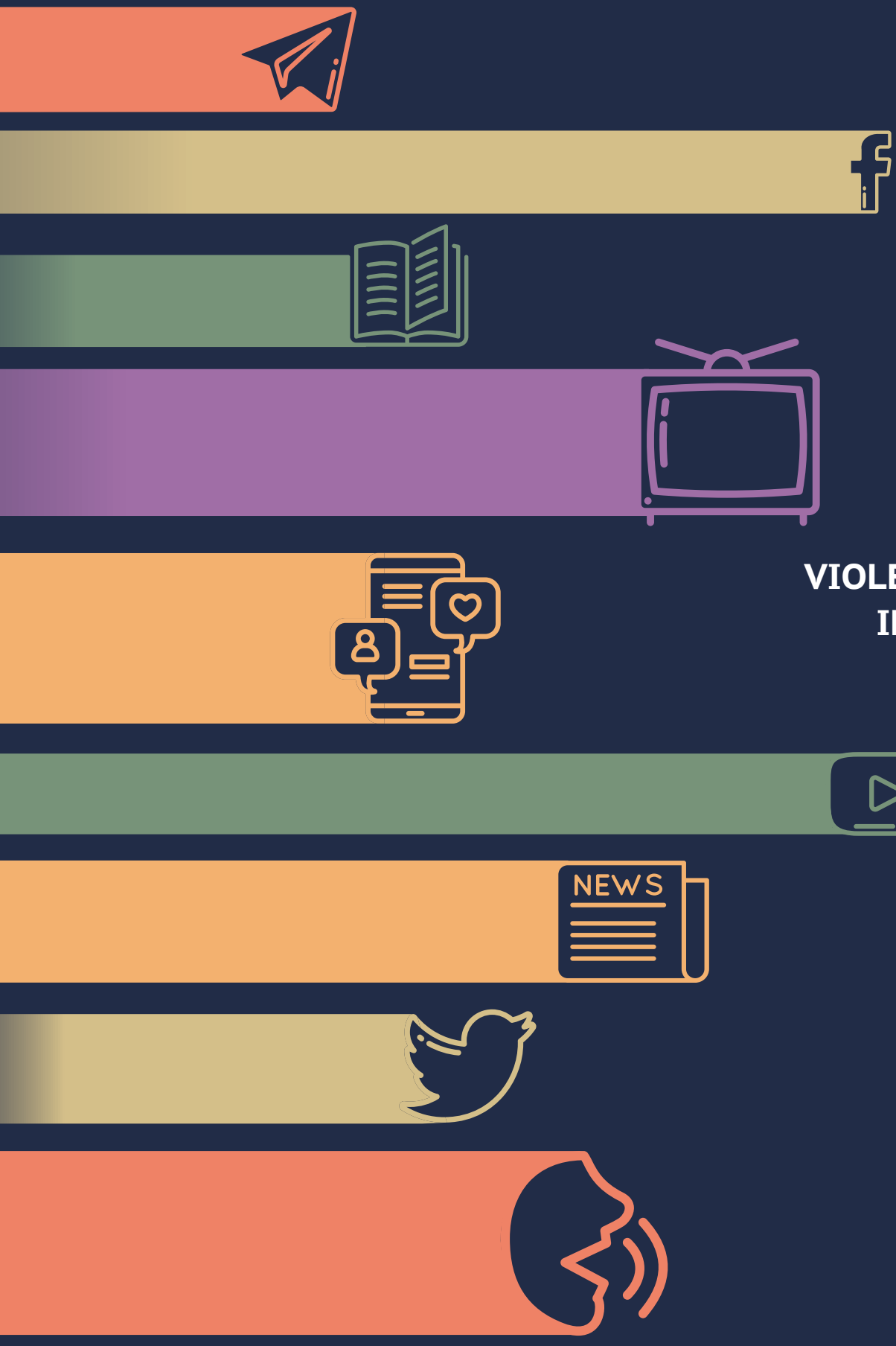

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA 2018

The project is funded by the European Union

CIVIL INITIATIVE ON INTERNET POLICY

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Violent Extremism in Central Asia 2018:

A preliminary survey of groups, digital dimensions and state responses

Disclaimer: This research has been produced within the framework of the "Contributing to stability and peace in Central Asia through media literacy, improved reporting and regional cooperation" Project implemented by Internews and funded by the European Union. The contents of this research are the sole responsibility of The SecDev Group, and Public Foundation Civil Initiative on Internet Policy and can not be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union and Internews under any circumstances.

Executive summary

Over the past decade, radicalisation to violent extremism (VE) has become a matter of pressing public and political concern in Central Asia. Between 2000 and 5000 Central Asians[1] responded to calls to join jihad in Syria and Afghanistan[2], most of them radicalised while foreign workers in the labour camps of Russia's cities[3]. While rates are low by global standards, the phenomenon has nonetheless spurred the governments of the region to respond.

The legal response taken up by Central Asian countries borrows heavily from Russia's anti-terrorism measures[4]. Laws are unclear and overbroad in their definitions of extremism, leading to legal uncertainty and repressive application. They set out legal penalties for those creating or disseminating VE and mandate restrictions on the dissemination of VE material, including online. A lack of clarity about what is and is not extremism has resulted in uneven and harsh application of these laws, with lengthy prison sentences for those convicted of no more than liking an extremist Facebook post.

Measures to block VE content online have been similarly heavy-handed, restricting access to entire platforms and beneficial web content to suppress VE material—and increasingly, the voices of political dissent[5]. Yet VE content from Central Asia was still available on open social media in late 2018, with some 140 active accounts found from ten regional VE actors, some of which continue to recruit. Even as they are more widely applied, reactive measures such as prosecution and content blocking are failing to stem the tide of VE content on social media. Education and local engagement among communities at risk show more promise, but are underused in most countries, where civil society has been discouraged.

This report is written in three parts:

Part A sets out legislative definitions of extremism and extremist content in Central Asian states, and outlines how they have been applied through criminal prosecution.

