thousands of citizens (including youth), who are also in the same initial situations, but are not involved in destructive groups. Moreover, the wrong strategy (as in the case of stimulating “religious literacy”) of politicians of states in the religious field with excessive attention and intrusion into spheres unusual for their status give rise to other phenomena that also stimulate the politicization of Islam and Islamization of politics.

Returning to the issue of radicalization, we note that the researchers agreed on only one thing – there are no common reasons for radicalization, just as there is no single “profile” of a radical (as well as in the extreme manifestation of a terrorist), even if the identification of “common features” involves the entire known arsenal of classical social theories and psychoanalysis.

In other words, there can be no talk of massive mental pathologies and disorders in the case of radicals and even terrorists, even in cases of suicide bombings. Psychologists involved in the research of radicalism often speak of anger, a feeling of a decline in social status, and similar factors of the personality structure, including mental trauma<sup>85</sup>, which can be detected in many people, including those who have refrained from being involved in networks of radicals.

Such facts give rise to even more doubts in the frequently used explanatory models, bearing in mind the obvious construction of many theories within the framework of socio-economic problems or psychological deviations, which suggest considering radicalism (and its extreme manifestation – terrorism) in terms and theories of conflict-generating sociology or personality pathology.

New realities associated with the use of Islamic VE propagandists of the Internet and especially media resources are making their own adjustments to the quality of content and the forms of its distribution. The use of the capabilities of media resources led to a literal explosion of “virtual Islam,” simplified versions of which (often in the form of arbitrary and biased selection of links to the “Sacred Texts” or dogmatic works) help to substantiate the individual or collective reaction of some Muslims in a radical form to the emerging problems of society.

The studied content shows that the VE propagandists have chosen the simplest way to legitimize their own ideology. It represents an extremely simplified semantic manipulation of the block of information available to them in the form of an eclectic mixture of unverified information gleaned from dubious sources of cyber space, or own interpretations of official news feeds on a wide palette of topics. The set of arguments used to criticize local regimes and conditions of existence of Muslims boils down to the following:

- Criticism of any social, economic, or political problems of society in the CA countries. The proposed way out is simplified to the limit: Only a return to Sharia is capable of solving the problems “at the root”;
- The existing borders and customs restrictions between the CA countries are interpreted as a sign of restricting the freedom of movement of Muslims, as a reason to consider the region's territory as “Dar al-zulm” (Territory of Muslim oppression);

<sup>85</sup> Olivier Roy. French radicals - who are they? / Religions and radicalism in post-secular World. P. 263-265.

- Criticism of the existing political system as alien to Islam and imposed by the “Russians” or the abstract “West.” Secular law is unacceptable to Muslims by default because it is not Sharia law;
- Local Muslims are unable or afraid to oppose their regimes, to establish an Islamic state, because they do not want to admit that they have moved away from Sharia;
- Criticism of the asymmetry between the existing secular law and the attitudes of Sharia, in the form as understood and interpreted by the ideologists of the VE. Holidays, dress codes (especially wearing a hijab), “secular and national customs” are interpreted as a way of life imposed on Muslims, which destroyed Sharia, morality and the ability to win the favour of Allah;
- Criticism of the “state mullahs” who are accused of becoming an instrument of the secular state, which itself is not capable of solving religious problems.

Thus, the set of arguments and especially the simplified argumentation is vulnerable and open to criticism from the point of view of both conventional logic and methodological foundations of Islamic law. The VE ideologists, in fact, turned religion into a set of arbitrary dogmas, the vulnerabilities of which the recipients of Islamic media products are unable to understand. At the same time, the lack of religious education is not the main reason for the sensitivity of some Muslims (especially young ones) to jihadist discourse. The religious and ideological influence of the VE propagandists turns out to be successful mainly in cases when the recipient has weak social connections, has undeveloped rational thinking (due to poor or incomplete secular education), is cut off from the influence of the family, etc.

As most Muslims, rarely what positions (out of the above) in the arsenal of criticism of the VE ideologists are able to achieve their goal, at least not for most Muslims. Attempts to convince this part of the community that they will not be able to live according to the existing secular laws have not been successful since the legal, political and – in general – cultural adaptation of local Muslims to the existing legislation and the secular regime of government is a fact.

At the same time, the dominance of propaganda (including through official resources) of Muslim ethics, under the mark of “Enlightened Islam,” enhances the Islamization of the Ummah in conservative forms. More and more often there are proposals from loyal theologians to replace secular laws with Sharia, or to force officials to “study Islam” in order to stop corruption. This path of “peaceful politicization of Islam” remains to be studied and understood – to what extent it can be radicalized if it has a chance of gaining political status (for example, as a result of the electoral preponderance of supporters of the Islamization of power and Sharia law).

More effective for radicalization and recruitment were videos with the glorification of jihad, which may well correspond to the individual inclinations of the recipients. However, these videos affect mainly exalted young people who – most likely, unconsciously and without direct religious motivations – find heroes to follow.

Thus, we can talk about the process of radicalization, which includes successive stages. For example, there is a positive perception of propaganda and then a break with the usual social environment and adherence to a new group. The same category of recruits perceives the labels of a new identity, not so much dogmatic in nature as complimentary and glorified symbols that create the image of a selfless hero, “the beloved warrior of Allah.” The new inculcated identity is formed, most likely,

through its affective component, it became a form of desocialization (alienation from the community and social networks) and resocialization at the same time – as a full member of the “brotherhood of the mujahideen.” Their fierce intransigence is most often combined with a very superficial religiosity.

However, the VE ideologists themselves are quite aware of these problems, reproaching the mujahideen that they do not know the religion for which they are ready to give their lives. That is why a whole series of “lessons” appeared on various topics that are outwardly distant from the issues of jihad and its legitimation but relate to the norms of elementary Islamic ethics. This circumstance misleads specialists and experts who are far from understanding theological issues, or who do not fully know the contexts of the “ideological work” of the VE propagandists, the internal logic and consistency of all the material. In other words, the “neutrality” of this kind of material is seen as a sign of “weakening attention to jihad issues.” However, even in such material, verbal “insertions” are quite revealed, appealing to the “purity of the thoughts of the mujahideen,” or similar messages emphasizing the exclusiveness and “God’s closeness” of Islam, its ethics and morality.

The studied content also shows that even if some of the countries in the region declare Islam the state religion, criticism of the protagonists of the jihad will not stop. For their goals go beyond the declared “victory of the decrees of Allah.” The meaning of the existence of the carriers and protagonists of this ideology is total alienation (both social and religious), which will always have a place in the complex collisions of the modern world. Consequently, radical ideologies as part of the security problem will remain permanent, at least for the foreseeable future. It should be about a competent strategy for its limitation and maximum localization of problems that stimulate the involvement of some Muslims in the networks of radicals.

In the prevailing historical conditions, the only guarantee of the observance of the complex of rights of believers, regardless of confession and dogmatic adherence, for the Central Asian countries can only be a secular state. It must observe “confessional neutrality,” build relationships with religious leaders only on the basis of existing laws. One should not try to compete with Islamists in the field of religious ideology, as this competition is doomed to failure, since the parties will speak different languages and pursue different goals.

Thus, the main condition for maintaining an acceptable level of security and interfaith harmony and stability is the secular state system, the inviolability of which should be declared openly and bluntly.

In addition, the previous experience of monitoring, statistical observations reflect that the growth of interest in radical ideologies is often stimulated by excessive attention to them (not quite commensurate with the scale of their activity) on the part of the media, especially independent theologians in the media space. At the same time, the propagandists of the VE ideology themselves are fully aware of this circumstance and in their strategies use “negative advertising” as a factor of interest in them.

Finally, given the rather limited tasks of the present project, it gave a serious basis to reaffirm the conclusion of previous researchers. That is that among the direct and indirect causes of radicalization in the CA countries, significant problems remain. Specifically in the functioning of state and legal, economic, cultural, educational or public institutions in working to address external and internal propaganda that neglect the problems of the individual

## Appendix 1.

### **Desk research on radicalization factors, narratives, distribution channels, and audiences of extremist groups**

Desk analysis was mainly carried out by examining the available online publications on a research topic<sup>1</sup>. In particular, the websites of international and research organizations that in the recent years have implemented projects that in one way or another touch on the issues of violent extremism and terrorism in the region were reviewed. Source materials were selected from materials published between January 1, 2019, and April 1, 2020. However, in the conditions of countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan), where this area was less studied, and also based on expediency, the review includes works that go beyond the specified time frame.

The material was identified through a keyword search based on the expert's experience and the snowball method was used with tracking citations in literature, referring to site recommendations (articles on similar topics). For the purposes of this review, any article related to the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) has been included regardless of the specific adopted definition of violent extremism. In addition, the authors consulted with libraries on countering violent extremism from various research institutions such as RAN, Hedayah, ICCT, RUSI, and others.

Despite the general recognition in the region for the urgency of the problems of violent extremism – both at the government level and in the public regulated by the state. Largely for this reason, the amount of available academic and expert researches on violent extremism in several countries in the region are still relatively small. In this connection, the authors also used the materials from personal archives; for Turkmenistan it used the expert's archives, as well as open English-language publications available through search engines. Due to various political factors, the most researched is Kyrgyzstan, where in the recent years much attention has been paid to studying the level of threats, identifying the drivers of radicalization and vulnerable groups, citizens' participation in the activities of terrorist groups and opportunities to counter violent extremism, measures to prevent online propaganda of violent extremism.

The desk analysis included an analysis of the available research on the following topics:

- The threat of violent extremism in Central Asia (CA);
- Drivers of radicalization leading to violence in CA;
- Banned extremist groups in CA;
- Violent extremism (VE) character narratives: meanings, values;
- Author/sender audience and communication channels;
- An overview of the state policy of CA countries in the field of PV;
- A study of the current context (political, economic, cultural, etc.);
- An overview of communication strategies and experiences in countering extremism online in CA;
- An overview of the previous studies on the values of young people in each target country (excluding Turkmenistan)

<sup>1</sup> The use of mainly online sources was dictated by the introduction of quarantines and restrictions on movement associated with the spread of COVID-19, which fell on the desk analysis.

## Drivers of radicalization leading to violence

Numerous studies dedicated to understanding the causes of radicalization agree that it is impossible to single out common motives, in each case a complex of individual factors is triggered. USAID as a whole has identified general “drivers”, including the push and pull factors<sup>2</sup>. The push factors include: *political* (restrictions on civil rights, gross violations of human rights, corruption and impunity of elites, weakly regulated or unregulated areas, the presence of local violent conflicts, discredited political regimes with weak or no opposition); *socio-economic* (weak governance, inadequate provision of social services, social exclusivity, poverty, migration, etc.); *ideological* (religious and other beliefs that justify the use of violence, etc.). The pull factors include the emergence of a charismatic leader, social connections, personal relationships, material or social benefits, an attractive idea, etc. Data factors vary by the context and country.

There is no uniform assessment of this distinction. There are those who take a critical look at it, noting that the existing programs do not always accurately assess the push and pull factors in their context<sup>3</sup> and ignore the broader structural reasons for VE<sup>4</sup>. RUSI suggests using the more accurate term “factors” instead of “drivers”, since the latter assumes the presence of several components<sup>5</sup>. The researchers proposed to divide political, economic, social, cultural and psychological factors into three levels. At the **macro-level**, there are situational factors that affect a large number of people (large communities or even entire countries) and which are described as “push factors” in the USAID push-pull model. At the **meso-level**, affecting the smaller communities and identity groups, social and cultural factors predominate. In the USAID model, they fall under the category of “pull” factors. The literature notes that the most powerful social and cultural factors are factors related to identity: religious, ethnic or group. The authors also propose to conceptualize the interventions based on this model: general [country] development at macro-level, countering violent extremism at meso-level, and law enforcement and specialized interventions at micro level.

The RUSI analysis is very interesting in that, based on the analysis of 2008 sources dedicated to the study of VE drivers, 17 hypotheses of the causes of radicalization were confirmed or refuted.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the hypotheses highlighting the following were fully confirmed: the search for personal and group identity, religious and ethnic identity<sup>7</sup>, the inability of the government to provide basic services (health, education, social security), a lack of peace and security, an inequality, and institutionalized discrimination. While the influence of economic factors has been questioned, especially given that a large number of people affected by this problem do not join radical groups. In addition, there was no confirmation of the importance of the issue of gender and the ideals of masculinity. Education has little and/or largely unwarranted influence, and there is little evidence that certain types of education (for example, religious) increase the risk

<sup>2</sup> USAID, Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism (2009), <http://www.usaid.gov>.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Romaniuk, Tracey Durner, The politics of preventing violent extremism: the case of Uganda, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18:2, 159-179, (2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F14678802.2018.1447863>

<sup>4</sup> Larry Attree, Shouldn't YOU be countering violent extremism? Safeworld (2017), <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism>

<sup>5</sup> Harriet Allan, Andrew Glazzard, Sasha Jespersen, Sneha Reddy-Tumu, Emily Winterbotham, Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review, RUSI (2015), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d-40f0b64974000192/Drivers\\_of\\_Radicalisation\\_Literature\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d-40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The reliability of the hypotheses was determined by the following gradation: strongly supported, supported, partially confirmed (mix), not supported.

<sup>7</sup> RUSI experts also note that even at this level, many, if not most people do not participate in this, which again suggests that these factors may be necessary, but not sufficient.

of radicalization. Research also shows that the problem of radicalization in madrassas has been greatly exaggerated<sup>8</sup>. This data allows a more critical approach to the trends in determining the causes of radicalization and the corresponding work in the field of PVE not only in the world, but also in the Central Asian region, in particular, to the exaggeration of the role of religion or religious education in PVE.

The recent studies in Central Asia largely repeat the explanations of the causes of radicalization discussed in the previous studies of Internews,<sup>9</sup> and highlight as such a set of various structural (political, economic, social, ideological) and contributing (personal relationships, social ties, low secular and religious education and others) factors. The following are only those drivers that are emphasized by the local researchers.

In **Kazakhstan**, the problem of radicalization, as in other CA countries, is viewed mainly through the prism of structural problems such as socio-economic inequality between regions,<sup>10</sup> discrimination against religious minorities<sup>11</sup>, and a sense of injustice and frustration in the society due to government corruption<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, several authors note the specifics of Kazakhstan: First, here the vulnerable categories are internal migrants, and not labor migrants, as in the case of other countries in the region. The placement of settlers from villages in the poor outskirts of large cities leads to their marginalization and the search for new forms of identity, including through radical forms of Islam<sup>13</sup>. Second, a close relationship was found between radicalization and petty crime. According to researchers, radical cells in the RK are a mixture of criminal groups and religious communities, and the acts of violence that took place in Kazakhstan in the period 2011-2012 were more likely committed by criminals inspired by "radical Islamism."<sup>14</sup> Some authors consider this the reason why Kazakhstani "jihadists" choose law enforcement officials as their targets, which also distinguishes the VE in Kazakhstan<sup>15</sup>.

An interesting discourse about the reasons for radicalization is in **Tajikistan**. For the Tajik government and most departmental experts, one of the main factors is the activities of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), while jihadist organizations

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed rationale for each finding, see: Harriet Allan, et.al., Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review (RUSI, 2015)

<sup>9</sup> Seeking the Common Interest "Information Flows and Radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism in Central Asia" (within the framework of the project "Promoting Stability and Peace in Central Asia Through Increased Media Literacy, Effective Coverage and Regional Cooperation," funded by the European Union and implemented by Internews, 2019), [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Information\\_flows\\_public\\_rus.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Information_flows_public_rus.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Noah Tucker. Terrorism without a God: Reconsidering Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization Models in Central Asia, CAP papers, No. 225 (2019), <https://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CAP-paper-225-September-2019-1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, Homo Jihadicus Islam in the former USSR and the phenomenon of the post-Soviet militants in Syria and Iraq, Centre for Eastern Studies (2015), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194511/homojihadicus.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Lemon, Vera Mironova, William Tobey, Jihadists from Ex-Soviet Central Asia: Where Are They? Why Did They Radicalize? What Next? (Russia Matters Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Harvard Kennedy School (2018), <https://www.russiamatters.org/sites/default/files/media/files/Jihadists%20from%20Ex-Soviet%20Central%20Asia%20Research%20Paper.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Serik Beussebayev. Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan: From Criminal Networks to Jihad, The Central Asia Fellowship Papers, No. 15, February 2016), <http://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CAF-Paper-15-Serik-Beissebayev.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Ерлан Карин. "Что произошло в Актобе и Алматы? Специфика радикализма в Казахстане", CAA Network, 25 июля (2015), <https://caa-network.org/archives/7386>.

<sup>15</sup> Zhulduz Baizakova, and Roger N. McDermott, "Reassessing the Barriers to Islamic Radicalization in Kazakhstan" U.S. Army War College (2015), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a621437.pdf>.

are mentioned as secondary.<sup>16</sup> For the rest of the experts, such an external factor is the propaganda of various salafi and jihadist organizations. The next most frequently discussed factors of radicalization are of an internal, socio-political nature; this means that the problems of economic development, the standard of living of the population and social injustice contribute to the radicalization of a part of the population of the republic. At the same time, such important aspects as corruption, social injustice and inequality are often omitted in the official messages and, in any case, they are often not given the proper influence.

In **Uzbekistan**, as well as in Tajikistan, the reasons for radicalization are mainly considered from the position of the official (state) vision, which sees the reasons for radicalization more in economic problems and the vulnerability of migrants who are recruited in the host country<sup>17</sup>. Experts, however, agree that we are talking about complex factors, without highlighting any separately. For example, researchers talk about weak media literacy and, as a result, poor resilience of recipients of VE content, shortcomings in the work of the state with young people in terms of increasing media literacy, and weak religious education<sup>18</sup>. Economic (unemployment, impoverishment, etc.) political (corruption, weakness of civil society, etc.) problems, vulnerability of labor migrants in the Russian Federation (RF) and other countries are named as drivers of the “secondary order”; the vulnerability is generated by psychological discomfort due to alienation in the host country (primarily the RF).<sup>19</sup> These factors are permanent, have been in effect and will always stay. However, they do not explain another phenomenon: why, given the same conditions of action of the same factors, the overwhelming majority of Muslims do not succumb to the ideology of the VE and are not involved in their groups.

The least researched country is still **Turkmenistan** and it is considered mainly as part of regional studies<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, the available data<sup>21</sup> do not highlight the political and religious factors, and pay more attention to migration associated with both a low level of higher education and the lack of a sufficient number of educational institutions, as well as economic problems (unemployment, inflation, corruption). The same sources argue that radicalization mainly occurs abroad, often in Turkey, which is one of the few visa-free countries for citizens of Turkmenistan, where there is a similar language, culture and religion, and therefore is the main direction of Turkmen labor and educational migration. Perhaps, the recent statement of the Turkmen oppositionist Maksat Saparmuradov that the emissaries of terrorist organizations send them to

<sup>16</sup> Khokim Mukhabbatov, “Tajikistan. The final collapse of the political and ideological platform of the IRPT,” Khabar News, September 19, 2019, <https://hgu.tj/news/post/666352.html>

<sup>17</sup> Center for the Study of Regional Threats, “The Causes of Religious Extremism in Central Asia,” April 12, 2019, <https://crss.uz/2019/04/12/prichiny-vozniknoveniya-religioznogo-ekstremizma-v-centralnoj-azii/>, Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, *Homo Jihadicus Islam in the Former USSR* (2015)

<sup>18</sup> M.Z. Abdullaeva *Cybermakondaŷmirlarfaoliyati: tadidlarvaŷimoya* (Adolescents in cyberspace: threats and protection), pp. 4-5; She’s the same. *Cybermakondagihaatarlar* (Threats in cyberspace), p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Joint Research Search for Common Ground, RAS, RUSI, *Reasons and motives for radicalization of labor migrants from CA countries in RF* (2018), [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report\\_CA-Radicalization\\_Russ\\_24042018.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report_CA-Radicalization_Russ_24042018.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Roger Kangas, *Redefining Extremism in Central Asia*, ISPSW Strategy Series, 2018), <https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/ISPSW-541%20Kangas.pdf>; Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, *Homo Jihadicus Islam in the former USSR* (2015); Thomas F. Lynch III, Michael Bouffard, Kelsey King, and Graham Vickowski, *The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy*, Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives, No. 21, (2016), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-21.pdf>; Edward Lemon et.al., *Jihadists from Ex- Soviet Central Asia* (2018).

<sup>21</sup> Akram Umarov, “How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan? European Eye on Radicalization”, 18 June, 2019, <https://eeradicalization.com/how-serious-is-religious-radicalization-in-turkmenistan/>; Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, *Homo Jihadicus Islam in the former USSR*, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194511/homojihadicus.pdf>

Syria began to recruit the emissaries of terrorist organizations to send them to Syria, who were left without work in Turkey due to the spread of Covid-19, offering them US\$2,000 for this<sup>22</sup>.

Noah Tucker and RanoTuraeva, in their review "Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Turkmenistan,"<sup>23</sup> conclude that violent extremism in Turkmenistan has its own specifics. Unlike their compatriots from other Central Asian countries, militants from Turkmenistan abroad, as far as we know, do not form their brigades within the larger terrorist organizations and do not have publicly recognized independent militant Islamist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Bukhari brigade. or the Kazakh brigade in the Islamic state (IS).

In **Kyrgyzstan**, despite the diversity of approaches, all studies agree that social injustice and discrimination are the key causes of radicalization<sup>24</sup>. The reasons for radicalization among women are considered: discrimination and prejudice when wearing religious paraphernalia, a deep life crisis and lack of help to overcome the difficulties, religious and ideological indoctrination through radical husbands and relatives, and a lack of access to approved religious knowledge<sup>25</sup>. The authors of another report, analyzing the participation of women in the conflict zone in the Middle East (more than 20 percent of the total number of those who left), come to the conclusion that "Kyrgyz women, in fact, like women from other countries, are not alien to a propensity for proactive actions as ideologues and adherents of violent extremism"<sup>26</sup>.

One of the experts' conclusions that, contrary to the statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Committee for National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, ethnic minorities are not more vulnerable than ethnic Kyrgyz<sup>27</sup>, contradicts the previous ones in this area.<sup>28</sup> Contradictions of this kind only confirm that radicalization is the product of a combination of various reasons, both structural and personal, and they can have completely different effects on each person. With general socio-economic, political and other factors, a significant part of the population is not radicalized. The same

<sup>22</sup> Central Asia Media, "In Turkey, Militants Recruit Migrants from Turkmenistan to Send to Syria" April 10, 2020, <https://centralasia.media/news:1609922>

<sup>23</sup> Noah Tucker, Rano Turaeva, Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Turkmenistan (2016), [https://capve.org/components/com\\_jshopping/files/demo\\_products/CERIA\\_Brief\\_15\\_February\\_2016.pdf](https://capve.org/components/com_jshopping/files/demo_products/CERIA_Brief_15_February_2016.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Emil Nasritdinov, Zarina Urmanbetova, Kanatbek Murzakhililov, Mametbek Myrzabaev, Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization and Extremism: An Analysis in Five Areas of Life, CAA Network (2019), <https://caa-network.org/archives/15165>. UN Women, Report on the Study "Women and Religious Practices" GSPS Study - Gender in the Perception of Society, (2018), <https://eca.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2020/04/gender-in-society-perception-study-kyrgyz-republic>. Joint Research Search for Common Ground, RAS, RUSI, Reasons and motives for radicalization of labor migrants from CA countries in RF (2018) [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report\\_CA-Radicalization\\_Russ\\_24042018.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report_CA-Radicalization_Russ_24042018.pdf) Common Interest Search "Information Flows and Radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism in Central Asia" (2019), Kloé Tricot O'Farrell, Jordan Street, "A threat inflated? The countering and preventing violent extremism agenda in Kyrgyzstan", (March 2019) <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/long-reads/a-threat-inflated-the-countering-and-preventing-violent-extremism-agenda-in-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>25</sup> UN Women, Report on the Study "Women and Religious Practices," GSPS Research - Gender in the Perception of Society (2018).

<sup>26</sup> Anne Speckhard, Adrian Shaikovich and ChinaraYessengul, Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan. Role of women in supporting, joining, intervening and countering proliferation (UN Women, 2017), <https://eca.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2017/10/violent-extremism-in-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>27</sup> Emil Nasritdinov et al., Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization and Extremism: An Analysis in Five Areas of Life, CAA Network (2019).

<sup>28</sup> Contradicting previous research: See: Noah Tucker, Islamic State Sends Messages to CA Migrants in Russia, (CAP, 2015), <http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/6982>; IOM Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in CA (2019), [http://prevention.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Уязвимость-мигрантов-и-потребности-интеграции-в-CA\\_исследование.pdf](http://prevention.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Уязвимость-мигрантов-и-потребности-интеграции-в-CA_исследование.pdf); Joint Research Search for Common Ground, RAS, RUSI, Reasons and motives for radicalization of labor migrants from CA countries in RF (2018), [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report\\_CA-Radicalization\\_Russ\\_24042018.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RAS-Final-Report_CA-Radicalization_Russ_24042018.pdf)

statement is true for attempts to select the most vulnerable groups (women, young people, migrants).

Thus, the studies covered by the review, conducted in Central Asia, to one degree or another, consider the following as the main motivations for involvement in the VE groups:

- Political (weakness of civil society institutions, corruption, authoritarianism, discrimination);
- Socio-economic factors (unemployment, poverty, large families, etc.);
- Ethno-ideological (nationalism of titular nations, alienation of enclaves, attractiveness of supranational religious ideology);
- Vulnerability of labor migrants, mainly in the Russian Federation or Turkey;
- Religious (weak religious education, unwillingness or unwillingness of religious leaders to resist the VE ideology, schisms within religious communities, religious discrimination, etc.).
- "Internet Engagement"<sup>29</sup> (Internet Dawah) as a result of effective use of visual storytelling, masterful use of meta- and mono-narratives used by the VE groups. Here, however, the explanation for the growth of ideological involvement is dominated by psychological or social motivations.

Each of the selected factors has the right to exist in individual cases, although it can hardly be considered a sufficient explanation for the growing commitment to the VE ideology both in the region and beyond its borders. The main argument for the vulnerability of all and each individual disposition is that these factors equally affect hundreds of thousands of believers, but the smallest share of them (as some experts believe, no more than 0.005% of the total number of believers<sup>30</sup>) is somehow involved in the ranks of jihadists. Foreign researchers talk about excessive victimization of the problem of Islam and exaggeration of threats,<sup>31</sup> based on the insignificance of the terrorist groups involved and the desire of the regimes to manipulate the threats. However, the insignificance of the number of those involved should not be misleading, given two really existing groups among the believers:

1. Those who participate in jihad with "property" (*Ishtirak bi-l-mal*), that is, transfer or transition of various amounts of money to trusted persons. This means that the researchers do not take into account the dogmatic and legal interpretation of jihad, which allows various forms of "war in the path of Allah";
2. Compassionate, hard to count. For this project, the conclusion of the researchers is also important in the sense that it is very important to study the public discourse about religion, as well as the recognition of the fact that the causal relationships of the emergence of VE and radicalism have not yet been fully studied. And for further comprehension, it is important to deeply study the content of the texts of the VE ideologists circulating in the Internet space.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See more details below.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Lemon. On Terrorist Threats in Central Asia and Beyond (2019), <https://caa-network.org/archives/14501>

<sup>31</sup> Noah Tucker, Terrorism without a God. Reconsidering Radicalization and. Counter- Radicalization Models in. Central Asia, CAP papers, No. 225 (2019), <https://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CAP-paper-225-September-2019-1.pdf>; J. Heathershaw & D. Montgomery, The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization (2014), [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field\\_document/2014-11\\_14%20Myth%20summary%20v2b.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/2014-11_14%20Myth%20summary%20v2b.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Noah Tucker, Terrorism without a God. (2019).

## Banned extremist groups of a violent nature

The activities of 22 extremist and terrorist organizations have been banned in **Kazakhstan**<sup>33</sup>. Most of these organizations were banned in the period until 2011 or before the first wave of extremist activity in Kazakhstan, and at the moment they do not pose threats to the security of Kazakhstan due to the cessation of their activity ("Jamaat of the Mujahideen of Central Asia", "Jund al-Khalifat"), or its irrelevance for the region as a whole ("Muslim Brotherhood," "Kurdish People's Congress"). Since 2011, the list has been supplemented by seven organizations, of which only four have a clear jihadist orientation. Jund al-Khalifat ceased to exist after the death of its leader in 2012. The remaining organizations -- At-Takfir Wal-Hijra<sup>34</sup>, Islamic State, and Fron-al-Nusra (Jabhat al-Nusra, later Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) -- represent global jihadist structures in the zone whose influences fall on the inhabitants of the Central Asian region, including Kazakhstan.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, some foreign researchers express doubts about the direct connection between extremists in Kazakhstan and the "Islamic State," appealing to the fact that even the most conservative Salafi groups within the country actively oppose IS and its messages.<sup>36</sup> While local experts, on the contrary, believe that it is the propaganda of IS preachers that causes violent acts inside the country, for example, as in the case of the terrorist attack in Aktobe in 2016.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, in March 2020, the special services announced the arrest of a member of the "Islamic State," who was preparing a terrorist attack on the territory of Kazakhstan.<sup>38</sup>

In **Tajikistan**, 18 terrorist and extremist organizations are banned<sup>39</sup>, some of them are inactive in the territory of Tajikistan. Since 2006, at the suggestion of the country's Prosecutor General's Office, 10 religious groups have been included in the list of banned organizations, including Al-Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jamoati Tablig, Taliban, Tojikistoni Ozod, Hizb-ut Tahrir, "Muslim Brotherhood," "Tashkloti Lashkar Taiba," the "Salafiya" movement, as well as the "Jehovah's Witnesses" organization. Later, IS was also added to the list. In addition, in 2015, the Tajik authorities officially banned the activities of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), including the party on the lists of terrorist organizations. Outside Tajikistan, IRPT is recognized as terrorist only on the RF's territory. Jamoati Ansarullo is one of the most active propagandists of jihadism in the Tajik segment of the Internet. SecDev also includes the following online organizations: IS, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Hizbut-Tahrir, and the Islamic Party of Turkistan<sup>40</sup>.

In **Uzbekistan**, the active persecution of members of banned the religious extremist organizations has been noted since the late 1990s, but until recently there was no

<sup>33</sup> List of terrorist and extremist organizations banned on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan - [https://egov.kz/cms/ru/articles/religion/zaprewennye\\_organizacii](https://egov.kz/cms/ru/articles/religion/zaprewennye_organizacii)

<sup>34</sup> Tengrinews, KNB Special Operation: What is known about the extremists "At-Takfir Wal-Hijra", December 21, 2016, [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/spetsoperatsiya-knb-izvestno-ekstremistah-at-takfir-ual-308583/](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/spetsoperatsiya-knb-izvestno-ekstremistah-at-takfir-ual-308583/)

<sup>35</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2018)

<sup>36</sup> Noah Tucker. Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Kazakhstan, CAP Papers, CERIA Brief, No.13, <https://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/9296>.

<sup>37</sup> Yerlan Karin, "What Happened in Aktobe and Almaty? Specificity of radicalism in Kazakhstan ", July 25, 2015, <https://caa-network.org/archives/7386>

<sup>38</sup> Italics, "ISIS member who planned the attack, detained in Kyrgyzstan" (2017), <https://kursiv.kz/news/proisshestviya/2017-09/chlen-igil-planirovavshiy-terakt-zaderzhan-v-kyrgyzstane>

<sup>39</sup> Republic of Tajikistan/Anti-Terrorist Center of CIS Member States – <http://www.cisatc.org/1289/134/160/1268>

<sup>40</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2018)

court decision to ban them. By the decision of the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan on September 26, 2016, 22 organizations were immediately recognized as being terrorist and their activities were banned in the country<sup>41</sup>. Among them are organizations of an extremist nature such as Akromiya and Hizbut-Tahrir, as well as an organization whose status as extremist and terrorist is rather controversial: Nurchilar (followers of Said Nursi). In addition, the list includes "Jihadists," without clarifying whether this is an organization or a definition of an ideology. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Tavhidwa Jihad Katibasi, Katibat Imam Bukhori, and Islamic Jihad Union, the Islamic State were identified as the most active in the SecDev study<sup>42</sup>.

In Turkmenistan, there is no official list of the banned terrorist and extremist groups; the corresponding topic is not discussed in the official mass media. Based on the materials available to the expert on Turkmenistan, five Islamic communities persecuted in Turkmenistan can be identified: Hizbut-Tahrir, followers of Said Nursi, Fettulah Gülen, "jihadists" and "Wahhabis." Their entire government is not always justifiably considered violent. The most active of them in official documents appear under the conditional terms "jihadists" and "Wahhabis" (in the available government materials these terms differ). However, based on the research, it can be assumed that the "Islamic State," "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" and their affiliated organizations are being persecuted<sup>43</sup>.

In the territory of Kyrgyzstan, various courts banned the activities of 20 extremist and terrorist organizations. Some organizations are banned under regional agreements (SCO, CSTO) and are not active in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs Kyrgyz Republic, the most dangerous terrorist organizations of the takfiri-jihadist movement are Zhaishul Mahdi, Jund-ul-Khalifat, Ansarulloh, At-Takfir Wal-Hijra and the Islamic State. About 2,000 citizens are adherents to the extremist ideas of these organizations<sup>44</sup>. However, the activities of "Zhaishul Mahdi" were only of an episodic nature (2010, 2015), arose under the influence of the ideas of Said Buryatsky and today has lost its relevance. "Jund-ul-Khalifat" is an organization active in Kazakhstan until 2012; Ansarulloh is an active organization in Tajikistan; "At-Takfir Wal-Hijra" -- in the Kyrgyz Republic was banned within the framework of ratified international agreements.

Thus, active in both their terrorist activities and online propaganda are organizations calling for armed jihad in Syria and Iraq, such as Katibat al-Imam Bukhari, Jannat Oshiklari, also known as "Tawhid wal-Jihad," "Islamic state," Front al-Nusra or "Jabhat al-Nusra"<sup>45</sup>. This data correlates with the list of terrorist organizations active in CA's online space<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> List of organizations recognized as terrorist and banned in the Republic of Uzbekistan (2019) [http://sud.uz/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Список\\_террористических\\_организаций\\_рус.pdf](http://sud.uz/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Список_террористических_организаций_рус.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Violent extremism in Central Asia (2018).

<sup>43</sup> Noah Tucker, Rano Turaeva, Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Turkmenistan (2016). Edward Lemon, et.al, Jihadists from Ex-Soviet Central Asia (2018). Akram Umarov, "How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?" (2019).