Part B gives the results of analysis of VE content on Central Asian open social media, blogs and online forums from late 2018, detailing the actors, their use of social media, and the narratives they promulgate; and,

Part C examines how content blocking, education and engagement have been used to counter VE content online, and assesses their success.

[1] Lemon, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat in and from Central Asia", Voices on Central Asia, October 18, 2018, accessed January 5, 2019, http://voicesoncentralasia.org/assessing-the-terrorist-threat-in-and-from-central-asia/

[2] Barrett, "Report on 'Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees'", The Soufan Center, October 2017, accessed January 4, 2019, http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf

[3] Elshimi with Pantucci, Lain and Salman, "Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia" Royal United Service Institute Occasional Paper, April 2018, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www.rusi.org/sites/default/files/201804_op_understanding_radicalisation_in_central_asia.pdf

[4] Beshukova, "Legal and Comparative Analysis of Legislation of CIS Countries Regarding Liability for Extremism", Pravovedenie (Правоведение), 2014, v 3(314), accessed January 8, 2019, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/sravnitelno-pravovoy-analiz-zakonodatelstva-gosudarstv-uchastnikov-sng-ob-otvetstvennosti-za-ekstremizm

[5] Also known as "unlawful anti-extremism" (неправомерный антиэкстремизм) among experts in CIS, "Misuse of Anti-Extremism in January 2019", SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, January 11, 2019, accessed January 13, 2019, https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/news-releases/2019/02/d40643/

This report has been jointly produced by SecDev Group and Civil Initiative on Internet Policy (CIIP). An evidence based, targeted, proportional and ethical public health based approach has been applied for collection and analysis of data. All conclusions and statements are based on analysis of the research team. Any errors or omissions are entirely the responsibility of the authors. This study has been conducted within the wider Project on "Contributing to Stability and Peace in Central Asia through Media Literacy, Improved Reporting, and Regional Cooperation" run by the Internews and funded by the European Union. Project is focused on national and regional efforts to prevent radicalisation in Central Asia through increasing the capacity of journalists, civic activists and media professionals in the production of high-quality media content and raising the level of critical media consumption of civil society, decision-makers, and ordinary public.

Key takeaways

Extremism in Central Asia: context and legislation

- **All four countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan - have laws on extremism, but the legal definition of extremism is unclear and excessively broad**, leading to legal uncertainty, unpredictable enforcement, and politically motivated prosecution. Laws on extremism often conflict with criminal and other laws, and are not aligned with international norms on countering extremism and protecting digital rights and freedom of expression.
- **All four countries maintain lists of prohibited extremist content, including** digital and web content, but these lists lack transparent criteria, are hard to navigate, and are either poorly publicised or unavailable to the public.
- **Legal remedies for VE content include criminal prosecution and restriction on dissemination of extremist material.** Criminal prosecutions for extremism in most countries lack transparency over process and decisions, and sentences for extremism online are often harsh, with imprisonment as the most common penalty.

VE content on Central Asian social media:

- **Despite platform and government monitoring, VE content is still found on open social media in Central Asia.** From August to October 2018, SecDev analysts found 140 Central Asian social media accounts that were actively distributing VE content to over 324,000 subscribers.
- **Content blocking and takedowns have had only limited efficacy in reducing the amount of VE content.** Groups are quickly able to circumvent these measures and recreate their accounts through account redundancy both within and across channels.

Preventing and countering violent extremism in Central Asia:

- **Content blocking is the main tool for countering VE content online.** In most countries, it is extrajudicial and increasingly politicised, being used to suppress dissent. Blocks are excessively broad, encompassing entire sites and platforms, and processes for blocking, unblocking and appealing are not transparent.
- **Content blocking has been largely ineffective as a response to VE content**, since technology and strategies to circumvent blocks are constantly being developed. It is also inconsistent with international norms on digital rights and freedom of expression, and restricts access to harmless and beneficial content.
- **Education and engagement have been far more effective**, but are underutilised in most countries, largely because civil society is underdeveloped in the region.

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A. Extremism in Central Asia: context and legislation

Violent extremism is a matter of growing public concern in Central Asia, driven by domestic stagnation, global Islamist narratives, and proximity to active conflict zones like Afghanistan and Syria. Of the 20 000 foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq in 2015, for example, some 2500 came from the Central Asian region.[6] Estimates suggest that, overall, somewhere between 2000 and 5000 Central Asians were recruited to participate in jihadist movements in Syria and Afghanistan since 2012. Breakdowns of numbers of foreign fighters from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are shown in Table 1 (below).

Table 1. Number of Central Asian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.[7]

Country	Total foreign fighters	Sent back from/stopped in Turkey	Remain	Returned	Date
Kyrgyzstan	>500	N/A	N/A	>44	06/2016
Kazakhstan	>500	N/A/1914	120	N/A	04/2017
Tajikistan	1300	308/2651	>700	147	07/2016
Uzbekistan	>1500	N/A	N/A	N/A	05/2016

Despite this concern, rates of radicalisation among Central Asian populations remain comparatively low. Several thousand foreign fighters represents a fraction of a percent of the total population of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, now approaching 66 million people. One source suggests that radicalisation rates among the Muslim population of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are 1 in 54 000 and 1 in 37 000 respectively, as compared to 1 in 4900 in the UK and 1 in 1450 in Belgium.[8]

The demography of those recruited is both consistent and well understood, which should make developing effective responses easier. Most Central Asians who took part in jihad were radicalised as migrant workers in Russia. Around 80 percent of those who chose to engage in jihad came from the 3 million Central Asians living in the Russian Federation, mostly as migrant workers, and largely in the labour camps on the outskirts of Moscow.[9] [10]

Yet efforts to confront radicalization in Central Asia have been undermined by structural and legislative weaknesses. Legal systems with over-broad and imprecise definitions of violent extremism (see Table 2), that emphasise the suppression of radical views, and that lack a coordinated regional response have hindered the development of effective countermeasures to the problem of violent extremism[11]. This is nowhere more true than online, and especially on social media, where public engagement with violent extremism occurs most often, and where VE actors' use of technology has consistently outpaced legislation and monitoring.