<sup>44</sup> Search for Common Ground, Freedom of religious and other beliefs: the practice of legal regulation in the Kyrgyz Republic in relation to constitutional and international standards (Bishkek, 2018 - p. 167), <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/20181219-Russian.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> General information on extremist or terrorist organizations banned on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic/Search for Common Ground, Freedom of Religious and Other Beliefs: (2018).

<sup>46</sup> Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Jabhat an-Nusra); TavhidwajihodKatibashi; Katibat Imam Bukhori; Islamic Jihad Union; Islamic State; Islamic State Vilayat Khorasan; Islamic Party of Turkestan; Liwa al-Muhazhirenwal-Ansar. See: CIIP, SecDev, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2018)

As you can see from the list, it is presented entirely from groups whose ideology is based on religion, in particular Islam. In this connection, within the framework of this study, the analysis of Islamic apologetic propaganda is used.

## Internet and violent group narratives

The meteoric rise of the Islamic State sparked the interest not so much in the "revival of mass interest in the propaganda of jihad,"<sup>47</sup> but in the ways of using the possibilities of the worldwide network to promote violent ideas. UNODC in its publication "The use of the internet for terrorist purposes" notes that technology is one of the strategic factors contributing to the increasing use of the Internet by terrorist organizations and their supporters for a wide range of tasks, including recruitment, funding, propaganda, training of perpetrators, incitement to commit acts of terrorism, as well as the collection and dissemination of information for terrorist purposes<sup>48</sup>.

Researchers question how directly online propaganda and radicalization are directly related. Mora Conway<sup>49</sup> analyzes the arguments for<sup>50</sup> and against<sup>51</sup> the Internet's impact on VE and terrorism in her work. Jayson Burke, in articles on the assessment of al-Qaeda and al-Shabab, said he believes that social media activity cannot be an essential form of "grassroots activity," and said the access to the Internet is more a "prerogative of the elites" and does not provide the grassroots coverage. At the same time, Burke does not deny that social media, for example Twitter, were used to find funds, recruit foreign terrorist fighters and used as an effective means of communication<sup>52</sup>. Conway notes that the modern Internet use not only allows one-way "extremist material" to be distributed and consumed from producer to consumer, but also provides a high level of online social interaction around this material. It is the functionality

<sup>47</sup> Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (2015), <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/charlie-winter-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy>.

<sup>48</sup> UNODC, *Use of the Internet for terrorist purposes* (2013), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/Use\\_of\\_Internet\\_for\\_Terrorist\\_Purposes/Use\\_of\\_the\\_internet\\_for\\_terrorist\\_purposes\\_Russian.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/Use_of_Internet_for_Terrorist_Purposes/Use_of_the_internet_for_terrorist_purposes_Russian.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Maura Conway, *Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research* (2016), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408?src=recsys>.

<sup>50</sup> J. M. Berger and Bill Strathearn, *Who Matters Online: Measuring Influence, Evaluating Content and Countering Violent Extremism in Online Social Networks*, King's College London: ICSR (2013), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ICSR-Report-Who-Matters-Online-Measuring-influence-Evaluating-Content-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism-in-Online-Social-Networks.pdf>; Joseph Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter Neumann, *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks*, King's College London: ICSR (2014), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>; Charlie Edwards and Luke Gibbon, "Pathways to Violent Extremism in the Digital Era," *RUSI Journal* No. 158 (2013), pp. 40–47, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2013.847714>; David H. Gray and Albon Head, "The Importance of the Internet to the Post-modern Terrorist and its Role as a Form of Safe Haven," *European Journal of Scientific Research* 25(3) (2009), <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p2s7s29n6/and-Albon-Head-The-Importance-of-the-Internet-to-the-Post-modern-Terrorist-and/>; Anne Stenersen, "The Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20(2) (2008), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546550801920790?journalCode=ftpv20>; United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria*, New York: UN (2014), p. 4., <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/rule-terror-living-under-isis-syria>

<sup>51</sup> David C. Benson, "Why the Internet is Not Increasing Terrorism," *Security Studies* 23(2) (2014), pp. 293–328, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2014.905353>; Noémie Bouhana and Per-Olof H. Wikström, *Al-Qa'ida-influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory*, London: UK Home Office, (2011), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116724/occ97.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116724/occ97.pdf); Jonathan Githens-Mazer, "Radicalisation Via YouTube? It's Not So Simple," *The Guardian*, 4 November 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/nov/04/youtube-radicalisation-roshonara-choudhry>. It's worth mentioning here too the contestability of "radicalization" as a concept as discussed in, for example, Akil Awan, Andrew Hoskins, and Ben O'Loughlin, *Radicalisation and Media: Connectivity and Terrorism in the New Media Ecology*, London: Routledge (2012), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2015.1006102>

<sup>52</sup> Jason Burke, "Al-Shabab's Tweets Won't Boost its Cause," *The Guardian*, 16 December 2011. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408>. Po: Maura Conway, *Determining the Role of the Internet* (2016).

of the social network that leads many scientists, politicians and others to believe that the Internet plays a significant role in the process of modern radicalization<sup>53</sup>. However, almost all authors agree that online propaganda is effective with offline support<sup>54</sup>.

No case studies have been found to link the Internet and radicalization leading to violence in Central Asia (during the specified time period). Perhaps, given the prevalence of the Internet, this connection is seen as obvious. Yet, Turkmenistan stands on the sidelines because access to the Internet is physically limited<sup>55</sup>. Basically, researchers consider this issue in its connection with the study of the general risks of radicalization and the recruitment of labor migrants in Russia, Turkey and other countries<sup>56</sup>. Noah Tucker and experts from the International Crisis Group show the significant role of Internet and online communications in recruiting fighters in Syria<sup>57</sup>. The RUSI study indicates that in Russia, the Internet can be seen as a contributor to the rise of violent extremism more than in Central Asian countries. This is primarily due to the fact that Uzbeks in Russia have more stable and cheaper access to the Internet than in Central Asia<sup>58</sup>. This online influence can take many forms, both impersonal in the form of online propaganda and personal in the form of communication through social media.

SecDev comes to the conclusion in its analysis that: "based on the results of studying and systematizing data on radicalization and violent extremism in cyberspace among the population of Central Asian countries, it was revealed that the degree of influence of recruitment into extremist organizations through social networks in the Central Asian region is exaggerated, however, it is effective when combined with direct recruitment".<sup>59</sup> However, the researchers acknowledge that this issue requires research. Thus, the Uzbek researcher M. Abdullayeva notes that media space, which gave rise to a special type of "Internet thinking," burst into the environment of Islamic ideologues-propagandists, who managed to "hook" a significant audience on their Internet resources, primarily young and not sophisticated recipients with weak resistance. The symbiosis of high technologies and destructive ideology gives its results, which, according to the researcher, are poorly studied using the examples of the Uzbek-speaking audience, especially in the sense of professional content analysis, to which Islamic scholars are rarely involved.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Maura Conway. Determining the Role of the Internet (2016) .

<sup>54</sup> UNODC, Use of the Internet for terrorist purposes (2013), Maura Conway, Determining the Role of the Internet (2016). Jamie Bartlett, "You Can't Prevent Terrorism by Singling Out Muslims," The Telegraph, 19 February, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11422164/You-cant-prevent-terrorism-by-singling-out-Muslims.html> Hanna Rogan, Jihadism Online: A Study of How al-Qaida and Radical Islamist Groups Use the Internet for Terrorist Purposes Norway: FFI (2006), p. 30, <https://www.ffi.no/en/publications-archive/jihadism-online-a-study-of-how-al-qaida-and-radical-islamist-groups-use-the-internet-for-terrorist-purposes>

<sup>55</sup> Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, Homo jihadicus Islam in the former USSR (2015), P.95.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Lynch III, Michael Bouffard, Kelsey King, and Graham Vickowski, The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy, Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives, No. 21 (2016) P.10, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-21.pdf>; Edward Lemon, et.al., Jihadists from Ex- Soviet Central Asia (2018). P.16., Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, Homo jihadicus Islam in the former USSR (2015), P.30., Noah Tucker. Terrorism without a God. (2019). P. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group, Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia (Briefing 72/Europe & Central Asia 20 January 2015), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia> USAID, Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses (2015), [https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE\\_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf](https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Joint research RUSI, RAS, NAS KR, Reasons and motives for radicalization of labor migrants from CA countries in the Russian Federation (2018).

<sup>59</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2018), [https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online\\_public\\_rus.pdf](https://internews.kg/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violent-extremism-online_public_rus.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> M.Z.AbdullaevaCybermakondaŷsmirlarfaoliyati: tadidlarvaŷimoya (Adolescents in cyberspace: threats and protection), pp. 4-5; She's the same. Cybermakondagihaatarlar (Threats in cyberspace), p. 101.

In any case, as the UNODC handbook notes, one of the main areas of terrorist use of the Internet is propaganda.<sup>61</sup> The propaganda of the most successful banned terrorist groups in this regard -- ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra -- has been the subject of analysis of many studies<sup>62</sup>. This made it possible to define the recurring concepts used by these groups in their narratives, which, to one degree or another, are characteristic of other terrorist groups. Charlie Winter,<sup>63</sup> reviewing ISIS's propaganda strategy, notes that Islamic State propaganda has spawned an all-encompassing brand that offers an alternative lifestyle. Like any grassroots movement, it captures the imagination of potential recruits, offering them both immediate change and the ability to transform their future in the long run. She identifies six major brands that the organization spreads on the Internet -- cruelty, mercy, sacrifice, war, belonging and utopianism -- each of which is analyzed in detail separately and related to each other.

Deno and Gomez-Perez<sup>64</sup> (2019), considering strategic radical narratives, distinguish three main subgroups:

- **Promoting the group identity:** Any narrative that promotes a radical group spreading a given message, for example, victorious images, social aspects (problems) of the group, adventures and, in general, promotes the ideology of the group (or related to the group).
- **Discrediting other groups:** Any narrative that discredits other groups. Usually the enemy is attacked, although similar but competing groups are often discredited as well.
- **Sowing discord between groups:** Actions whereby discord between groups is intensified.
- **Emphasizing a moral obligation:** Narratives that are based on social and cultural norms to justify a certain type of action.

The authors carried out a comparative analysis of non-radical religious content (YMD) and the content of publications by ISIS (Dabiq, Rumiya) and Jabhat Nusra (Al-Risalah). Narratives were analyzed in the following categories: sowing discord between groups; moral duty (protecting your group, revenge for the group, attack as self-defense); group identity: image of a winner (winner in difficult times, group achievements), promotion of group ideology (legitimacy of ideology), eternal and unshakable essence of the caliphate (the caliphate as an Islamic utopia), homophilia (idealizing the most radical members, glorifying subgroups), adventure and resistance; discrediting another group: discrediting the enemy (West, Christians in Muslim lands), discrediting the competition (political Islamists, other jihadist groups).

Narratives promoting the **group identity** are the most challenging section in taxonomy among publications. In general, all the selected narratives, in one form or another, are aimed at forming a group identity. This correlates with the results of the RUSI

<sup>61</sup> UNODC, Use of the Internet for terrorist purposes (2013).

<sup>62</sup> See: Shahira S Fahmy, The age of terrorism media: The visual narratives of the Islamic State Group's Dabiq magazine (2019), [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1748048519843412?casa\\_token=tWem1m03On8AAAAA%3A-zLmG712ZZIt06k2fB75XQ17QglnykSf-Ts7wlOV\\_OF8DN5rSbmbERjX-GFnyM7kAV9Sme0y9UNEIkA#](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1748048519843412?casa_token=tWem1m03On8AAAAA%3A-zLmG712ZZIt06k2fB75XQ17QglnykSf-Ts7wlOV_OF8DN5rSbmbERjX-GFnyM7kAV9Sme0y9UNEIkA#); Charlie Winter, The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy (2015), <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/charlie-winter-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy>; Denaux Ronald , G´omez-P´erez Jose Manuel, Textual Analysis for Radicalisation Narratives aligned with Social Sciences Perspectives (2015), <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-2342/paper5.pdf>. Maura Conway, Determining the Role of the Internet (2016)

<sup>63</sup> Charlie Winter, The Virtual 'Caliphate' (2015).

<sup>64</sup> Denaux Ronald , et.al, Textual Analysis for Radicalisation Narratives aligned with Social Sciences Perspectives (2015).

analysis, which asserts that “there is strong evidence that radicalization is a social process and identity is a key factor in why people get involved in violent movements. There is strong evidence that religion and ethnicity are some of the most powerful manifestations of individual and group identity.”<sup>65</sup> Compared to non-radical religious content, **homophilia** is also quite common in radical content<sup>66</sup>. In addition, while non-radical religious content only uses generic homophilic phrases (for example, "brothers and sisters"), radical publications use terminology to glorify and idealize more radical members (for example, "martyrs"). Radical publications also put forward winners' narratives as part of their group identity, highlighting their achievements. Denot and Gomez-Perez note the **discrediting of other groups** as the most characteristic feature of radical texts, in particular groups viewed as enemies or as ineffective alternatives (for example, political Islamists)<sup>67</sup>.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to deduce such a categorization of the radical narrative prevalent in Central Asia due to limited research. For all the diversity of research on violent extremism in CA, there has been undeservedly little emphasis on analyzing the narratives of violent extremist groups directly. The USAID study “Engaging Central Asia in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses,”, conducted at a time when the propaganda of ISIS and other terrorist groups in the Middle East was especially active, identifies three blocks of main narratives propagated by the VE groups in Central Asia<sup>68</sup>:

1. *The Syrian Revolution as a Just War*. This narrative is the most widespread and resonant, which argues that the armed opposition against Assad’s government is a "just war" and a defensive conflict. Theologically, the conflict is described as a jihad to defend the true religion (in this case, Sunni Islam), as well as a jihad to defend against the killing of innocent people. Depiction of violence has been extensively used as evidence, especially against Syrian civilians and children.
2. *The Islamic state as an apocalyptic utopia*. It is a story of a powerful "status" that has two complementary parts. The first is a utopian vision of life in an "Islamic state" and the second is a manifestation of shocking violence used to advance the territory of this state and establish social order within it. To advertise their vision of a true utopia, images are often promoted of celebrating religious holidays, a life of happiness and security, in which mujahideen care for the disabled and orphans, while children enjoy the brightly lit carnival rides. The second part,, such as mass executions, the use of child soldiers, etc., is designed to transfer the power of the group, in contrast to marginalization and helplessness experienced, in particular, by migrant workers.
3. *The Fight against Western oppression*. The group's ideology in the form in which it is presented to the residents of Central Asia, especially in discussions aimed at labor migrants in the Russian social network Odnoklassniki, is less concerned with jihadist theology than the idea of a “Muslim” state opposing the West and the United States in particular, which is are portrayed by the IS recruiters (in Central Asian languages) as the actors responsible for the oppression of migrants in Russia and at home. These arguments are underpinned by the constant stream of disinformation and conspiracy theories that inhabit both the social media environment populated by migrants from Central Asian countries, and the persistent echoes of the Cold War in Russian mass media that reinforce these sentiments.

<sup>65</sup> Harriet Allan, et.al., Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review (2015).

<sup>66</sup> Emotional gravitation mainly towards persons of the opposite or own sex, which does not have a pronounced erotic character - with whom a person prefers to be friends, to whom he pours out his soul, etc.

<sup>67</sup> Denaux Ronald , et.al, Textual Analysis for Radicalisation Narratives aligned with Social Sciences Perspectives (2015).

<sup>68</sup> USAID, Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses (2015), pp. 13-15, [https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE\\_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf](https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf).

Studies that are closer in time touch on the topic of narratives to one degree or another. In **Kyrgyzstan**, research initiatives over this period are more focused on developing the preventive advocacy measures. The last case study was carried out by the Search for Common Ground in 2017 as part of the study “Meanings, Images and Media Channels that Contribute to the Radicalization of Young People in Kyrgyzstan”. According to that study, the main narratives leading to radicalization are: calls for jihad, calls for the creation of a caliphate, and calls to fight the infidels.<sup>69</sup> In **Kazakhstan**, this topic was touched upon in the context of research on radicalization, in particular of prisoners. Based on the personal experience of interviewing the prisoners, as well as returnees from the Middle East, a national expert from Kazakhstan singles out a *global jihadist narrative* describing the current situation in the world through the confrontation between Muslims and infidels, promoting the idea of a conspiracy of Jews and Freemasons against Islam, as well as against humiliated Muslims. In the local *Kazakhstani radical narrative*, the main topics are related to the discriminatory policy of the authorities towards believers -- the ban on wearing hijabs in schools, the closure of mosques due to the coronavirus, criminal cases against followers of Salafism, etc. This narrative is presented quite widely on social networks, and also voiced by those returning from Syria and Iraq.

In **Tajikistan**, the International Alert study addresses the question of the ideological aspects of the narratives of violent groups<sup>70</sup>.

In particular, with regard to the topics touched upon by the narrative, following concepts were noted:

- The concept of a “rotten society of unbelievers,” which every Muslim must reject (within the framework of the concept of takfir va al-hijra, that is, accusation of disbelief and withdrawal, rejection);
- The concept of social equality and an ideal society -- the Caliphate, free from the diseases of modern society, corruption, social injustice, and so on;
- The concept of self-realization, (only within the framework of an ideal society a Muslim can fully self-actualize himself, go beyond his social niche);
- The concept of new social opportunities, to change the status, get new opportunities in achieving a career, economic well-being, etc.