[6] https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180726_Russian_Speaking_Foreign_Fight.pdf?VyUdcO2D6TJdW_Zm4JkmIpRkJxoXEZU6

[7] http://thesoufancenter.org/research/beyond-caliphate/

[8] https://minerva.defense.gov/Media/Press-Releases/Article/1005777/why-do-central-asians-join-isis/

[9] https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/central-asia-is-not-a-breeding-ground-for-radicalization/

[10] http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/10989

[11] UN OHCHR, "Countering violent extremism, a 'perfect excuse' to restrict free speech and control the media – UN expert", accessed January 10, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/En/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19916&LangID=E

The following section examines how the four Central Asian states define extremism within relevant legislation. It then sets out how extremist materials are identified, and how state registers of extremist materials are developed, publicised and maintained. Finally, it sets out legal remedies for extremism—criminal prosecution and restrictions on dissemination of content—and considers how the first of these has been applied. Restrictions on dissemination of content, particularly as this applies to online and social media content, will be discussed in depth in part C1.

1. What is extremism?

Specific laws on extremism in Central Asia are recent developments. Although provisions on extremism appeared in the national legislations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from the early 90s, laws on extremism were only adopted by Kyrgyzstan [12] and Kazakhstan[13] in 2005, and Tajikistan in 2007,[14] and were largely borrowed from Russian federal law.[15] An anti-extremism law was not adopted in Uzbekistan until 2018.[16] This copying of laws from other jurisdictions, without taking account of their shortcomings and compliance with national and international legal and regulatory norms has created problems for the definition of extremism and its application.

Establishment of legal responsibility for extremist activity often preceded the legal definition of the concept of extremism. This resulted in its broad interpretation in law enforcement practice.

Table 2. compares the elements of legislative definitions of extremism in each country.

		Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Violent encroachment on constitutional form of government		✓	✓	✓	✓
Armed rebel/seizure of power/creation of illegal armed formations		✓	✓	✓	✓
Forced change of territorial integrity		✓	✓	✓	✓
Undermining security/defence capacity		✓	✓	✓	
Terrorist activities			✓	✓	✓
Incitement of hostility, hatred and discord, humiliation of dignity, propaganda of superiority on the grounds of	Race	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Nationality	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Language		✓		✓
	Ethnicity		✓		✓
	Religion	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Class	✓			
	Patrimony	✓			

[12] The Law No. 150 of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan "On Countering Extremist Activities" of 17 August 2005

[13] The Law No. 31 of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Countering Extremism" of 18 February 2005

[14] The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Countering Extremism" (as amended by the Law No. 226 of the Republic of Tajikistan of 5 March 2007 and No. 1146 of 27 November 2014)

[15] Law No. 114-ФЗ of the Russian Federal dated 25 July 2002 "On Countering Extremist Activities.

[16] Law No. ЗРУ-489 "On Countering Extremism" dated 30 July 2018 https://www.uzdaily.uz/articles-id-38719.htm, https://base.spinform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=108616

	Regional affiliation		✓		
	Social affiliation	✓	✓	✓	
Propaganda, production and/or use of prohibited symbolic			✓		✓
Financing extremist activities or other assistance			✓	✓	✓
Public calls for extremist activities			✓	✓	✓
Mass riots, hooliganism, vandalism motivated by hostility or hatred			✓	✓	✓
Activities on behalf of organisations recognised as extremist		✓			
Dissemination of extremist materials		✓	✓	✓	✓
Storage of extremist materials not aimed at their dissemination			✓		
Religious practices that threaten the security, life, health, morals, or the rights and freedoms of citizens		✓			
Humiliation of national dignity			✓		✓
Committing crimes on the grounds of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or hostility, or hatred or hostility towards any social group					✓

As Table 2 shows, **definitions from all four countries include three common elements:**

1. *violent change to the fundamentals of the constitutional order;*
2. *violation of the territorial integrity of the country;*
3. *incitement of hostility (discord), hatred, and humiliation of human dignity on the ground of race, nationality, religious affiliation or affiliation to a certain social group.*

Beyond these three common elements, each country includes a variety of actions in the list of extremist activities. Some key aspects of the Russian law from which they were developed -- hindering legitimate activities of state bodies, hindering the exercise of voting rights coupled with violence, public and knowing false accusation of an official in committing extremism related crime, and public justification of terrorism -- are omitted from all four laws.[17]

[17] Law No. 114-ФЗ of the Russian Federal dated 25 July 2002 "On Countering Extremist Activities.

Definitions of extremism in the legislation of all four countries emphasise a counter-terrorism over an anti-discriminatory approach. This approach draws from international instruments like the 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, to which all four countries are signatories. According to the Convention, extremism is acts aimed at violent seizure or retention of power, violent change of the constitutional order of the state, violent encroachment on public security, including organizing illegal armed groups for the above purposes. This approach differs sharply from the anti-discrimination approach enshrined in a number of acts of the UN[18] and Council of Europe, in which extremism is deemed primarily as an ideology that threatens democratic values of pluralism, tolerance and respect for human rights.[19]

Where the countries have tried to combine both anti-terrorist and anti-discriminatory approaches within the law, the result has been extremely broad definitions of extremism. Under these definitions, extremism includes everything from a terrorist act with mass victims to reposting pictures with swastika in a social network, and in some countries, the mere possession of a leaflet or book included in the register of extremist materials.

Some legal concepts still have unclear, circular or contradictory definitions, leading to varied interpretation in law enforcement practice. These include terms such as extremist activity, public approval of extremism, or humiliation of national dignity. Other definitions are circular: according to the Kazakhstan law, one form of extremist activity is any actions on behalf of organizations that are recognized as extremist.[20] Thus, a citizen who tries to appeal against a judicial ban on activities of an extremist organization will formally be involved in extremist activities.

Such broad and imprecise definitions create the preconditions for human rights violations. Under the pretext of countering terrorism, privacy, freedom of expression, belief and conscience are unreasonably restricted. Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have been criticized by international bodies for uncertain and excessively broad criteria of extremist activity, and for selective law enforcement practice that restricted the freedom of religion, expression, assembly and association, particularly with regard to prohibited or unregistered Islamic groups.[21] At the same time, the legislation of the four countries provides no special guarantees for the protection of vulnerable groups, such as the homeless, sex workers, people living with HIV, or migrants.

Articles touching on extremism in national criminal codes are often broader than the definitions of extremism in special laws, creating additional legal uncertainty. In 2016, an article was added to the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic establishing liability for public favoring of terrorist or extremist activities, defined as public glorification or praise, including admiration or justification of terrorist or extremist activities. . In the amendment to the law, which entered into force on January 1, 2019, this article was excluded. A similar provision exists in the Criminal Code of Tajikistan.[22] Article 174 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in addition to inciting social national, tribal, racial, class or religious discord, establishes liability for *insulting national honor and dignity or religious feelings of citizens*. None of the listed actions are mentioned in the anti-extremism legislation of these countries, but those prosecuted under these Articles are considered extremists, and can be subject to additional restrictions like having bank accounts frozen and inclusion in extremist lists and preventive databases.

[18] See, for example, the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism (approved by the UNGA Resolution No. 49/60 of 09.12.1994) or the UNSC Resolution No. 1373 (2001) of 28 September 2001 adopted after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

[19] See, for example, the PACE Resolution 1344 (2003).

[20] Subparagraph 1 of Article 1 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Countering Extremism."

[21] Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee on the second periodic report of Kazakhstan (CCPR/C/KAZ/2) adopted on 9 August 2016.

[22] Article 307.1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan

Legislative ambiguity and uncertainty leads to excessive use of forensic examination and expert witnesses in extremism cases. In the absence of clear definitions, courts are forced to reply on case-by-case opinions from linguists, psychologist, and religious scholars. Qualifications of experts are sometimes low and uniform standards for conducting cross examinations of expert witness are absent.

Current Central Asian legislation is out of step with international legal norms regarding definitions of extremism and the protection of free speech. In 2012, UN experts adopted the Rabat Action Plan[23]which attempts to formulate a minimum set of tools and recommendations for legislative responses to extremism. It mandates the need for clear legislative definitions of terms such as "hatred", "discrimination" and "violence" and sets out three criteria for restricting freedom of expression: legality, proportionality and necessity. In addition, the criminal law of some Central Asian countries includes provisions for insult to religious feelings, which is contrary to international norms stating that religious beliefs do not have a reputation and hence cannot be insulted.[24] Although these and other instruments developed by OSCE and UN bodies are not binding, they are subsidiary sources of law used both by national courts and the European Human Rights Court.

International checks on human rights abuses are wanting. None of the four countries has access to the European Court of Human Rights as a supranational body capable of addressing human rights violations. This absence reduces the possibilities to redress violated rights in the context of generally accepted international standards.

2. What are extremist materials?

National anti-extremism laws of all four countries establish similar definitions of extremist materials using three key criteria: *a call* for extremist activity; *excusing* extremist activity; or *justification* of extremist activity (see Table 2).

All four countries have a register of prohibited materials with extremist content. The Ministry of Justice of the **Kyrgyz Republic** maintains two lists on its websites,[25] one of which prohibits any information materials from the terrorist organizations Jannat Oshiklari, Katib al Imam al Bukhari, and Jabhat-an-Nusra (see Appendix 1 for the list of officially banned VE groups in Central Asia). The second list is more extensive with 65 records listing seized extremist materials belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic State[26]. Most of the listed materials are poorly described and impossible to identify.

In **Kazakhstan**, the Register of Information Materials recognized by the court as extremist[27] is maintained the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Records of the General Prosecutor's Office. Currently, the Register has 692 entries and the list is accompanied by the full texts of judicial decisions and related materials, such as the prosecutor's statement and expert opinions.

[23] Annex to the Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. January 11, 2013 // http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf [EN]

[24] Joint Declaration on Insulting Religions and Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Extremist Laws of 10 December 2008

[25] http://minjust.gov.kg/?page_id=26350

[26] Список экстремистских материалов, accessed January 10, 2019, http://minjust.gov.kg/ru/content/950

[27] http://pravstat.prokuror.kz/rus/o-kpsisu/spisok-religioznoy-literatury-i-informacionnyh-materialov-priznannyh-ekstremistskimi-i

In **Uzbekistan**, a special register of informational Internet resources with prohibited content was created by the Ministry of Justice in 2018,[28] but users have no access to it. Identification of such resources is the responsibility of the Center for Monitoring of Mass Communications of the Uzbek Agency on Print and Information.

Tajikistan publishes its register on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, although it does not include websites. Its Law "On Countering Extremism" prohibits as extremist any "official" materials of prohibited extremist organizations, as well as any other materials containing signs of extremism. At the same time, the law lacks criteria for determining the "official nature" of materials.[29]

These registers suffer from a number of common problems:

1. *an absence of clear criteria for identifying extremist content* comprehensible both to relevant public agencies and to the general public;

2. *the registers are excessively bureaucratic, poorly classified, and almost impossible to navigate*, composed of thousands of songs, books, articles, leaflets, notes and files that have been continuously added over time.

3. *measures for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the materials and their dissemination are not thoroughly developed.*

4. *a lack of transparency and citizen access to the registries* means that they do not help raise citizens' awareness of extremist content.

5. *apart from Uzbekistan, none of the countries have legal procedures for removing websites from the register after prohibited materials have been removed.*

6. *the decision to recognize materials as extremist is made by the court, often without the involvement of the owner, author or distributor.* By the time the author learns of the ban, the court's decision has entered into force and the deadline for appeal is past.

[28] https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/29475462.html

[29] Article 16 of the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Countering Extremism"

3. How is extremism dealt with under Central Asian law?

Legal responses to extremism in Central Asia take two forms:

1. *criminal or administrative prosecution* of citizens for extremist activities, often accompanied by restrictions in the form of blocking bank accounts, preventive records and administrative supervision;

2. *restricting dissemination of extremist ideology* in the form of a ban on information materials and restricting activities of extremist organizations and public associations (addressed in part C).

a. Criminal prosecution

The research team analysis of the national anti-extremism laws enforcement for restricting access to VE content online revealed the following challenges that contribute in the misuse or unlawful anti-extremism practices in all four countries.