In addition, a significant part of the narrative is dedicated to criticism of various aspects of the authorities' religious policy, restrictions on religious life, dress code, muftiate, Committee on Religious Affairs, etc.

The most common narratives of Uzbek-language media resources of violent extremist ideologues mainly include<sup>71</sup>:

1. A series of sermons by VE ideologues outlining the religiously motivated moral obligations of Muslims to “defend Islam,” censuring those who refuse to participate in jihad as a “munafiq” (apostate, hypocrite). Stories about the “oppression of Muslims and the community/ummat”;

<sup>69</sup> Search for common interests, meanings, images and media channels contributing to the radicalization of young people in Kyrgyzstan (2017).

<sup>70</sup> USIP, International Alert, Religion and stability: Defining and understanding the main trends and factors underpinning religious radicalisation in Tajikistan (2019), pp.34-35, <https://www.whatworks.co.za/project-evidence/international-alert-tajikistan>.

<sup>71</sup> From the materials of the Center for Islamic Studies at the International Islamic Academy of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

2. Mythologized stories on the history of Islam in its "jihadist version." Stories about "righteous ancestors" (as-salaf as-salihun) who sacrificed their lives "for the triumph of Islam"; Stories about the heroes of the war in Iraq and Syria -- the owners of the "keys to paradise". Attempts to conceptualize the "otherworldly motivations" of the mujahideen and honor in this world; revelations of the Mujahideen from Syria or Iraq, presented to bloggers from the moderate Islamic opposition (telephone conversations<sup>72</sup>). It should be noted that the Uzbek-language propaganda is the most widespread in the region and covers at least two countries – Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Audience-oriented radical narratives within Turkmenistan have not yet been explored in terms of sources, content and distribution dynamics. From 2012 to 2016 there was a surge in the distribution of radical materials, then a recession followed; many old materials are now not available on the Internet. Due to blocking of social networks and other Internet restrictions within Turkmenistan, sites with radical content in the Turkmen language were frequently visited by Turkmen citizens living abroad. The most popular content viewed both at home and abroad are still old video recordings of speeches by the former imam of one of the mosques in Ashgabat, known as Atageldy Agha (who died in prison after his arrest in 2008), and lectures on Islam and poetry by Rovshen Agha (who studied in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, was arrested in Syria in 2013 and his further fate is unknown). Their content requires analysis. Other preachers and online sources are noticeably less popular. Discussions on politically sensitive religious topics that took place on social media several years ago have now largely subsided due to fears of persecution of their participants. Due to the limited audience within Turkmenistan among radicals, especially among Turkmen migrants in Turkey, some of the narrative is being circulated in Turkish and other languages. Also, when analyzing the Turkmen-language narrative online, it should be kept in mind that most of the ethnic Turkmens participating in the Middle East conflict are from this region, and part of the narrative is focused specifically on this audience, and not on immigrants from Central Asia.

Internews' recent regional studies confirm and complement the previous ones.<sup>73</sup> Thus, based on the analysis of available data, the following categories of messages or ideological attitudes can be distinguished:

*Political:* Calls to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad; criticism of the West (Europe, USA), Russia and their allies; direct calls for jihad; discrediting the official Syrian authorities and the governments of other countries; and calls to expel foreign forces from Muslim territories;

*Social:* Efforts of the organization itself aimed at improving the quality of life of the local population: building of roads, provision of humanitarian aid, combating the corruption;

*Religious:* Dissemination of utopian ideas about establishing the Caliphate; performance of hijra; general information about Islam;

*Humanistic:* Information about the oppression of Muslims around the world; helping their brothers and sisters in faith.

<sup>72</sup> For example: Shomdayurgan, ýzini "Muzhogid" deb nomlabolganlarning asl basharasil Hulosaniýzingiz chikaring! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYwP7mt-jYo>

<sup>73</sup> Search of common interests, Information Flows and Radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2019).

Experts from Civil Initiative on Internet Policy and SecDev note that direct calls for jihad are quite rare; the recruiting strategy has become softer and more thoughtful<sup>74</sup>. Certain "tricks" are often used, such as the dissemination of non-radical material – videos, pictures, text material – demonstrating the efforts of the organization itself aimed at improving the quality of life of the local population. All of this is done to demonstrate the insolvency of the state itself and thereby increase the authority of this or that organization<sup>75</sup>.

As can be seen from the presented review, in the world practice there has been a tradition of in-depth qualitative analysis of the VE of printed and visual materials. In the Central Asian region, the study of VE narratives mainly takes place within the framework of a broader research. At the same time, there is a lack of research dedicated directly to content analysis of texts and videos of violent extremist groups on the Internet.

## Target groups

The UNODC Handbook on the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes indicates that terrorist propaganda is often designed to appeal to vulnerable and marginalized groups in the society. It can also be adapted to take into account demographic factors such as age or gender, as well as social or economic circumstances. The Internet can be a particularly effective mean of recruiting minors, who constitute a significant proportion of users. Promotional materials distributed over the Internet for the recruitment of minors may take the form of cartoons, popular music videos, or computer games.<sup>76</sup>

The authors of the study "Jihadists from Central Asia ..." emphasize that young people are especially vulnerable: "Many young people from Central Asia who have experienced personal setback and marginalization begin to feel alienated and frustrated with their lives – whether abroad, at home or in a host country where they settled as immigrants".<sup>77</sup> Maciej Falkowski and Józef Lang note that often young people decide to leave because they have little to lose and are less likely to find a good job, make a successful career, save money, or even start a family of their own. (In traditional Caucasian and Central Asian societies, marriage must be preceded by achievement of a social status that allows a man to provide for his wife and children).<sup>78</sup> In this regard, the high-risk groups include internal (from rural areas to large cities) and foreign migrants.<sup>79</sup>

Due to a lack of data on the age characteristics of the groups targeted by the VE narratives, the research team also reviewed the statistics of those convicted under articles for extremism and terrorism.

In **Kazakhstan**, young people are singled out as one of the main "risk groups of radicalization and committing the acts of violent extremism," which constitutes the main audience of social networks and other Internet resources in Kazakhstan<sup>80</sup>. The approx-

<sup>74</sup> CIIP, Sec Dev, Segmenting Target Audience to Determine Prevention Measures for Online Promotion of Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan (2018).

<sup>75</sup> Sec Dev, VE in Central Asian cyberspace: A survey of digital violent extremism in Central Asia, SecDev /Violent extremism in Central Asia (2019).

<sup>76</sup> UNODC, Use of the Internet for terrorist purposes (2013).

<sup>77</sup> Edward Lemon, et.al., Jihadists from Ex- Soviet Central Asia (2018). P.14.

<sup>78</sup> Maciej Falkowski, Józef Lang, Homo Jihadicus Islam in the former USSR (2015).

<sup>79</sup> Same source.

<sup>80</sup> Irina Chernykh, Internet communications in Kazakhstan: the degree of mobilization potential (based on the results of sociological research), (Almaty: KazISS under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2014), [https://www.academia.edu/110401264/Интернет-коммуникации\\_в\\_Казахстане\\_степень\\_мобилизационного\\_потенциала](https://www.academia.edu/110401264/Интернет-коммуникации_в_Казахстане_степень_мобилизационного_потенциала)

imate age range is 16 to 29 years.<sup>81</sup> Judging by the videos published, most of them are represented by young people under the age of 29 years<sup>82</sup>. According to the General Prosecutor's Office, the average age of people convicted of extremism and terrorism is 28; usually with secondary education, with no special religious education and are married with children<sup>83</sup>. Studies conducted among Kazakh prisoners for extremism and terrorism have shown that radicalization based on Salafi-jihadist ideology took place, most often among marginalized young people<sup>84</sup>. Thus, according to statistics, more than 80 percent of those convicted of religious extremism and terrorism in Kazakhstan are people who did not have official employment and are employed in the shadow sector of the economy (bazaars, private transportation, etc.). A significant portion of them were children of internal migrants who moved from villages to larger settlements, and experienced certain problems with adapting in this regard.

Geographically, the largest number of criminal cases was considered in Atyrau, Almaty, Aktobe, South Kazakhstan, Pavlodar regions and in Almaty<sup>85</sup>. However, a detailed analysis of the official crime statistics shows that the western regions of the country are more prone to violent extremism. So, in the period from 2011 to 2019, under the articles "*Act of terrorism*" and "*Creation, leadership of a terrorist group and participation in its activities*," citizens were mostly convicted in the following three western regions of the country: Atyrau (89 people), Aktobe (37) and West Kazakhstan (36) regions.<sup>86</sup> In aggregate, this is 57 percent of all convicts in the country under these articles during the same period.

In Tajikistan, several studies have identified the population groups that are most vulnerable to extremist propaganda and recruiting<sup>87</sup>. As a basis for the analysis, we used the available (rather incomplete) lists of Tajik recruits in ISIS, interviews with individual amnestied recruits available both in mass media and in the course of field research, survey data and in-depth interviews. According to the research, 45 percent of male recruits were between the ages of 24-30; 22 percent were between the ages of 31-37, 19 percent were between the ages of 18-23; 9 percent were between the ages of 38-45 and 4 percent were between the ages of 46-55. The gender aspect of the study showed that the majority of female recruits were in the 28-35 and 23-27 age groups – however, women accounted for only 11 percent of the total number of Tajik citizens in ISIS.

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<sup>81</sup> Serik Beisembaev, "Specificity and factors of radicalization of young people in the conditions of Kazakhstan," CABAR, July 27, 2016, <https://cabar.asia/ru/serik-bejsembaev-spetsifika-i-factory-radikalizatsii-molodezhi-v-usloviyah-kazakhstan/>

<sup>82</sup> Anastasia Reshetnyak, *Dangerous Networks: How to Fight Online Radicalization in Kazakhstan* (2018), [https://www.soros.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Решетняк\\_верстка\\_.pdf](https://www.soros.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Решетняк_верстка_.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Tengrinews, "A Social Portrait of a Terrorist in Kazakhstan Compiled", April 9, 2014, <https://tengrinews.kz/crime/sostavlenn-sotsialnyy-portret-terrorista-v-kazhstane-253308/>

<sup>84</sup> Serik Beisembaev, *Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan: Between Crime and Jihad* (2015), <http://www.ofstrategy.kz/index.php/ru/research/socialresearch/item/485-religioznyj-ekstremizm-v-kazakhstan-mezhdu-kriminalom-i-dzhikhodom>

<sup>85</sup> Tengrinews, A social portrait of a terrorist in Kazakhstan is compiled.

<sup>86</sup> Website of the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Accounting of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan <https://qamqor.gov.kz/portal/page/portal/POPPageGroup/Services/Pravstat>

<sup>87</sup> Soros Foundation Project - Open Society "Young People's Radicalism in Tajikistan," "Radicalization in Tajikistan: Causes, Main Trends and Possible Consequences" (UNDP) "Study of the Problems and Main Trends of Religious Radicalism in Tajikistan," (International Alert), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/newsroom/open-society-foundations-tajikistan/ru>

Social composition: labor, external migrants, mainly living in Russia;<sup>88</sup> internal migrants – mainly migrants from rural areas to the capital;<sup>89</sup> representatives of small and medium-sized businesses, farmers who were particularly affected during the crisis of 2014-16. According to the Prosecutor General's Office for 2017, there are 1,094 Tajik citizens adherents of Salafism in IS. Of these, 400 are natives of Khatlon region, 272 are from Sughd, 254 are from regions of republican subordination, 139 are from Dushanbe and 26 are from Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. Moreover, 85 percent of them are labor migrants who came to the attention of recruiters while staying in Russia.<sup>90</sup>

In **Uzbekistan**, the age category of “involved” is poorly studied. The preliminary data on studies of repatriates, as well as data from some articles<sup>91</sup> boil down to the following: 57 percent - young people between the ages of 19-25 years (of which 12 percent are girls or wives of young Mujahideen); 22 percent were between the ages of 26-45 (of this number, 14-15 percent are women who left for husbands or close relatives); up to 12 percent of children and adolescents (up to 15 years old) taken away by their parents (mainly mothers); the rest are people between the ages of 46 and 60 (mainly mothers and fathers of families. There are about half of women in this category. Within the framework of these studies, the regions (viloyats/oblasts) were identified, whose inhabitants are most susceptible to the influence of media products of destructive content, these are: Tashkent and the Tashkent region; Namangan and the Namangan region; the Kashkadarya region; the Andijan region; the Khorezm region (the Urgench, Khanka, and Bagat districts); the Fergana region (Margilan city, the Margilan region, Kokand city, the Oltiariq region); and the Syrdarya region.

These numbers of those involved in the conflict in the Middle East and the order of the regions (in ascending order) are to one degree or another confirmed by the results of studies of repatriates from hot spots (July of 2019 to January of 2020, conducted within the framework of the Search for Common Interests project).<sup>92</sup> For surveys within the framework of the initiated project, it seems sufficient to select the cities of Tashkent, Namangan, Andijan and their regions. When examining the repatriates, it was found that of the 56 cases studied, it was from these three cities and their regions that most families left (28 cases).

**Kyrgyzstan.** According to the study "Meanings, Images and Media Channels Contributing to the Radicalization of Young People in Kyrgyzstan," the portrait of the average respondent from the group of respondents (108 respondents) is a 22-24-year-old young man, student or unemployed, believer, active Internet user, regularly consuming information, such as from at least three social media (mainly in Uzbek or Russian, less often in Kyrgyz). Religious identity is primary for him, and he often searches for answers to religious topics of interest to him on the Internet or among his peers who are Inter-

<sup>88</sup> According to the official data, about 85 percent of Tajik recruits at the time of recruitment were in labor migration in Russia. See "Prosecutor General's Office: 90% of Tajik Militants Recruited to ISIS on the Internet" <https://www.dialog.tj/news/genprokuratura-90-tadzhikskikh-boevikov-zaverbovano-v-igil-po-internetu>

<sup>89</sup> A fairly significant portion of the recruits come from several suburbs of Dushanbe in other cities where many internal migrants live. The data was calculated based on data from Procurator RT for 2017, Sputnik-Tajikistan, "Danger online: what tricks does ISIS go for, 11 recruiting Tajik citizens," December 11, 2017, <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/analitics/20171211/1024129627/terrorism-migranty-ekstremizm-tadzhikistan.html>

<sup>90</sup> Same source

<sup>91</sup> Research Center for Islamic Studies at the International Islamic Academy, Religious Situation in Uzbekistan, (Tashkent, 2019). A sample of 1,000 respondents. Abdullaeva M.Z. Cybermakonda ysmirlar faoliyati: tadidlar va ximoya (Adolescents in cyberspace: threats and protection), pp. 4-5; She's the same. Cybermakondagi haatarlar (Threats in cyberspace), p. 101..

<sup>92</sup> Being published

net users.<sup>93</sup> This portrait is partially supported by the recent research. Thus, the Civil Initiative on Internet Policy (CIIP), based on an analysis of 10 previous studies on the PVE topic, conducted a segmentation of the target audience to determine measures for prevention of online propaganda of violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan. The authors note that age-related characteristics are important psychological characteristics that influence vulnerability to radicalization. According to the given data, the ages from 14 to 18 years is one of the most vulnerable periods, since it is at this age that a strong idealization of one's aspirations and values occurs<sup>94</sup>. The KR's Correctional Institution for Monitoring of Work with Prisoners of Extremism and Terrorism indicates that the average age of those convicted of crimes of a terrorist nature is approximately 24 years old (only one interviewee was convicted at the age of 39).<sup>95</sup> However, this data does not indicate at what age the process of radicalization leading to violence began. Almost all respondents had secondary education.

The authors of the study, based on the results of the above interviews with prisoners,<sup>96</sup> also propose to segment the audience according to the degree of involvement in radicalization processes. For this, it is proposed to use a scale of radicalization, including: (0) no radicalization, (1) persons affected by radicalization, (2) persons sharing extremist ideas, (3) persons involved in violent extremism, (4) persons participating in terrorist activities.<sup>97</sup>

Among the factors of vulnerability to radicalization, the authors of the study "Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization and Extremism" ranked the area of residence second after discrimination. The study indicates that the most vulnerable are two locations: the Batken region (due to very difficult border conditions and interethnic relations) and Osh city (due to the 2010 ethnic conflict).<sup>98</sup> In addition, ethnic Uzbeks who are citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic (KR), and came from the southern regions (mainly the Osh region) of the KR, and have become strangers to both Uzbekistan and their homeland: the KR, are considered the most vulnerable group for recruitment from the KR's migrants<sup>99</sup>. However, despite the fact that in the official data and various studies the south of the country was considered the most vulnerable to radicalization due to the largest number of citizens who left for conflict zones in the Middle East, it should be kept in mind that there were "emigrants" in a number of northern regions of the country.

In **Turkmenistan**, studies of the vulnerability of the various groups to the promotion of violent extremism and recruiting have not been carried out and are currently not possible. According to the materials available to the national expert, it can be assumed that in some cases, one or another stage of radicalization affected the young people within the country. But more frequent are the cases when the radicalization of

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<sup>93</sup> Search for Common Ground, Meanings, images and media channels contributing to the radicalization of young people in Kyrgyzstan (2017).