Judicial transparency in cases involving terrorism and extremism is poor in the Central Asian countries, with the highest transparency in Kyrgyzstan. Statistical data and information on prosecutions, convictions, and judicial decisions on extremism are often unavailable. None of the countries publish detailed information on criminal sentencing. At best, fragmentary information can be obtained from irregular state press releases or opposition publications. The Kyrgyz Republic is the only country in which most judicial decisions are published, while criminal sentences, including those for extremism, are posted on an official portal of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court.[30]In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, cases involving extremism are normally classified, despite public interest. Often access to information about the cases is difficult not only for the public, but also for relatives and lawyers of the accused. In Kazakhstan, information and statistical data on extremist crimes is not made available.

In criminal cases about which information is available, the most common punishment is imprisonment. Sentences for actions that do not directly threaten public security can sometimes be harsh. In Tajikistan, a common practice is long-term imprisonment for using symbolics of the "Islamic State". According to media reports in 2015-2016, at least 23 people in Tajikistan who raised the flag of the IS were sentenced to imprisonment for between 3 and 27 years for crimes under sections of the Criminal Code relating to public calls for violent change of the constitutional order, public calls for extremist activity, and criminal organization.[31]

Prison sentences are handed down not just for crimes in physical space, but for for the dissemination of textual, photographic and other materials on social media, in an excessively broad and sometimes erroneous interpretation of legal norms.[32] In 2016, a Kyrgyzstan court handed down a three year sentence to a man convicted of storage of extremist materials for liking a post in support of imam Rashod Kamalov in Odnoklassniki.[33] [34] The same year, a citizen of Kazakhstan was found guilty under two sections of the Criminal Code relating to public calls for violation of the unitarity and integrity of the Republic of Kazakhstan and insulting national honor and sentenced to 5 1/2 years imprisonment.[35] His crime was a post in VKontakte calling for Kazakhstan to join Russia.

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[30] https://sot.kg/ru

[31] Three people from Nurek were sentenced for their sympathy for the "Islamic state." Ozodi Radio. 22.02.2017. // https://rus.ozodi.org/a/28324909.html

[32] http://president-sovet.ru/presscenter/news/read/4875/

[33] A resident of Kara-Suu got 1-year suspended sentence for "Like" on "Odnoklassniki". Zanoza.kg. May 18, 2016 // http://zanoza.kg/338433

[34] Bulletin of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 2 (63)

[35] Sentence for a person, "who called for Kazakhstan joining to Russia". Azattyk Radio. December 5, 2016 //https://rus.azattyq.org/a/28156486.html

Central Asian legislation and courts lack procedures to try those accused of cyber crimes according to a fair process. In prosecuting those accused of disseminating extremist materials through telecommunications networks, gathering evidence and establishing liability is technically very complex. Central Asian laws do not provide clear procedures for examining, analyzing and recording evidence on Internet resources by an authorized body or court. In the absence of an appropriate regulatory legal framework, law enforcement officers have reported that they are forced to use the existing rules, which mainly aim at collecting and recording material evidence.

The lack of transparency and certainty in the judicial system and harsh sentencing in extremism cases breeds mistrust among citizens and civil society. The selectivity and unpredictability of court decisions discourages citizens from cooperating with the state, while the lack of judicial transparency decreases public trust and encourages dissatisfaction and protest. Imprisonment as a punishment for expressing opinions perceived by the state as extremist, in the absence of clear criteria for defining extremism, has a serious cooling effect on public debate. Neither encourage the participation of civil society in preventing and countering extremism. At worst, these judicial deficiencies create sympathy towards extremism and promote the mobilization of social groups for destructive activity, creating the outcome the state is attempting to prevent.

B. VE content on Central Asian social media

This section sets out the results of social media monitoring carried out by SecDev Group between August and October 2018 in order to assess VE actors' use of social media within Central Asia. It examines ten groups known to be currently or recently active in Central Asian cyberspace, identifying how they communicate with followers, the nature of their messaging, and whether they are actively recruiting within Central Asia. Lastly, it evaluates how well these groups are reaching their audience, and the degree to which their message is resonating within Central Asia—and driving radicalisation and recruitment.

Between August 1 and October 31 2018, SecDev Group analysts examined social media accounts in Russian and Central Asian languages. We identified a total of 245 social media accounts containing some VE content or belonging to groups known to support VE. Of these accounts, 140 were actively distributing VE content; 75 were abandoned or inactive, and 30 were blocked.

Given efforts by social media platforms and governments to identify and remove VE content and block VE actors (see below), **the availability of so much VE content in open social media is significant and concerning.** In addition, we also found many old accounts of VE groups that had been blocked by social media platforms, although these were not included in the analysis since their content was not accessible.

We also found evidence that extremist groups are adapting their tactics on social media in response to increased policing. We found very few pages openly calling for violent extremism. Instead, narratives and content on identified accounts and pages actively promote both metanarratives of Muslim oppression and encrypted chats and channels on closed social media, usually Telegram. In so doing, they fuel attitudes that could be supportive of VE among their followers while creating fora where more explicit VE content can be shared, and individuals radicalized, away from public scrutiny or monitoring.

Content blocking and takedowns have been effective in reducing the amount of VE content available on open social media in the short term, but groups have found ways to quickly resurrect their channels of communication after blocking. We found that most groups maintained a high degree of redundancy within and across channels, creating dormant accounts that could be quickly activated to replace blocked ones, with new links distributed to subscribers via unblocked accounts on other platforms.

In addition to groups and pages, there were also a significant number of individual Facebook profiles clearly associated with VE groups with a high number (3000-5000) of Facebook friends. These individual profiles were distinguished by the use of banners or symbolism belonging to VE groups, and by having numerous friends who also made use of these images and symbols, suggesting that they were, at least, part of a community of sympathisers. Since individual profiles can be made visible only to approved Facebook friends, making it harder to monitor the content being shared, some extremist groups may be using profiles as informal groups to bypass the blocking of open groups and pages with VE content.