<sup>94</sup> CIIP, Sec Dev, Segmenting Target Audience to Determine Prevention Measures for Online Propaganda of Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan (2018)

<sup>95</sup> Report on the results of monitoring of correctional institutions of the penal system of the Kyrgyz Republic on work with convicts for crimes of a terrorist nature and extremist orientation. (Bishkek, 2018), <http://mptf.undp.org/document/download/22440>

<sup>96</sup> Same source.

<sup>97</sup> For more details, see: CIIP, Sec Dev, Segmenting Target Audience to Determine Prevention Measures for Online Propaganda of Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan (2018), Report on the Monitoring of Correctional Facilities (Bishkek, 2018).

<sup>98</sup> Emil Nasridtinov et al., Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization and Extremism: An Analysis in Five Areas of Life, CAA Network (2019).

<sup>99</sup> A joint study by RUSI, RAS, National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic, Reasons and motives for the radicalization of labor migrants from CA countries in the Russian Federation (2018).

citizens of Turkmenistan – students and labor migrants from among young people – occurs abroad (in Turkey, Egypt, Russia and other CIS countries), where people from Turkmenistan are faced with streams of alternative information that are not readily available at home. However, not in all cases does radicalization cross the critical line. Regionally, the largest number of reports of persecution of members of religious groups accused of extremism by the authorities refer to Ashgabat, the districts of the Akhalvelayat adjacent to the capital, as well as the Dashoguz and Lebapvelayats, which border with Uzbekistan. A specific feature of the Turkmen situation is the active use by the state of the mechanism of bans on leaving the country in case of doubts about political or social loyalty, there are cases of criminal prosecution for critical statements or religious activity abroad, as a result of which some students and labor migrants are afraid to return to their homeland, trying to find the opportunity to stay abroad by joining certain communities, including the VE organizations persecuted in their country.

## Communication channels

The possibilities of the Internet also allow reaching a significant audience in comparison to physical media such as books, brochures, CDs or DVDs. Such materials can be distributed using a wide range of tools, such as: specialized websites, targeted virtual chat groups and chat forums, online magazines, social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and popular video and file sharing websites like YouTube and Rapidshare. The use of indexing services such as Internet search engines also makes it easier to find and retrieve terrorism-related content.<sup>100</sup>

In **Kyrgyzstan** in 2017, the most popular channels were (in descending order): YouTube, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, VK, Instagram, Twitter and further messengers WhatsApp, Telegram and Imo.<sup>101</sup> A study of the popularity of online media channels among young people in Kyrgyzstan, conducted by the CIIP<sup>102</sup> and the Institute of Electronics and Telecommunications at the Kyrgyz State Technical University, showed a slightly different picture in January and February of 2019, based on a sample of 3,945 respondents, including 480 labor migrants from the KR. The most popular messenger used by young people is WhatsApp (95% of the respondents in the general sample, followed by Telegram, three times behind (32%) of the respondents in the general sample). Young migrants (64%) prefer to use Telegram messenger to a greater extent than young people living in the KR (28%). Most young people spend at least one to two hours a day on social networks, and every third respondent spends three hours or more.

Considering the situation in Uzbekistan, M. Abdullaev comes to the conclusion that radical bloggers and administrators of Islamic sites managed to create a certain audience, which because it was virtual was able to bypass the preventive measures of law enforcement agencies.<sup>103</sup> Based on extensive statistics,<sup>104</sup> the researcher came to

<sup>100</sup> UNODC, Use of the Internet for terrorist purposes (2013), p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> Search for Common Ground, Meanings, images and media channels contributing to the radicalization of young people in Kyrgyzstan (2017).

<sup>102</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Segmenting Target Audience to Determine Prevention Measures for Online Propaganda of Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan (2018).

<sup>103</sup> Although, it should be noted that tracking Internet networks and WEB-applications for professionals is becoming a way to identify groups that often try to get out of the "Internet underground" and meet like-minded people. This is how some groups were arrested in Uzbekistan Kommersant-Uz, "In Uzbekistan, two Kokand residents were arrested for extremism on Telegram," January 23, 2020. (<https://kommersant.uz/v-uzbekistane-dvuh-kokandtsev-arestovali-za-ekstremizm-v-telegram/>).

<sup>104</sup> For example, a researcher offers the results of her calculations of the questions with which recipients turn to famous Islamic sites, or interest in political issues, etc.

the conclusion that the level of network involvement of young people in the last two years (2018-2019) has seriously increased (up to 300 percent), in connection with the reforms in Uzbekistan, which affected access to previously closed Internet resources<sup>105</sup>. V. Mikhailov in the study "Internet resources on which ideas of violent extremism leading to radicalization and terrorism are spreading,"<sup>106</sup> cites 552 Internet resources<sup>107</sup> (websites, as well as on applications such as Facebook, OK.ru, Telegram.me, Twitter.com, Youtube, etc.) These media resources, according to the author, are "Internet sources that recruiters actively use for recruiting, as well as for self-radicalization." However, during LPO it was revealed that up to 20 percent of the resources are inactive. In addition, the list includes educational sites such as Islombek Nabiev<sup>108</sup>, Zikirjon<sup>109</sup>, islomnuri,<sup>110</sup> etc.

The Center for Islamic Studies at the International Islamic Academy (Uzbekistan) in its research was able to identify the following main channels and Web applications that were visited by labor migrants and which were used by preachers: WhatsApp, Telegram, and Odnoklassniki. The most popular channel and its applications among labor migrants from Uzbekistan was and remains "kavkazcenter.com." The following are equally popular: "islom.dini.com," "echimislomda.com," "Islomovozi.com," "Jundurrahmon.biz" and others. Currently, in Uzbekistan, many sites and channels promoting VE ideas are not available, but their fragments (individual sermons) are actively "re-posted" or sent to friends in applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, Odnoklassniki or Facebook, etc.).

A study by International Alert and UNDP on radicalization in **Tajikistan** cited data on sources and channels of online recruitment. In particular, it was said that a significant part of Tajik recruits in ISIS were recruited through online channels – among them online TV channels, video blogs, private blogs on YouTube, and social networks (Facebook, Odnoklassniki, and Twitter).<sup>111</sup> The EFCA study<sup>112</sup> also highlighted the role of satellite channels sponsored by various foundations associated with the Gulf States. Thus, the Visoli-Khak satellite television channel, which broadcast in Farsi, with a focus on the Tajik audience and topics, played a significant role in the dissemination of "radical propaganda." According to the British media, the channel was sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Embassy in London.<sup>113</sup>

In **Turkmenistan**, many social networks and messengers are blocked and accessible mainly via virtual private networks (VPNs), which are associated with the additional costs. According to preliminary data, the most popular are V Kontakte, Odnoklassniki,

<sup>105</sup> M.Z. Abdullaeva *Cybermakonda ysmirlar faoliyati: tadidlar va ximoya* (Adolescents in cyberspace: threats and protection), pp. 4-5; She's the same. *Cybermakonda gihaatarlar* (Threats in cyberspace), p. 101.

<sup>106</sup> Viktor Mikhailov, Internet resources that spread the ideas of violent extremism, leading to radicalization and terrorism. Research (2018). <https://crss.uz/2018/10/11/issledovanie-rasprostranenie-idej-nasilstvennogo-ekstremizma-radikalizaciya-verbovka-i-terrorizm/>

<sup>107</sup> It is interesting that according to the results of the work of The SecDev Group, in an analysis conducted from August to October of 2018, 140 Central Asian social media accounts were identified as actively distributing VE content to more than 324,000 subscribers.

<sup>108</sup> Islombek Nabiev, Profile, Facebook, May 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100022421798255>

<sup>109</sup> [https://www.ok.ru/profile/559665783490\\$](https://www.ok.ru/profile/559665783490$).

<sup>110</sup> <https://ok.ru/profile/588612852016>.

<sup>111</sup> USIP, International Alert, Religion and stability (2019), p. 33, Project "Radicalization in Tajikistan: Causes, Main Trends and Potential Consequences," implemented by the UNDP Tajikistan office from 2017-2018.

<sup>112</sup> EFCA, The contribution of positive young people's development in Tajikistan to effective peacebuilding and to countering or preventing violent extremism: successes, limitations, and recommendations. (2019) pages 19-20. <https://www.youngpeoplepower.org/resources/contribution-positive-youngpeople-development-tajikistan-effective-peacebuilding-and-countering-or-preventing-violent-extremism-successes>

<sup>113</sup> Same source

Facebook and IMO messengers. The use of WhatsApp and Telegram is difficult. The issue of accessibility and the popularity of networks and messengers in the context of the project topic will be further studied during interviews.

Contrary to expectations, the Kazakh expert did not find any national studies mentioning which communication channels are used more often by the VE groups. The latest study "Dangerous Networks: How to Fight Online Radicalization in Kazakhstan"<sup>114</sup> does not provide these "dangerous networks", but is more aimed at understanding the communication with extremist content by the official structures responsible for the prevention of extremism and counter-propaganda in Kazakhstan.

As you can see, in a number of CA countries, communication channels of the banned violent groups are poorly studied. The results of the regional monitoring of social networks conducted by the SecDev Group from August to October of 2018, in order to assess the use of social networks by the VE participants in Central Asia,<sup>115</sup> shows that organizations active in the CA online space mainly use the following networks: Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki, Google+, Instagram, Vimeo, LiveJournal and WhatsApp. Of these, Telegram is the most widespread and is used by all organizations in the study.

## Value orientations of young people in Central Asia

Young people are the most sensitive to appeals for extremism and radicalism. But young people are a large group of people that are very heterogeneous in their composition. After analyzing the modern age periodization, it can be noted that researchers divide the age of young people (18-35 years old) into three stages: late adolescence (15-21 years old), early adulthood (21-25 years old) and middle adulthood (25-40 years old). This division within one age period complicates the analysis of data on value orientations, and other difficulties arise with the development of a unified communication strategy, since even the age factor demonstrates the need to formulate different communication strategies for these age stages.

When we talk about radicalization, one of the challenges is the difficulty of assessing the involvement of respondents in extremist activities. When interviewing young people unfamiliar with radical organizations and the ideas that these organizations bring to the masses, there is a possibility of developing interest among a previously uninvolved part of the population only as a result of informing them. The other extreme is the study of persons whose acts have been proven and have received a judicial assessment. Extremists who have already been arrested and convicted represent a very specific group, and the results obtained from their study cannot be applied to the entire totality of persons prone to such behavioral deviations.

The reliability of the data obtained in the study of extremist or radicalized behavior is significantly reduced due to high likelihood of social (and sometimes criminal) condemnation, which forces the subjects to give the socially desirable answers, demonstrating a high tendency towards set behavior.<sup>116</sup> The more the types of extremist behavior that we study are disapproved by the society, the more likely it

<sup>114</sup> Anastasia Reshetnyak, Dangerous Networks: How to Fight Online Radicalization in Kazakhstan (2018)

<sup>115</sup> CIIP, SecDev, Violent Extremism in Central Asia (2019)..

<sup>116</sup> Attitude behavior - behavior determined by the desire (attitude) to "present" oneself in a more favorable light. Typically, this is associated with a desire to actively influence the results of the study, but may be associated with the desire to "look good" or to please the researcher.

is to receive socially desirable responses from the respondent or subject. Due to the high tendency towards attitudinal behavior in studies dedicated to radical (extremist) behavior, it is desirable to use "protected" methods, that is, with scales for controlling sincerity and reliability.

The scientific literature repeatedly mentions the fact that extremists have a certain system of values, which are formed under the influence of many factors and affect the personality and activities of each of them individually and the entire group as a whole. There is reason to believe that the value orientations of extremists are different from the generally accepted ones, that they have their own hierarchical structure, and that it is this structure that determines the behavior of an extremist in the society.<sup>117</sup> But there is another point of view that claims that extremists have a generally accepted system of values. That is, they adhere to ordinary norms, using them to justify the deviant behavior. The norms are simply "blurred". Sometimes, a person does not make a choice between illegal and law-abiding behavior, but "drifts" somewhere between these two opposite points, resorting to referring to extenuating circumstances to justify his radicalization.<sup>118</sup> The extremist expands the circle of extenuating circumstances to include his own situation and justify his behavior. "Drift" makes neutralization possible because it is the process of freeing the extremist from the moral bonds imposed by the law.

What are values and value guidelines? Values are what is most important for a person and has a personal meaning for him.<sup>119</sup> It is the values that determine the main and relatively permanent relationship of man to the world, to other people, to himself.<sup>120</sup> It is values that have a personal meaning for a person, become regulators and landmarks of his life and actions.

The predominance of one value over the rest forms a hierarchy of values (value orientations<sup>121</sup>) and is defined as the orientation of a person toward certain values.<sup>122</sup> Researchers note the differences in value orientations between representatives of young people living in the city and in the village,<sup>123</sup> with different levels of education and income levels. They also note the influence of gender, profession, marital status and much more.<sup>124</sup>

One of the large-scale studies (1,000 people were interviewed) of value orientations in Central Asia is the intercountry sociological study "Young people of Central Asia"<sup>125</sup>, conducted in four Central Asian countries in 2016. It focused on young people from 14 to 29 years old living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The project was carried out by the Public Opinion Research Institute (Astana, Kazakhstan) at the

<sup>117</sup> N.V. Dvoryanchikov et al. Value orientations of right-wing extremists // Psychological science and education. - 2010, T. 15, No. 5, pp. 92-103.

<sup>118</sup> Psychology of Personality. Textbook / ed. prof. P.N. Ermakova, prof. V.A. Labunskaya. M.: Eksmo, 2007, 653 [3] P.

<sup>119</sup> D.A. Leontiev, The psychology of meaning. M., 1999.

<sup>120</sup> Bardi, A., & Goodwin, R., (2011) The dual route to value change: Individual processes and cultural moderators. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 42, pp 271–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110396916>

<sup>121</sup> Schwartz S. H. Value orientations: Measurement, antecedents and consequences across nations //Measuring attitudes cross-nationally: Lessons from the European Social Survey. – 2007. – C. 161-193.

<sup>122</sup> L.M. Ryumshina, Forms of communication: Value-semantic analysis. Abstract on Dr. Psychol. sciences. Rostov on Don, 2005.

<sup>123</sup> D.D. Eshpanova, K.O. Aytbai, Z.S. Aydarbekov, Young people of Kazakhstan - problems of its social development // Sociological research. 2008. No. 5. pp. 58-66.

<sup>124</sup> Kogan I. Ethnic minority youth at the crossroads: Between traditionalism and liberal value orientations //Growing up in Diverse Societies. – British Academy, 2018.

<sup>125</sup> B.I. Rakisheva, A.B. Mazhitova, G.T. Ashkenova. Values of Kazakhstan, Young people (based on the results of inter-country comparative sociological research) // LBC 60.5 M 74 Editor-in-chief. - 2018. -- P. 147. [https://ask-aleumettanu.kz/upload/iblock/9ae/sbornik-kongress-sots\\_2018-\\_1\\_.pdf#page=147](https://ask-aleumettanu.kz/upload/iblock/9ae/sbornik-kongress-sots_2018-_1_.pdf#page=147)

request of the Regional Office of the Friedrich Ebert in Central Asia and was based on the methodology of a German research project.

According to this study,<sup>126</sup> respondents from four countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) unanimously chose "dignity" as the most valuable quality. The second valuable quality, "honesty," was chosen by Uzbeks (21.0%) and Kyrgyz (15.4%). For Kazakhstanis, the second valuable quality is social prestige (status in society, importance in the society), (22.1%), and for Tajiks, well-being (17.7%). The third quality for Tajiks and Uzbeks is "loyalty" (22.6% and 23.1%), and it was "honesty" for other respondents from Kyrgyzstan (20.2%) and Kazakhstan (12.1%).

**Kazakhstan.** The researchers<sup>127</sup> recorded the rooting of market standards of behavior in the young peoples' environment of Kazakhstan (economic freedom of action, enterprise, flexibility, ability to take risks). Young people have a less developed fear of tomorrow, the desire for a decent life, the desire to rise above the average level is in a high place. The first place was taken by such values as freedom, material well-being. Young people associate the prospect of social formation, improvement of social well-being with the solution of the problems of professional choice, the possibility of self-realization, and the acquisition of the desired social and professional status. Sociological research data<sup>128</sup> show that young people choose the achievement of a business career as their priority goals (23.1%); education (21.9%) and material well-being (27.1%).

The researchers also conclude that the value orientations of Kazakhstan's young people are contradictory: the presence of traditional values (attitude towards family, marriage, respect for elders) is combined with the manifestation of extreme individualism.<sup>129</sup>

**Kyrgyzstan.** The value orientations followed by the students of Kyrgyzstan are health, happy family life and loyal, good friends. Accordingly, their activity is aimed at achieving these values. At the same time, values that are important for self-development and self-determination of a person, such as beauty, creativity and enjoyment of life, occupy the last positions in the structure of values of both genders of Kyrgyz students.<sup>130</sup>

Values are a stable and long-term factor in human behavior, and the data obtained in a study conducted by N.A. Bagdasarova<sup>131</sup> and colleagues in 2014 on the topic "Young people of Kyrgyzstan: value orientations, social moods and conflict behavior" can be considered in relation to modern young people. But the results obtained show the presence of a certain problem – namely, the lack of a clear hierarchy of values among the young people of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>132</sup>

A detailed study of values reveals the most preferred life values of young people of

<sup>126</sup> Young people of Central Asia. Kazakhstan. Based on a sociological survey. Second edition. Under the supervision of Prof. Klaus Hurrelmann (Germany, Berlin). Almaty, 2016, 281P.