1. Groups promoting violent extremism in Central Asia

Note: The list of prohibited extremist organizations by CA countries is given in the Appendix 1.

a. Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

HTS (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) is the latest incarnation of a group founded by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani in January 2012 as the official branch of Al Qaeda (AQ) in Syria,[36] though its relationship with AQ has since become tense and unclear. One of the strongest and most militarily successful Syrian opposition groupings[37], HTS has a strong Syrian contingent as well as Arab foreign fighters, some Westerners, and Russian-speaking foreign fighters from the North Caucasus and Central Asia. Most of the Central Asian militants affiliated with the group are members of Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (see below).

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki, Google+, Instagram

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

Of the groups targeting Central Asians, HTS has by far the most active and effective central messaging and dissemination apparatus. HTS and its media activists have built an extensive network of allegedly independent and objective news agencies and media projects to create a daily stream of content covering the events in Syria while actively promoting the HTS agenda.

During this study, SecDev analysts found 26 active social media accounts that were associated with HTS. A further 15 accounts were inactive, and eight more were blocked during 2018. In addition, we found seven media channels probably linked to HTS, since they also distribute content related to it, but whose relationship with HTS could not be defined. As at October 31, 2018, **the total number of subscribers of all unblocked HTS social media accounts was 73 830**, and subscriptions are growing rapidly.

HTS distributes material in Arabic, Russian and Uzbek. The group has the largest and most stable jihadist channel on Telegram, the Arabic-language @E…, which at October 31, 2018 had over 53 000 followers. A Russian-language channel (@E…), now blocked but since recreated, translated nearly all of the group's posts into Russian. Among the most active producers of Russian content are the Russian-language division of Ibaa Information Agency ("Агентство Ибаа")[38], Voice of Sham Information Agency ("Голос Шама")[39], the Sham Center[40] and Muhammad Jazira media projects.

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[36] https://web.archive.org/web/20150328080133/http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf

[37] "Tahrir al-Sham became one of the best-equipped Syrian opposition groups by purchasing weapons from Iraqi arms dealers and by converting munitions from existing Syrian military equipment in Syria", accessed January 15, 2019, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493

[38] Официальный канал Ибаа - https://ebaa-agency.com/, https://jihadintel.meforum.org/identifier/806/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-ibaa-news-agency

[39] @GolosShama, https://twitter.com/GolosShama; Голос Шама (запасной) Телеграм канал - https://telegram.me/odna_umma; Архив новостей "Голос Шама", accessed January 16, 2019, https://archive.org/details/@user_12217&tab=uploads

[40] Sham Center — independent information and analytical agency, highlighting the social and political events around the syrian

HTS also maintains a single Uzbek account on Telegram, which had almost 38 000 subscribers at the end of October 2018. The account, named "Q…" after the HTS special forces group, consolidates and retransmits content produced by Uzbek extremist groups affiliated with HTS, along with material translated from Arabic, Turkish, and Russian. It has been active and growing rapidly for a year and has almost as many subscribers as all the Russian-language HTS social media accounts combined, despite the fact that Telegram constantly blocks channels with VE content[41], including in Uzbek.

iii. What are their key narratives?

Unlike other extremist groups, much of the content distributed by HTS is not overtly radical[42]. HTS publishes extensively about the lives and sufferings of Syrian civilians, the atrocities of the Assad regime, and the victims of Russian and USA airstrikes. It also showcases efforts by HTS to improve the life of the local population by building roads, providing humanitarian aid, and fighting crime and corruption in the territories under their control.

Some content about HTS combat operations, and occasional calls to jihad, are interspersed with more neutral material. This includes posts, still images and videos about successful combat operations carried out by HTS and its affiliates, and about HTS training camps. Direct calls to join the HTS to conduct armed jihad are rare: HTS prefers instead to advertise through depictions of itself as a defender of Muslims in Syria against the actions of evildoers like the Syrian government, Russia, and Iran, who must be destroyed. Shifting between VE and more neutral content allows HTS to propagandise more effectively without alienating new subscribers with the explicit VE content characteristic of other extremist groups.

HTS also has social media accounts dedicated to spreading religious content. Individual religious groups that can be identified as religious wings of the HTS have created a network of social media accounts and Telegram channels through which radical religious content is distributed to support the radicalization of their subscribers of their media channels.

b. Tavhid va Jihod Katibasi (TJK)

Also called Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ), **TJK is the second-largest Central Asian militant group active in Syria**, and one of the most militarily successful.[43] Founded in 2014 by Sirojiddin Mukhtarov, a.k.a. Abu Saloh, an ethnic Uzbek from southern Kyrgyzstan,[44] it operates closely alongside HTS, with whom it occasionally releases media in both Uzbek and Arabic, and has maintained strong loyalty to AQ. Despite officially pledging its loyalty to HTS in September 2015, TJK retains its autonomy.

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, VK, Vimeo, Google+, Odnoklassniki

war, accessed January 15, 2019, http://shamcenter.site/about

[41] Telegram FAQ - https://telegram.org/faq; Secretive message app used by IS takes down posts, CNBC, November 19, 2015, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2015/11/19/telegram-the-messaging-app-used-by-isis-takes-down-78-posts.html

[42] "Today, HTS maintains that it is "an independent entity that follows no organization or party, al-Qaeda or others.", Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts

[43] https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/09/uzbek-group-pledges-allegiance-to-al-nusrah-front.php

[44] https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/04/27/katibat-al-tawhid-wal-jihad-a-faithful-follower-of-al-qaeda-from-central-asia/

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

TJK has created an effective media network to disseminate its propaganda, the main purpose of which is to radicalize the population of Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, and recruit new fighters into their ranks. Posts are mainly in Uzbek, although several channels also disseminate information in Tajik and Russian. Some of TJK's news channels are extremely active, posting several dozen messages a day. In addition to official media channels directly associated with TJK that openly distribute VE content and call for armed jihad, TJK also has more apparently neutral accounts[45] that post on religious topics without open discussion of jihad. The religious wing of TJK, led by its spiritual and political leader, Abu Saloh, uses these channels for the gradual religious and ideological indoctrination of visitors who may not know that these media channels belong to extremist groups in Syria.