<sup>127</sup> S.Sh. Maratova Value orientations of young people // Sayasat. 2003. No. 4., pp. 31 - 32.

<sup>128</sup> L. Zainieva, D.Kaletayev, G. Shoikin Young people of Kazakhstan in the conditions of democratization of social and economic relations. Astana, 2004.

<sup>129</sup> N.A.Tkacheva, R.S.Baimukhametova. Value orientations of Kazakhstani young people // Historical and socio-educational thought. 2016. T. 8. No. 6-2. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/tsennostnye-orientatsii-kazahstanskoy-molodezhi>

<sup>130</sup> N.T. Cholponkulova. Series: Psychological and pedagogical sciences. 2018. No. 2 (38).

<sup>131</sup> N.A.Bagdasarova.Young people of Kyrgyzstan: value orientations, social moods and conflict behavior. Research report. - Bishkek, 2014

<sup>132</sup> N.T. Cholponkulova. Students of Kyrgyzstan: social activity and value orientations. Bulletin of the Kyrgyz National University. J. Balasagyn, 2018 <http://arch.kyrlibnet.kg/?&npage=download&nadd=22255>.

the KR<sup>133</sup> are "health," "happy family life," "having good friends," and "love." These values, according to the typology of D.A. Leontyev (1992), refer to the values of personal life. According to Sh. Schwartz, these values belong on a "benevolence" scale, and "health" is considered as a separate independent value. But when comparing the points received for dominant values and less significant values in research methods, it is possible to replace the insignificant intervals between them, which suggests that the built hierarchy requires the additional evidence and the conclusion about the low degree of formation of the psychological mechanism of value orientations becomes more and more reliable, i.e. features of value differentiation (the ability of subjects to make value choices).

**Tajikistan.** The five main priorities for respondents from Tajikistan<sup>134</sup> were: to be loyal (in relation to a partner, friends, employer) (92.3%), to eat healthy food (90.1%), to be married (88.4%), to take responsibility (83.2%), and to look good (78.7%).

In-country studies on Tajikistan in the free access of the Internet space have not been found over the past decade. The bulk of the publications are of a theoretical nature, where researchers argue about a change in the value orientations of Tajik young people with the dominance of material well-being as a leading value,<sup>135</sup> but they do not describe empirical studies. Part of the research is carried out in the territory of Russia,<sup>136</sup> which describes the value orientations of Tajik students in Russian universities,<sup>137</sup> but these studies are carried out on small samples, which makes it difficult to use the data obtained to describe the value orientations of Tajik young people in general.

**Turkmenistan.** A similar situation is developing in Turkmenistan. The titles of several publications found in the study illustratively describe what is happening in the field of value research in Turkmenistan:

- Formation of value orientations of Turkmen young people (on the example of the book "Rukhnama"<sup>138</sup> (N.M. Khaidarova, Yu.A. Shurygina, 2017)
- Socio-ethnographic analysis of the traditional values of the Turkmen<sup>139</sup> (T.A. Abdulmutalinova et al., 2012).
- Family traditions in the proverbs and sayings of the Russian and Turkmen peoples<sup>140</sup> (A. Yazlyev, Sh.A. Yazlyeva, 2015).

Thus, these studies describe the value orientations that need to be developed, with an emphasis on the national traditional values of the Turkmen young people. The

<sup>133</sup> A.A. Beletskaya, S. B.Malykh. Features of life strategies of senior students (cross-cultural aspect): dis. - Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, 2012..

<sup>134</sup> B.I. Rakisheva, A.B.Mazhitova, G.T.Ashkenova. Values of Kazakhstani young people (based on the results of inter-country comparative sociological research) // LBC 60.5 M 74 Editor-in-chief. 2018, pp. 147. [https://ask-aleumettanu.kz/upload/iblock/9ae/sbornik-kongress-sots\\_2018-\\_1\\_.pdf#page=147](https://ask-aleumettanu.kz/upload/iblock/9ae/sbornik-kongress-sots_2018-_1_.pdf#page=147).

<sup>135</sup> M.A. Rakhmatullaeva. Educational strategy of Tajikistan in the conditions of society transformation // Scientific notes of the Khujand State University named after academician B. Gafurov. Humanitarian sciences. 2014. No. 2 (39).

<sup>136</sup> N.R. Ganieva. Ethnocultural stereotypes: analysis of value attitudes of ethnic groups in Russian and Tajik culture // Social and humanitarian bulletin of the South of Russia. 2012. No. 1. pp. 148-154.

<sup>137</sup> L.S. Astafieva. Features of education of foreign students in Russia in the context of their religious attitudes and values // Questions of modern science and practice. University named after VI Vernadsky. 2012. No. 2. pp. 232-241.

<sup>138</sup> N.M. Khaidarova, Yu.A.Shurygina Formation of value orientations of Turkmen young people (on the example of the book "Rukhnama") // Intercultural communication in the modern world: collection of articles. 2017, p 83.

<sup>139</sup> T.A. Abdulmutalinova et al. Socio-ethnographic analysis of the traditional values of the Turkmen // Actual problems of the humanities and socio-economic sciences. 2012, No. 6-2. pp. 5-7.

<sup>140</sup> A. Yazlyev, Sh.A.Yazlyeva. Family traditions in the proverbs and sayings of the Russian and Turkmen peoples // Slavic readings-10. 2015,pp. 194-198.

study of the values of the Turkmens living in Russia<sup>141</sup> made it possible to single out three dominant value orientations: family and procreation (60.5%), confidence in the future, i.e. the desire to provide the family with opportunities for further development (53.3%), and self-esteem (49.3% of the respondents). which coincides with the results of the intercountry sociological survey "Young people of Central Asia," which did not include the results for Turkmenistan.

**Uzbekistan** According to the study "Spiritual and moral values of citizens of Uzbekistan",<sup>142</sup> "one of their main goals in life is the creation of a family and the upbringing of a worthy generation. Further in the hierarchy of the goals of life of Uzbek people are social and civic activity, education, work and material well-being, which determine the future and give confidence in the future."<sup>143</sup> When considering the values of different groups (by gender, place of residence: city or village), it was revealed that creating a family and raising children is the life goal for an equal number of townspeople and villagers, men and women. At the same time, women were more often naming as their life goal: "getting an education," while for men it was "finding a good job, making a career" and "material well-being." "Creating a family and raising children" as a life goal was set by middle-aged citizens (31-50 years old), while for young people "getting an education" and "finding a good job" were the priorities.

Thus, young people living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan demonstrate the inconsistency of their own value orientations, among the dominant values and collectivist values (having a family, adherence to traditions) and extremely individualistic values (self-respect, independence, including financial, external attractiveness). Differences in value orientations are also present, so for the young people of Kazakhstan social opinion is very important ("social prestige" and "respect for others"), for the young people of Kyrgyzstan, social interaction is significant ("honesty," "justice," "friends") and the young people of Tajikistan noted a high importance for oneself of financial well-being. In the data on young people from both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, there is a high need and value of confidence in the future.

In Schwartz's classification, which will be used in the further field research, the values of Central Asian young people are: benevolence (well-being of oneself and loved ones), independence (being independent, striving for freedom), universalism (the importance of understanding, gratitude, tolerance and justice for all, and not only loved ones) and power (the desire for a decent life, the desire to rise above the average level, material well-being, achieving a business career, getting an education).

## Conclusion

*Drivers of radicalization.* Researchers agree on the impossibility of identifying the common causes of radicalization, which are more a combination of various factors and causes. Experts point out the search for various forms of identity (individual, group, religious, national, etc.), discrimination and inequality as the most effective factors influencing the vulnerability of radicalization. In works on Central Asia, the influence of inequality and discrimination is also indicated as reasons for radicalization, more often the influence of structural factors such as political, socio-economic problems. The issue of migration and coverage of Internet networks, which increase access to radical content, is particularly highlighted, but these conclusions are also debated, due to the fact that, like structural factors, do not answer the question why, given these factors, the main population does not radicalize to violence.

*Banned extremist groups.* There is no single list of organizations banned in Central Asia; in each country this list reflects the current political and religious situation. These lists are characterized by inclusion in the lists of organizations that are not active in CA (within the framework of regional agreements); inclusion of non-violent organizations; inclusion in the lists of structural divisions of certain organizations as independent groups; presence of already "dead" organizations and generalizations that do not allow defining the organization as, for example, "jihadists" or "wahhabists". Thus, the following violent groups were identified as active in the region: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Islamic State, Islamic Party of Turkestan, Katibat Imam Bukhori, Union of Islamic Jihad, Tavhidwa Jihod Katibasi (Jannat Oshiklari) and At-Takfir-wal-hijra ". As you can see, all these groups use religious Islamic rhetoric in their propaganda work.

Despite the results of the analysis by SecDev and the GIIP, Hizbut-Tahrir was not included in this list, as its definition as a violent extremist organization is controversial, there is not enough supporting quantitative and qualitative data. However, the study will cover those individual leaders and bloggers who justify the activities of the VE organizations.<sup>144</sup> In addition, the study will include non-VE affiliated bloggers and leaders promoting violent content.

## *Narratives of extremist groups*

In the world practice, there has been a certain experience in analyzing the narratives of VE organizations. Analysis of IS publications and Jabhat al-Nusra shows that the key narrative disseminated by organizations is identity (group and personal). This narrative takes various forms, such as images of a hero, homophilia, discrediting other groups, moral obligations, etc. In Central Asia, the topic requires the further study. Since it was more considered in the context of other studies, no qualitative content analysis was carried out. From the available data, we can conclude that general messages remain valid for the CA countries, such as the fight against the infidels, overthrowing unjust regimes, building a caliphate, helping brothers, etc., which are broadcast taking into account the specifics of each country.

Research notes that having a radical narrative is not in itself a problem. The functionality of the social network (the high level of online social interaction around this narrative) leads many scientists, politicians and others to believe that the Internet plays a significant role in the processes of modern radicalization. In addition, the effectiveness of online propaganda is supported by the appropriate offline support. Social connections shape the way people interpret the external information and events, accept and reject. This shows the importance of the socio-political, religious context (at the structural level) and the existing social connections (at the individual level) in which these narratives are promoted.

*Target groups.* Almost all studies agree that the most vulnerable group is young people due to a number of psychological and social characteristics. The average age of those convicted of crimes of an extremist and terrorist nature varies in each country, as in Kazakhstan it is the age of 28 years, in Kyrgyzstan: 24 years, in Tajikistan: 30 years, and in Uzbekistan: 32 years. However, this data does not give an idea of the age when radical sentiments began to form. In this case, we consider it expedient to single out the age group of 18-35 year olds for research and development of a communication strategy, with a possible reduction to the age of 18-28 years.

*Communication channels* of VE organizations were examined in the framework of various regional studies. The most common are: Youtube, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, VK, Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Vimeo, LiveJournal, IMO. It should be noted that the popularity of platforms can change over time, as recently Tiktok has been gaining popularity among the CA audience.

## Appendix 2.

### Technological process of data collection and cleaning and its results

Data collection in the Brand Analytics automated monitoring system (hereinafter referred to as the System) was launched at 10 a.m. on July 9 and completed at 11:42 a.m. (Moscow time) on July 19. The monitoring covered all sources indexed by the System's algorithm: media, forums, blog platforms, social networks and information channels of the Telegram messenger. The total number of references from January 1, 2019, to July 19, 2020, were 1,610,164.

Formation of search queries was carried out taking into account the requirements of Brand Analytics. Since the system has a limitation of 50 keywords/phrases, search queries were divided into four topics, thus providing a full coverage of the media space without restrictions on geography and language.

Table 1. General data collection results

#	Title	Today	Week	Total
1	Theme 1.1. Religious terms <small>Данные собираются с 02.07.20</small>	625	7 479	659 734
2	Theme 1.2. Religious terms <small>Данные собираются с 02.07.20</small>	666	8 854	637 094
3	Theme 2. Phrases <small>Данные собираются с 02.07.20</small>	130	2 549	281 651
4	Theme 3.0 Personas <small>Данные собираются с 02.07.20</small>	28	243	31 685

The resulting array was stripped of irrelevant content in two steps:

1. At the stage of forming search queries within the system, all key phrases were tested and "stop words" were identified, the presence of which does not imply that this mention is related to the research topic. When information with these words was found on the Web, references were not entered into the array, thereby not increasing the amount of collected information.
2. After the completion of retrospective data collection, the array was cleaned using filters inside the interface. For example, 62 communities about electronic music and more than 6,000 references to the work of an Arab DJ with the creative pseudonym Jihad were removed by the keyword "jihad / Jihad." In total, more than 60,000 thousand mentions in Farsi, English, Hindi and Arabic were removed from the name "Jihad." Cleansing of irrelevant sources was carried out in all sources - accounts of legally existing public organizations and socio-political communities were deleted, whose commentators allowed the use of keywords outside the context under study.
3. Manual processing of the data set consisted of profiling the authors of the most relevant messages and identifying the degree of virality of both publications and specific terms. For which six volunteers were involved, receiving preliminary training on working with the system as it was conducted.

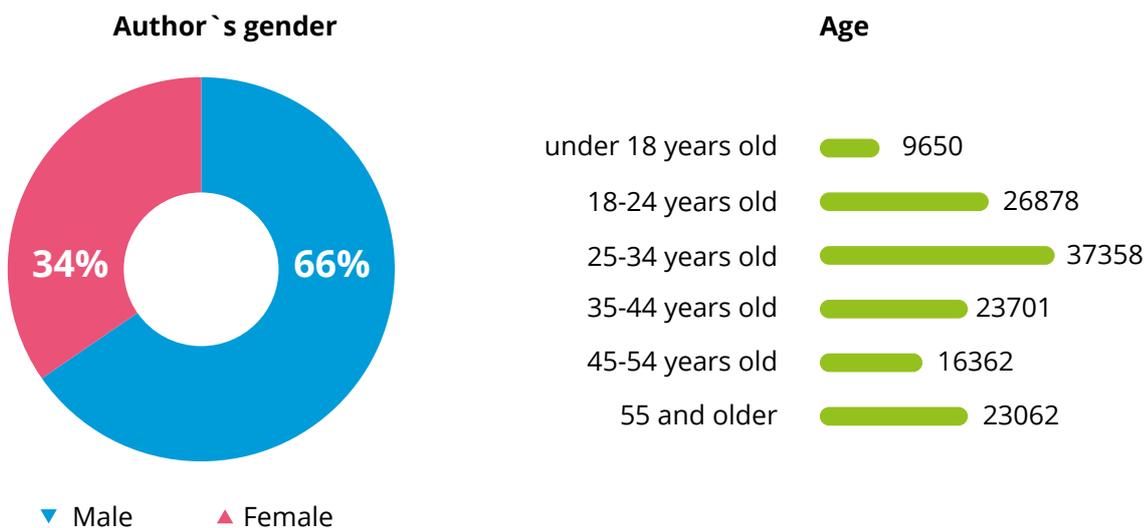
## Data of the first phase of cleaning the array

The data after the first phase of cleaning was 637,488 mentions. Since some of the mentions, like their authors, are present in all created topics, the statistics presented should not be taken as an absolutely correct indicator. First of all, the specifics of the content presupposes a certain level of anonymity in regard to the active migration of representatives of various ethnic groups within the Central Asia and Commonwealth of Independent States and the actual location of the technical infrastructure that provides users with access to the Internet.

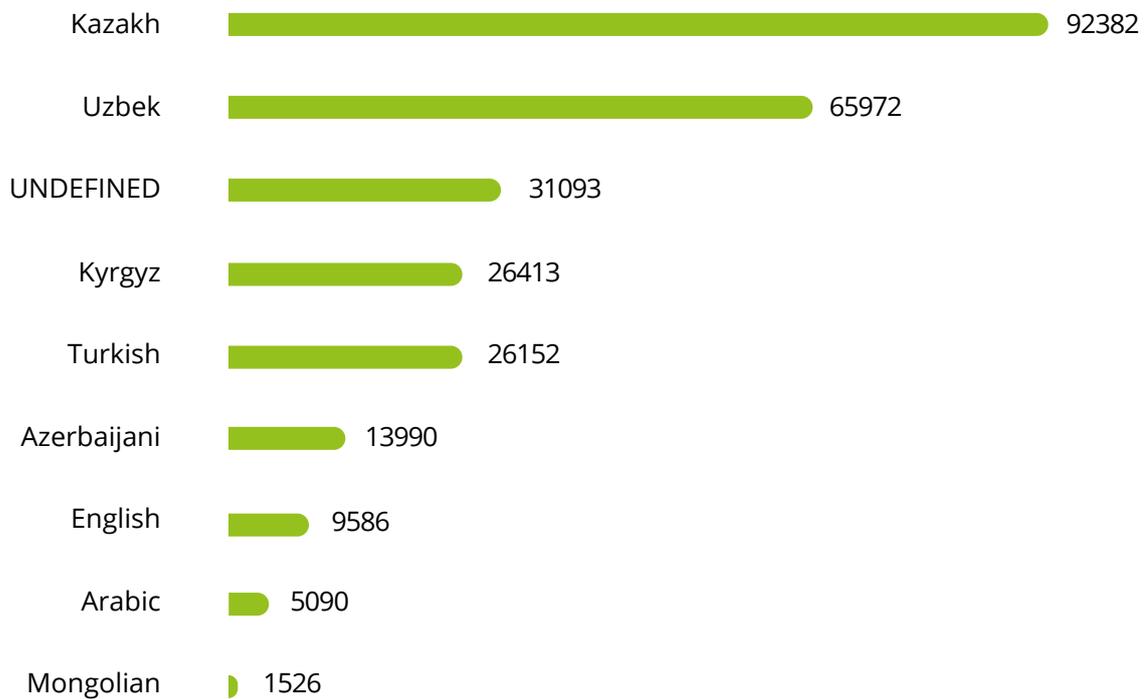
The table provides a breakdown of the sources of the information found by category:

Category	Theme 1,1	Theme 1,2	Theme 2	Theme 3	Overall
Social networks	221599	261595	94012	18920	596126
Micro blogs	13690	11855	7818	70	33433
Videos	1215	1279	643	364	3501
Blogs	896	1097	595		2588
Forums	175	231	414		820
Comments	3	4	2		9
Messengers	259	210	108	2	579

Most of the accounts calling for illegal actions on religious grounds, for obvious reasons, do not contain reliable personal data. Authors are registered under fictitious names in the "John Solomon" / "Daria Ivanova" format. Based on the data provided by the system, the audience is divided by gender and age as follows:



According to Brand Analytics, the following languages have become the main languages for thematic communications:



The **UNDEFINED** tag marks messages that are not identified by Brand Analytics due to incorrect (according to the semantic core of the Brand Analytics system) use of the Cyrillic/Latin alphabet in writing. Most often, these include the Nakh-Dagestan language group, Tajik, Kazakh, Kyrgyz languages and publications, as well as publications where text was recognized in images.