SecDev analysts found a total of 45 social media accounts directly associated with TJK, of which 20 were active. Of these, 13 were on Telegram, three on YouTube, and one each on Vimeo, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, and VK. 17 were inactive, and a further eight were blocked during our research from August to the end of October 2018. We also identified an additional 15 accounts probably related to TJK, since they also distribute its content, but their direct connection with TJK could not be verified.

As of October 31, 2018, **the total number of subscribers of all unblocked social media accounts distributing TJK content was 11 803**. Accounts blocked in 2018 had a further 10 577 subscribers. While these takedowns undoubtedly affected TJK's reach, the group is able to counter blockages, promptly distributing information about new accounts and channels through their other media. Subscription to the new TJK media channels is currently growing rapidly. TJK also has an Uzbek-language official website[46] posting audio lectures and videos, but it is periodically blocked or unavailable.

iii. What are their key narratives?

TJK is still actively recruiting. Abu Saloh, who leads TJK's recruitment, continues to emphasize that the jihad in Syria has not ended, and that Muslims should make *hijra*[47] there to carry it out. Reportedly fluent in Arabic, Russian, Uzbek, and Uyghur, Abu Saloh is a skilled orator, without peer among Central Asian jihadist leaders. Urging his followers to continue the path of Osama bin Laden by driving Russians and Americans from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, and taking the fight to Israel to rid Palestine of its oppression, Saloh echoes the language of AQ leader Aymen al-Zawahiri, but also calls on Muslims in Central Asia to overthrow the secular and authoritarian governments of their countries.

c. Katibat Imam Bukhori (KIB)

Katibat Imam Bukhori (KIB) is the largest Uzbek militant group in Syria, and likely in existence. Founded in 2014, the group rose to become a pivotal player in northern Syria, participating in numerous rebel offensives and establishing close ties with AQ and HTS. KIB was designated a terrorist group by the US State Department in March 2018.[48]

[45] https://t.me/tavhid_minbari

[46] http://tavhidvajihod.net/

[47] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegira

[48] https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/03/279454.htm

KIB has roughly 500 fighters active in Syria, under the group's leader Abu Yusuf Muhojir.[49] A second, probably smaller contingent was established in Afghanistan in mid 2016.[50] There KIB participates in battles jointly with the Taliban, including the August 2018 attack on Afghan government forces in Ghazni city. While recruitment to Syria has probably halted as it has with all Syria-based jihadist groups, the group appears to be expanding in Afghanistan.

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki, YouTube, website

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

KIB is active in both open social networks and Telegram. Although KIB accounts in open social media are quickly blocked, the group rapidly creates duplicate accounts to replace deleted ones. The rapid dissemination of information through Telegram channels allows KIB to quickly inform its subscribers about new accounts.

14 social media accounts associated with KIB were found, of which eight were active. The active accounts included three Telegram channels, two Facebook pages, two Odnoklassniki accounts, and one VK account. Four accounts were inactive, while a further two were blocked during our research from August to the end of October 2018. Two more social media accounts distributing KIB content were also found, but their direct connection with TJK could not be defined. As of October 30, 2018, there were a total of 2324 subscribers to all unblocked media channels distributing KIB content; most of these subscribed to Telegram or Facebook. Subscriptions to active KIB social media accounts are actively increasing. All of its recruitment material is in Uzbek. The group also had a website (buxoriy.com), but it is now blocked.

iii. What are their key narratives?

KIB openly attempts to recruit fighters to their armed forces operating in Afghanistan. KIB has curtailed its activities in Syria and migrated to Afghanistan, and its posts only mention the latter. The spiritual and political leader of KIB, Sheikh Salokhidin, states that Afghanistan is the center of global armed jihad against infidels and calls on all supporters and sympathizers of KIB to go to Afghanistan and join KIB. Judging by its posts, KIB has now entered into an alliance with the Taliban and Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and conducts joint combat operations with these groups. KIB recruiting messaging revolves around expelling US forces from Afghanistan, toppling the Syrian regime and its apostate Iranian and Russian allies, and eventually carrying the jihad to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

d. Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)

A splinter group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that formed in the early 2000s, the **IJU's goal is the overthrow of the Government of Uzbekistan**, and it has carried out attacks and suicide bombings of police checkpoints, public places, government offices, and embassies within the country since 2004. **Outside Uzbekistan, the IJU is active within Afghanistan.** Loyal to the Taliban, the group has carried out attacks on international forces in Afghanistan, including an American military base, and took part in the 2015 Taliban siege of Kunduz. The group currently consists of between 100 and 200 members from the countries of Central Asia[51].

[49] https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/08/23/central-asian-jihadists-under-al-qaedas-talibans-strategic-ties/

[50] https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/02/uzbek-jihadist-group-claims-ambush-in-northern-afghanistan.php

[51] Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.refworld.org/docid/5981e3d8a.html

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Odnoklassniki, Google+.

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

SecDev analysts found 10 social media accounts associated with IJU. Of these, four were active and six inactive. One additional channel distributing content related to IJU probably has a relationship with the group, but the nature of its connection with IJU could not be defined. The group's primary channels are Telegram and YouTube; the former avoids blocking and takedowns by using private channels accessible via join-links with expiring terms, which are constantly updated and distributed among subscribers. **As at October 31, 2018, the total number of subscribers of all unblocked media channels distributing IJU content was 1976.** Currently, there is an active growth of subscribers on the IJU media channels.

iii. What are their key narratives?

IJU's social media accounts share videos and still images of the group's activity, and are actively recruiting, with calls to join the group in jihad. IJU also has a channel devoted to the dissemination of religious and extremist literature, which offers some 26 books in PDF format for download. The channel is also used to promote links to other official IJU channels in Telegram.

e. Malhama Tactical (MT)

A unique entity among militant groups involving Central Asians, and indeed among jihadist groups as a whole, **MT is a private military contractor offering training to other jihadist groups in Syria.**[52] MT's main client has been HTS, which has had entire battalions of elite forces trained by the group. MT also conducts occasional raids and acts as a strike-force-for-hire in certain circumstances, working primarily alongside the North Caucasian jihadist group Ajnad al-Kavkaz[53].