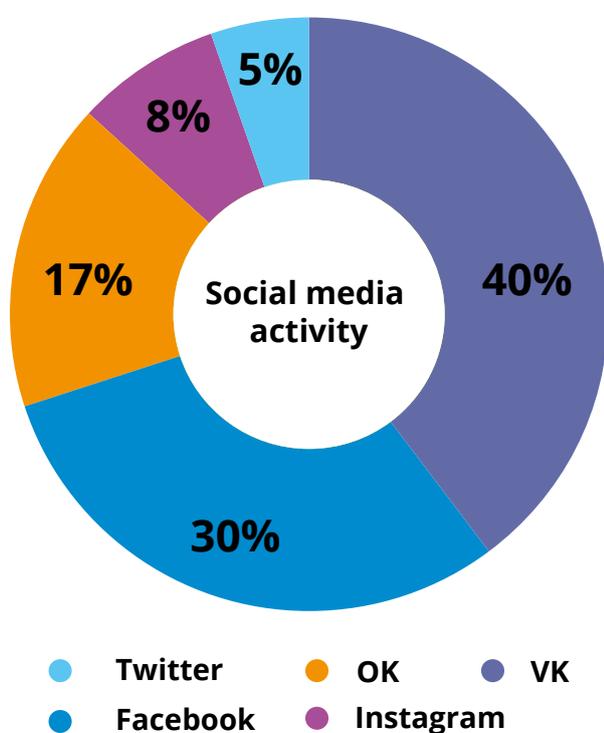
### Results of the second phase

Upon completion of the second stage of processing, the number of references – which already excluded exclusively Russian content coming mainly from the North Caucasian republics – decreased to 267,828 (a decrease of 1,342,336 publications). In contrast to the primary revision of the data set, the activity by keywords was considered in the context of the countries included in the study as a result of the primary sorting of messages. The results obtained indicate the degree of activity of users for each individual country in the studied region using religious ideologies in a hostile context.

Table 3: Results of the second stage of processing mentions

Country	Number of mentions	Ratio, %
Kazakhstan	126 565	47,26
Uzbekistan	49 098	18,33
Kyrgyzstan	33 791	12,62
Azerbaijan	27 875	10,41
Tajikistan	17 743	6,62
Syria	3 081	1,15
UAE	2 772	1,03
Egypt	2 400	0,90
Afganistsan	927	0,35
Pakistan	924	0,34
Iraq	840	0,31
Iran	831	0,31
Turkmenistan	501	0,19
Qatar	287	0,11
Libya	193	0,07

Figure 1: Presence of mentions on social media



Among all distribution sites V Kontakte leads by a wide margin, where 40 percent of all processed references are posted. However, in future work with references, one should also pay special attention to Instagram, where a high concentration of publications with all the relevant signs of inter-faith hatred is noted in the public domain.

Since work with the audience is carried out most often in closed communities or through personal correspondence, the ratio of materials published in open groups and personal accounts is 4.5 by 95.5, respectively.

## Results of the third phase

The results of the third phase of the selection of relevant messages – which consisted of manual sorting of the data set by volunteers – led to a result of 8,673 mentions. The difference between the monitoring results and the final data is a consequence of the initially chosen strategy of maximum monitoring coverage of sources containing keywords in the list and a large number of references outside the study region in the languages prescribed in the terms of reference (Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen).

Analysis of messages collected using the system demonstrated how "easy" it is to use religious terminology in a non-religious context by users of social networks. The use of religious terms in a religious context is more associated with outreach or preaching work. The basics of worship: the fulfillment of certain prescriptions, quotes from sacred sources, etc. are explained. Radical extremist content is of a random nature, mainly through user reposts. On social media, hate speech is more prevalent in relation to various religious and non-religious groups. However, well-thought-out systematic propaganda is extremely rare. In connection with the above, it was not possible to answer all of the questions posed in the content analysis using the material received by the automated system. As a result, the monitoring of closed groups of extremist and terrorist nature was carried out.

## Appendix 3.

### Research Team

#### *Research team*

**Aslanova Indira** (Kyrgyzstan) is the leader of the research team, a religious scholar, a researcher with 15 years of experience studying the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic, violent extremism, freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan, and state policy in the religious sphere.

**Bakhtiyar Babadjanov** (Uzbekistan) is a doctor of historical sciences at the Center for Scientific and Innovative Studies at the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan. He is the author of more than 200 scientific works. His research interests include the history and current state of Islam in Central Asia and the history of Sufism in the region.

**Parviz Mullojanov** (Tajikistan) is a Ph.D. political scientist, orientalist, and independent researcher. He is a visiting scholar at Uppsala University and an author and leader of research on youth radicalization in Tajikistan.

**Serik Beissembayev** (Kazakhstan) is a sociologist and doctoral student at the National University of Kazakhstan. He is the director of 60 full-cycle research projects on political topics, violent extremism and terrorism, the radicalization of youth, etc. The topic of his dissertation is "Countering Violent Extremism."

**Tileubergenov Ilyas** (Kazakhstan) is a sociologist with more than 10 years of social, political, and business research experience. He is an author and leader of more than 40 research projects.

**Vitaliy Ponomarev** (Russia) is the director of the Central Asia Program of Memorial Human Rights Center (Russia). He led projects to monitor political and religious persecution in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and has participated in interviewing refugees from Central Asia. Since 2013, he has been involved in monitoring the situation in Turkmenistan as part of the international campaign, "Show Them Alive."

**Yulia Davydova** (Kyrgyzstan) is a psychologist with more than 15 years of experience in social psychology. She has participated in research projects on violence and has experience interviewing women who have been subjected to domestic violence.

**Rustam Azizi** (Tajikistan) is a doctor of philosophy and serves as the Deputy Director of the Center for Islamic Studies under the President of Tajikistan.

**Sherali Rizoen** (Tajikistan) is a doctoral candidate in political science and an active participant in field research on the social and political processes in Tajikistan.

**Kirill Kovyazin** (Kazakhstan) is a media analyst and is an expert in monitoring social media and online media on socio-political and religious topics.

**Nuraym Syrgak kyzy** (Kyrgyzstan) is a research assistant with a master's degree in anthropology and serves as a fellow of the Eurasian Peace Research Exchange Program in Hamburg, Germany. She took part in research projects on conflict transformation and media analysis.

### *Media team*

**Ksenia Diodorova** (Russia) is a team leader and media specialist and the co-founder of Gonzo-design's visual communications studio. She has supervised projects on brand platforms, identity systems, visual concepts and special integrated projects from concept to support.

**Daniyar Sadiev** (Kyrgyzstan) is a media expert and serves as the chairman of the T.Tursunaliyev Media School. He is the founder of T-Media group, which includes TMG TV channel, radio Zhash FM, [www.t-media.kg](http://www.t-media.kg) information website, and a media school for journalists.

**Mirzobekova Ramziya** (Tajikistan) is a media expert, journalist, and a reporter for Fergana News International News Agency.

**Saida Sulaimanova** (Uzbekistan), is a media expert and the director of the Centre for the Development of Modern Journalism in Uzbekistan. She serves as a consultant at the UNESCO Office in Uzbekistan and is a media trainer at the Journalists' Retraining Centre of Uzbekistan.

**Zarina Akhmatova** (Kazakhstan) is a media expert, journalist, media consultant, and producer. She works as a media trainer at MediaNet International Journalism Center and works as a journalist and columnist for HOLA News and Esquire Kazakhstan.

### *Volunteer team*

**Aruzhan Beisenbayeva** (Kazakhstan) has a B.A. degree in political science from the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, studying in the Kazakh language.

**Babayeva Shakhriyaza** (Kyrgyzstan) – has a B.A. degree at the UNESCO Chair of Religious Studies at Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University.

**Rasokhan Khurshida** (Kyrgyzstan) has a B.A. degree in Social Work and Social Law at Osh State University, studying in the Uzbek language.

**Ruslan Temirkhanov** (Kyrgyzstan) – has a B.A. degree at the UNESCO Chair of Religious Studies, at Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University, studying in the Russian language.

**Sharifzoda Farzona** (Tajikistan) has a Ph.D. in journalism from Tajik National University, studying in the Tajik language.

**Yulia Dyakova** (Kyrgyzstan) has a B.A. degree at the UNESCO Chair of Religious Studies at Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University, studying in the Russian language.

### *Field research*

**DataSight** Agency does field data collection in Kazakhstan.

**Evidence Central Asia Research Institute** does field data collection in Kyrgyzstan.

**Zerkalo Central Asia** does field data collection in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

### *Project Management*

**Elnura Kazakbaeva** is the project manager with an M.A. degree in anthropology and jurisprudence.

**Begimai Maratova** is an administrative assistant.

## Appendix 4.

### Categories and units of content analysis

Categories and units in English<sup>1</sup>

**Names:** Kafir (infidel or unbeliever); jihad, kufr, mujahid, jahiliyya, tagut, maliyyat, munafiq, muhajir, tawhid, takfir, hijra, shaxid, Shi'a, murtad, caliphate, Daesh, "Islamic State."

**Phrases:** "Allah warrior," "brother in faith" ~2, "blood of the infidel," "die in the name of Allah," "saved community," "judgment day community," "victorious community."

**Persons:** "abu bakr bagdadi", "abu bakr saddyk", "sayid kutb", "sayid buryatski", "said abu saad", "umar shishani", "nazratulla maryam", "orktam zaurbekov", "abu bashpaev", "abu ibrohim bashbaev", "bagautdin muhammad", "sodiq samarqandiy", "abd mu'min".

**Stop words:** Apostle, Orthodoxy, Temple, Starbucks, EAEU, Xiaomi, "terrorist group", India, atheism, Jesus, Christ, Eurasian Economic Union, Russia, Bangkok, father, RSFSR, Thailand, Azur, Starbucks, Starbucks, Football, sport, hockey, COVID, Christ, "In Sha", "@abdulla\_shahid", "Shahid Khaqan", "Shahid Afridi", Burhan, "@People4Shahid", "#ShahidKapoor", "@shahid2742", "Shahid Kapoor", "Rahul Gandhi", Hindu, "Shahid Shaili", "Shahid Kapur", "Shahid Madani", "Rajkummar Rao" ~1, "Worships\_Shahid", "Shahid Buttar", "Faraj Shahid", "Ahmet Küçükadalı", "Шахид Бехешти", "Şehit Hava Pilot", Bernie, "Bernie Sanders", Pelosi, "FENDOĞLU", Ertugrul, ErtugrulGhazi, "ibn Jabr", Abbasid, Bospiek, Azour, Analysis, church fathers, atheist, Foma, Sanders, "GRU special forces", "Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi", "according to the Secret Service", "Ryafagat Khabibullin", "banned in Russia", "terrorist organization", "banned in the Russian Federation", "banned organization", "FSB officers" "mujahid Afghanistan".

**Names/Названия:** даиш, "исламское государство"~1, "аш шам"~0, "ash sham"~0, "ash shom"~0, "daish islam"~3, "yurak sam yslam"~3, "daish islom"~3, доиш, джабхат, жабхат, jabhat, жабҳат, "жаннат ошиклари"~1, "жаннат ашыктары"~1, "jennet muşdaklary"~1, "ислам мемлекети"~1, "ислам мамлекети"~1, "давлати исломи"~1, "ислом давлати"~1, "islom davlati"~1, "yislam döwleti"~1

**Phrases/Словосочетания:** "воин аллах"~0, "дар ислам", "дар харб"~1, "dar harb", "брат по вере"~"кровь неверного", "умереть имя аллаха", "спасенная община"~2, "община день суда"~3, "победоносная община"~2,

**Persons/Персоны:** "абу бакр багдади"~2, "абу бакр сыддык"~2, "саид кутб", "сайид кутб", "sayuid qutb", "саид бурятский"~2, "саид абу саад"~2, "said abu saad"~2, "умар шишани"~1, "омар шишани"~1, "назратулла марьям"~1, "октам заурбеков"~1, "эбу мухаммад", "абу башпаев"~4, "абу иброхим башпаев"~4, "багаутдин мухаммад"~2, "содик самарқандий", "sodiq samarqandiy", "abd mu'min"~1.

**Stop words/Стоп-слова:** апостол, православие, храм, Старбакс, ЕАЭС, Xiaomi, "террористическая группировка"~0, India, атеизм, Иисус, Христос, Евразийский экономический союз, Русь, Bangkok, батюшка, РСФСР, Thailand, Азур, Starbucks, Старбакс, Football, футбол, sport, спорт, хоккей, hockey, COVID, Христа, "Ин Ша", "@abdulla\_shahid", "Shahid Khaqan", "Shahid Afridi", Burhan, "@People4Shahid",

<sup>1</sup> Categories and units of content analysis originally were used in local Central Asian languages.

"#ShahidKapoor", "@shahid2742", "Shahid Kapoor", "Rahul Gandhi", Hindu, "Shahid Shaili", "Шахид Капур"~0, "Шахид Мадани"~0, "Rajkummar Rao"~1, "Worships\_Shahid", "Shahid Buttar", "Faraj Shahid", "Ahmet Küçükadalı", "Шахид Бехешти", "Şehit Hava Pilot", Bernie, "Bernie Sanders"~0, Pelosi, "FENDOĞLU", Ertugrul, ErtugrulGhazi, "ибн Джабр", "ibn Jabr", Аббасид, Abbasid, Боспиек, Azour, Анализ, отцы церкви, атеист, Фома, Сандерс, "спецназ ГРУ", "Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi"~4, "по данным спецслужбы"~2, "Ряфагат Хабибуллин"~2, "запрещенный в России"~0, "террористическая организация"~0, "запрещенная в РФ"~0, "запрещенной организации"~0, "Сотрудники ФСБ""моджахед афганистан"~5.

## Check example key mentions for irrelevance

### Statistics of the key phrases

Key word	For today	For tomorrow	For a week
Кафир	220	337	2 466
кәпір	72	149	1 092
каапыр	7	16	95
капыр	6	3	42
кофиран	3	5	30
Кофир	56	92	642
Kofir	10	61	147
Kafir	459	460	5 586

### Statistics of the key phrases

Key word	For today	For tomorrow	For a week
"брат по вере"~2	57	138	1 142
"Мұсылман бауыр"~2	42	108	754
"мусулман бир туугандар"~2	21	50	343
"Мусулмон биродарлар"	1	2	29
"Musulmon birodarlar"	1	2	18
"Бародарони исломи"	1	2	5
"imanly doganlar"	0	0	0

## Statistics of the key phrases

Key word	For today	For tomorrow	For a week
Муджахид	98	122	1 103
муджахид	0	0	3
моджахед	260	406	3 553
муджохид	0	0	4
мужохид	2	5	55
Mujohid	1	0	7
Mujahid	85	164	2 050

## Statistics of the key phrases

Key word	For today	For tomorrow	For a week
"Саид Кутб"	5	5	16
"Ибн Кутб"	0	0	0
"Сайид Кутб"	0	0	7
"Sayyid Qutb"	6	0	23

## Protagonists of Violent Extremism

According to the results of the content analysis, special attention was given to the authorship of the VE content in the process of its distribution – even in those cases when the radical meaning of the message is largely lost due to reposts and numerous adaptations, the name of the author of the message is retained. Thus, in radical content, it is not only the meaning of the messages that matters, but also its source. The most common contributors of identified messages recognized as being of interest to this study are:

### **Abdullah Zufar (channels: Zufar123, Aqida\_darslari and others)**

Zufar does not directly declare himself the ideologue of the Mujahideen of Daesh, although he often addresses this particular audience. He extensively comments on the situation in Uzbekistan or neighboring countries. Zufar categorically rejects any form of a secular state in which "Muslims lose religion, are oppressed and commit sins." The rights of Muslims, in his opinion, can be embodied only in an Islamic state, when the political system and laws are built on the basis of the requirements of the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

The most widespread and popular messages of Abdullah Zufar are: "Any other system, any other law for Muslims is oppression and cannot be acceptable." Unlike other preachers, Zufar believes that declaring jihad "is an obvious [religious] precept" (fardi 'ayn)." For him, the territory of Uzbekistan is a "territory of war" between secular authorities and Muslims, and therefore he has repeatedly declared that violence against the existing government is permissible.

He has a fairly fundamental knowledge of the sources of Islam, although he often ignores the madhhab literature. He prefers to engage in data extraction and commentary on sacred texts himself (personal ijihad). He owns the most systematic exposition of media strategies that he believes jihadist propagandists should adhere to.

Abu Salokh / Abu Salokhiy (Sirojiddin Mukhtarov), channels "Katibat tawhid val-Jihod", "Jannat Oshiqdari": The most aggressive propagandist of jihad. The former head of the Jamaniyat / Katibat at-tawhid wa-l-jihad, which was based on Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

He was active at the same time as an amir (military commander) and a propagandist of jihad, calling to join the jihadists in the Middle East, or to help financially (ishtirak bil-mal).

Abu Saloh's messages are interesting because of the propaganda of his own exclusivity and the desire to take an absolute position in the Katibat group. The basis of his messages is calls for help from Muslims and the fact that he is the only one who has extensive combat experience, "clean before Allah and before the brothers-mujahideen."

Despite the lack of uniqueness in Abu Saloh's messages, his media content is in demand, which confirms a significant number of views of his videos and comments

\* Internets and the European Union do not share the views of the VE content authors listed in Appendix 5. The information is provided for academic purposes only.

on the merits, as well as in the intensity of the practical actions of his followers. It was he who, more often than all cyber propagandists, ensured that young people asked for ways to get into the ranks of the mujahideen and immigrated to Syria. Researchers and experts believe that the basis of his popularity is the quality and content of the visuals, in which he poses in military uniform and with weapons, as well as his personal charisma.

**Mahmoud Abdalmumin (Mahmud Kholdorov / Abdalmumin)**, channel Echim Islomda / Chechim Islamda / Solution in Islam. Widely known among Uzbek and Kyrgyz visitors to the sites of the radical opposition (broadcasts in both languages). The main audience is young labor migrants.

The fairly high popularity of Abdalmumin, despite his weak theological erudition, lies in the extreme simplicity of his argument, the emphasis on the most pressing problems of Muslims (especially labor migrants). Abdalmumin compensates for his poor knowledge of the specifics of global politics and economics with primitive egalitarianism in the Islamic style (quote: "... if we do not sell our gas and our oil to the wrong, they will come to our knees tomorrow!").

Popular posts by Abdalmumin are:

– The territory of Central Asia is the "Territory of oppression" for Muslims (Dar al-Zulm). The main proof is that all Muslims, when crossing the border, must receive a stamp in their passport, "as if they are not going to a neighboring Muslim country, but to a country of infidels." In addition, Muslims cannot follow their dress code (for example, wearing a hijab). Governments opted for a secular path of development and secular laws over Sharia law. Consequently, such states can, at best, be considered oppressors in a land of oppression and injustice (Dar al-Zulm).

Only an Islamic state "which should be guided by the best political structure for Muslims in the world – the Universal Caliphate" – can ensure a dignified life and justice for Muslims. " ... All who oppose this are the enemies of Islam and are the servants of the Jews."

– Abdalmumin states in his discussions or monologues to the fact that all global and local problems of Muslims (in politics, economy, social or religious life) will be resolved if Muslims jointly build a caliphate, at least within the Central Asian countries.

– "War with a bunch of bombs on the body" is not self-detonation, but waging jihad using available means, when the Mujahideen have no other means, technology, which the "infidels" possess.

– Abdalmumin perceives Daesh as a bad experience of Muslims in creating a caliphate. Jihad itself is recognized as legitimate from the point of view of the dogma of Islam. The reason for the failures, in his opinion, is the haste and unpreparedness for modern war, as well as "the intrigues of the enemies of Islam, led by the Jews," who in his opinion, are the "main extremists in the world." At the same time, Abdalmumin calls the mujahideen in Syria and Iraq heroes and an example for Muslims. The main omission of the leadership of Daesh is the weak ideological preparation of the Mujahideen and an insufficient understanding of the specifics of the Caliphate.

– He also defends the right of Muslims to polygamy, which, from his point of view, "is the command of Allah."

**Abdullo Bukhari (Mirzagolib Khamidov; channels: Darul\_islom, Buxoriy\_Darsliklari, etc.).** Born in the Andijan region of Uzbekistan in 1975 into a religious family. He is one of the students of the "father" of the Fergana Wahhabis, Abduvali-kori Mirzaev.

Since 1999, Abdullo Bukhari has been an active member of the IMU. At the same time, he translated into Uzbek several works on jihad (in particular, Ibn Nakhhasa). In parallel, he regulated the supply of arms and the flow of funds from Pakistan to the IMU / IMT fighters. Then he became the chief financier of the IMU and the head of Bayt ul-Mal (IMU budget, the so-called common fund).

The main audience of Bukhari is small businessmen who often ask questions on the ethics of trade and business (ways of paying zakat, how to achieve "marriage / good luck" in business – what prayers to read, etc.).

In his messages, Bukhari focuses on popularizing the propaganda of Islam, uses the simplest possible language that makes Islam accessible to an unprepared public. His key message is "Therefore, when we return (to Uzbekistan), then it will be easier for us to continue the Da'wat. And then we will put a real Muslim ruler at the head of the state without bloodshed." That is, the messages of this propagandist are aimed at preparing the ground for the subsequent change of state structure.

**Rovshen Gazakov**, was born in 1980 in the suburbs of Ashgabat. From 2002-2006 he studied in Saudi Arabia, then returned to Turkmenistan and the possibility that he would be appointed imam of the mosque was discussed. Due to pressure from the special services, who tried to make him their agent, in 2010 he left with his family to Cairo (Egypt), where he was enrolled in Al-Azhar University, and remained in Cairo until leaving for Syria in mid-2013. In June 2013, Russian TV showed footage of Gazakov, detained in Syria, and his further fate is unknown. The broadcast caused a great resonance not only in the official structures of Turkmenistan, which denied the participation of Turkmen in the Syrian conflict, but also among ordinary Turkmen.

During his life in Cairo, he decided to post systematic audio lectures on Islam in the Turkmen language on the Internet, based on the religious knowledge he acquired during his studies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. At that time and up to the present day, this is the only systematic course of lectures on this topic available online in the Turkmen language.

Gazakov's own social media page is inaccessible, but his files are now posted by many other Turkmen users. These lectures include a wide range of topics that are presented – according to some estimates, consistently and competently – in good Turkmen. Among them: an explanation of religious concepts and terms, comments on individual suras of the Koran, etc. However, many files contain aggressive and emotional rhetoric against the infidels, as well as against the traditions widespread among the Turkmen, which the author says do not correspond to the principle of monotheism.

Gazakov's lectures have been popular among religious Turkmen youth in recent years. Those who are abroad download them on the Internet and sometimes they listen together. Within Turkmenistan, files are mostly transferred from hand to hand. Since the arrest of Gazakov in Syria in June 2013, the authorities of Turkmenistan have severely persecuted those who distribute or store these files inside the country.

In the country context, the authors and their messages are consistent with the ideas

of a change of state structure, but have a different focus, which is mainly expressed in justifying the need to follow the precepts of Islam in everyday life and to fight for the purity of religion, as well as in promoting the fight against representatives of other religions (infidels).

## Survey questionnaire

### QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDIA HABITS

#### 1. Which social network do you use most often? multiple options

1. Facebook
2. Instagram
3. VK
4. OK
5. TikTok
6. Telegram
7. Youtube
8. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. How often do you use the following messengers? *circle it*

Messenger	Frequency					It is a hard answer
	Daily	A couple of times a week	A couple of times a month	A couple of times a year	Never	
Whatsapp	1	2	3	4	5	99
Telegram	1	2	3	4	5	99
Skype	1	2	3	4	5	99
Агент Mail.ru	1	2	3	4	5	99
Facebook мессенджер	1	2	3	4	5	99
Other #1 (write)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Other #2 (write)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Other #3 (write)	1	2	3	4	5	99

#### 3. Why do you use social media most often?

*multiple options*

1. For communicating with friends/family
2. For watching videos
3. For listening to music
4. For games running on various apps
5. For a news review
6. For work
7. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What information in social networks do you consider more valuable for yourself?** *multiple options*

1. News in the country and the world
2. Educational materials (videos/articles/lessons/tests)
3. Culture and art
4. Sport
5. About other people's experiences and events
6. About technologies
7. Friends and family
8. About science
9. About the rest
10. About religion
11. Other (write) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. In which language do you prefer to receive information?**

1. English
2. Russian
3. Kazakh
4. Kyrgyz
5. Tajik
6. Uzbek
7. Turkmen
8. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

**6. From what sources do you most often learn about events in the world and your country?**

*multiple options*

№	Source options	Duration					It is hard to answer
		Less than 30 minutes	30 to 60 minutes	1 to 3 hours	3 to 5 hours	More than 5 hours	
6.1	TV	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.2	Chats and messages with friends	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.3	YouTube	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.4	Close people (in live communication)	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.5	Social network feed	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.6	Thematic communities and channels	1	2	3	4	5	99

№	Source options	Duration					It is hard to answer
		Less than 30 minutes	30 to 60 minutes	1 to 3 hours	3 to 5 hours	More than 5 hours	
6.7	News portal	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.8	Neighbors	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.9	Colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.10	Teachers	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.11	Religious organization (mosque, church)	1	2	3	4	5	99
6.12	Other (write) _____	1	2	3	4	5	99

## 7. What format of information do you prefer the most?

*multiple options*

1. Talk shows on TV
2. Radio broadcasts and news programs
3. Video clips
4. Text format
5. Visual format (images, infographics, etc.)
6. Other (write) \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Which sources of information do you trust most?

№	Source options (read all options)	the greatest trust	general-ly trust	some-times trust	generally do not trust	no trust	It is hard to answer
8.2.	Radio programs / broadcasting	5	4	3	2	1	99
8.3.	Social networks (Odnoklassniki, Facebook, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1	99
8.4.	Information portals	5	4	3	2	1	99
8.5.	Newspapers (local, national)	5	4	3	2	1	99
8.6.	Messenger group mailings (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1	99

## QUESTIONS ABOUT VALUES

### 9. How much do you agree with the following statements

#### To what extent do you agree with the following statements

(1 - completely agree, 2 - rather agree, 3 - rather disagree, 4 - completely disagree)

№	Statements	4-point scale				It is hard to answer
Xenophobia, separation into own and others						
9.1.	Marriages between representatives of varying ethnic groups are quite acceptable	1	2	3	4	99
9.2.	Muslims and Christians have a lot in common	1	2	3	4	99
9.3.	I have many friends from other nationalities	1	2	3	4	99
Political reconstruction						
9.4.	Religious leaders should have a more significant influence on the political life of the country	1	2	3	4	99
9.5.	In our country, all the rights of believers are respected	1	2	3	4	99
9.6.	Muslim women should have the right to wear hijabs everywhere	1	2	3	4	99
The sacralization of religious ideas and symbols						
9.7.	People who offend religion and its values should be severely punished	1	2	3	4	99
Hostility towards the "West"						
9.8.	It is necessary to ban the celebration of Halloween in our country, as it contradicts our traditions and culture	1	2	3	4	99
9.9.	Western culture (music, movies) harm morality and spirituality in our country	1	2	3	4	99

### 10. How much do you agree with the following statements

#### To what extent do you agree with the following statements

(1 - completely agree, 2 - rather agree, 3 - rather disagree, 4 - completely disagree)

№	Approvals	5-point scale					It is hard to answer
10.1.	People should do as they are told.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.2.	People should avoid doing things that other people who are important to them would consider wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.3.	A person should try to follow their religious beliefs	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.4.	A person should always act according to the established traditions of society (secular).	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.5.	People should always take care of their family and friends.	1	2	3	4	5	99

№	Approvals	5-point scale					It is hard to answer
		1	2	3	4	5	
10.6.	People should always try to understand the opinions of people who differ from them.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.7.	A person wants everyone to be treated fairly, even the people he does not know, incredibly the weak.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.8.	A person should always be accessible in planning and choosing her or his activities	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.9.	Human life should be full of vivid impressions, risks and adventures	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.10.	A person should always enjoy life.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.11.	People should admire what I do	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.12.	Anyone wants to be a decision-maker, a leader.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.13.	Any person should now be actively involved in politics.	1	2	3	4	5	99
10.14.	Having a stable government is important for me. I am concerned about maintaining public order.	1	2	3	4	5	99

## QUESTIONS ABOUT DRIVERS

### 11. What do you aspire to in life first of all? *no more than three options*

1. A strong financial position for yourself
2. Strong financial position for your loved ones
3. Personal self-development
4. Professional self-development
5. Leave a mark of yourself
6. Getting pleasure
7. Fame
8. Forming your own family
9. Approval of others
10. Make the world better and more just
11. Serving Allah
12. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### 12. What or who is more likely to prevent you from implementing your plans? *multiple options*

1. Social events in the country
2. The political situation in the country
3. Personal financial difficulties
4. Self-doubt
5. My physical condition (illness, injury)
6. A lack of tolerance in my environment
7. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE USED INTONATION

### 13. What makes you feel happy? *multiple options*

1. The achievement of significant goals
2. Material security, money
3. Love, a beloved person
4. Calmness, no anxiety
5. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### 14. What has a more positive effect on your well-being? *multiple options*

1. Availability of money
2. Love, a beloved person
3. Calmness
4. Impressions and knowledge
5. Humor
6. Physical activity
7. Religion
8. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### 15. Which of the following are more likely to cause you negative emotions? *multiple options*

1. Violence in my environment
2. Bad weather
3. Injustice in the country
4. Conflicts with people
5. The policy of the country's leadership
6. Religious instructions
7. A lack of money
8. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### 16. Imagine that you saw a video or post on social media that criticizes your religion or a representative of your religion. What will you do in this situation? *multiple options*

1. I will write a condemning comment about the author
2. I will write a comment in support of the author
3. I will write a protective comment about the hero of the video or post
4. I will ask the author why he writes like this/share information (makes a repost)
5. I will put a dislike on it
6. I will put a like on it
7. Ignore
8. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Imagine that you saw a video or post on social networks that criticize another religion or a representative of another religion. What will you do in this situation?** *multiple options*

1. I will write a condemning comment about the author
2. I will write a comment in support of the author
3. I will write a protective comment about the hero of the video or post
4. I will ask the author why he writes like this/share information (makes a repost)
5. I will try to understand why the author writes like this
6. I will put a dislike on it
7. I will put a like on it
8. Ignore
9. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS ABOUT IMAGE AND REPUTATION

**18. Please choose from the following features that you think are characteristic of a successful person.** *multiple options*

1. Live in a happy family
2. Have a circle of friends
3. Work at your favorite job
4. Relax where you want
5. The one who is happy with his life
6. Confidence
7. Self-organization, discipline
8. Ability to think calmly (in cold blood) and reason clearly
9. Honesty with yourself
10. Be pious/believe
11. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS ABOUT TRUST

**19. Who do you listen to most when making decisions?** *multiple options*

1. Spouse
2. A beloved person
3. Parents
4. Friends
5. Relatives
6. Teacher
7. Mentor
8. Own opinion
9. Neighbors
10. Religious leader
11. Communities
12. Bloggers
13. Other (write): \_\_\_\_\_

## CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

### D1. Respondent's gender (marked independently)

1. Female
2. Male

### D2. Please tell me how many full years you were on your last birthday \_\_\_\_\_

### D3. Your ethnicity:

1. Kyrgyz
2. Uzbek
3. Russian
4. Kazakh
5. Tajik
6. Uygur
7. Ukrainian
8. Tatar
9. German
10. Turkmen
11. Azerbaijani
12. Korean
13. Other ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_ +++++ \_\_\_\_\_

### D4. Your Education:

1. higher education, with an academic degree (candidate or doctor of science, Ph.D.)
2. higher education (specialist, bachelor, master's degree)
3. Incomplete higher
4. Secondary vocational education
5. General secondary education
6. Incomplete secondary education
7. No education

### D5. In what area (industry) do you work for?

*Interviewer, respondents on maternity leave should indicate their main job:*

1. Housewife/husband
2. Farmer
3. Laborer
4. Businessman
5. Labor migrant
6. Medical worker
7. Teacher
8. Public servant
9. NGO worker
10. Lawyer
11. Student
12. Unemployed person
13. Retiree
14. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**D6. Your marital status:**

1. Was never married
2. We are not officially married, but we live together
3. I am legally married
4. Divorced (and)
5. Widow/widower

**D7. If you feel comfortable, please specify your religion please:**

1. Muslim
2. Christian (Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic)
3. Buddhist
4. Jew
5. Non-believer (atheist)
6. Other

**D8. Indicate how much of your family's monthly income is spent on food, including grocery shopping, as well as eating out, for example, visiting cafes, restaurants, etc. THERE IS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER**

1. Almost all income is spent on food
2. More than half of the income is spent on food
3. Food costs about half of the income
4. Food costs less than half of the income
5. A small portion of the income is spent on food
6. 99) I find it difficult to answer (do not read out this option)

For quality control purposes, the organization conducting this survey can verify if I have actually interviewed you, so please give me your phone number and if you receive a call, please confirm that you participated in the survey:

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!**