MT is comprised almost entirely of fighters from the former Soviet Union. Its founder and original leader, Abu Rofiq, was an ethnic Uzbek who had served in the Russian armed forces before coming to Syria in 2014. After Rofiq's death in a Russian airstrike in February 2017, his deputy Abu Salman al-Belarusi took over command of the group. The group's present size is unknown but is estimated at roughly two dozen individuals. The group screens recruits very carefully and is known for its very advanced command of weapons and squad tactics.[54]

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, Twitter

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

MT's current social media channels are Telegram and Twitter, with earlier accounts on other social media platforms having been blocked. SecDev analysts found a total of nine social media accounts directly associated with MT, of which only two were in active use. Six of the detected media channels were inactive, and one was blocked at the

[52] https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/10/the-world-first-jihadi-private-military-contractor-syria-russia-malhama-tactical/
[53] Malhama Tactical and Ajnad Kavkaz training video, accessed January 16, 2019, https://twitter.com/badly_xeroxed/status/904806821592010752
[54] https://www.thefirearmblog.com/blog/2018/07/02/revival-of-insurgent-training-team-malhama-tactical/

end of October 2018. One further social media account was probably related to MT, although the nature of the relationship could not be defined. **As at October 31, 2018, the total number of subscribers of all unblocked media channels distributing MT content was 4 564.**

Unlike groups mentioned earlier, MT uses social networks and Telegram primarily to promote its services and does not attempt to recruit militants to its ranks. MT also actively uses its accounts to raise funds, usually via Bitcoin, to support its activities, pay for training militants, and purchase equipment. MT services have been used by a number of groups belonging to the alliance with HTS, and many of the videos show the training of HTS-aligned combat groups. The Russian-language media activist Faruq Shami and the Russian-speaking media collective Muhammad Jazira, both aligned with HTS, have also published posts about MT's activities. MT and LWA have also jointly run a program to train jihadist suicide bombers, and MT has posted videos of joint exercises with the Chechen group Ajnad al-Caucasus.

MT's primary channel for social media engagement is the Twitter account of its leader, Abu Salman al-Belarusi, who posts regularly in English, Russian, and Turkish. Salman's Twitter account (@s…) has 2385 followers and posts several times a day, including numerous video releases. The account is used to promote MT and its services and raise funds for its activities (see left). More than 920 posts have been published, of which 143 are photos and videos showing successful MT combat operations, training courses for militants, and MT promo materials. The MT commander regularly engages in public conversations with Western journalists and analysts, but there is little evidence that the group interacts with potential recruits, which it is very selective about accepting.

MT also has a Telegram account[55] with 1165 subscribers. The channel has several hundred posts, most of which are reposts from other channels and links to publications from various media resources about MT. The channel also has 36 videos and 64 photos depicting MT's combat operations and training of militants, and advertising its services.

iii. What are their key narratives?

Instead than ideological or religious narratives, MT activity on social media shares footage of its training operations in northwest Syria, showing other groups' fighters receiving training from its members.

f. Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT)

HuT is a transnational organization committed to reviving the so-called second Caliphate — a transnational Islamic state based on Sharia law, headed by the Caliph, the spiritual and political leader of all Muslims. **It formally rejects violent extremism, claiming to be pursuing its goals exclusively by political methods**, and there is no expert or international consensus as to whether they are an extremist organisation. Although the United States considers it a non-violent group, HuT is considered a terrorist organization in Central Asia and Russia, and its activities are also banned in a large number of Muslim countries, Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom[56].

SecDev analysis shows that HuT contributes to the spread of Islamist extremist sentiment and is potentially capable of providing ideological support for terrorism. In their accounts in social networks and official websites, we found many posts appealing to its followers to join jihad and participate in the battle for the establishment of the caliphate in Syria. In them, HuT claims to be the main political force in Syria, calling for the moderate Syrian

[55] t.me/joinchat/AAAAAExqe4sv-GsQwakSKw
[56] Hizb ut-Tahrir, Counter Extremism Project, accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/threat_pdf/Hizb%20ut-Tahrir-01262018.pdf

opposition and the more radical armed resistance to unite under its banners to establish a caliphate. There is also some evidence of a more direct link between HuT and certain extremist groups fighting in Syria.[57]

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, VK, Google+, LiveJournal

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

Possessing a huge army of supporters and considerable financial resources, **HuT has created a media empire spanning both online and paper media.** All materials are translated from Arabic into Russian, Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz and are actively distributed through numerous accounts in social networks and separate Internet resources. In addition to its official website, HuT produces a number of specialized magazines and newspapers that carry ideological propaganda.

SecDev analysis found 49 accounts directly associated with HuT. Of these, 38 social media accounts were active, eight were inactive, and three were blocked during 2018. We also found an additional 26 media channels that are likely to have some relationship with HUT, since they also distribute content related to this extremist group, but their direct connection with HUT could not be defined.

As of October 31, 2018, **the total number of subscribers of all unblocked social media accounts distributing HUT content was 246 017.** The total number of subscribers of all blocked accounts was just 2 297.

iii. What are their key narratives?

SecDev analyzed all posts (338) from January to mid September 2018 on the official Russian-language HuT Facebook page.[58] The majority are devoted to criticism of the West and its allies (57 percent), Islamic lectures including calls to jihad (14 percent), and accounts of the oppression of Muslims worldwide (9 percent). About 11 percent of posts could be classified as a direct appeal to jihad. Since other official HuT social media accounts publish the same content in translation, this pattern of narratives is likely to be broadly consistent across those accounts.

In addition to these official HuT accounts, we also found a further 26 accounts not directly associated with HuT, but which actively distribute their content, which had a total of more than 187506 subscribers. These apparently independent accounts also publish many posts related to local events and political news, thereby attracting local audiences and engendering trust in the account as a source of objective information. These accounts typically have a much higher average number of subscribers than official HuT accounts, and their selective inclusion of HuT content allows them to disseminate radical ideas in a softened form among a wider audience that would not be attracted by the obviously extremist content of official HuT sources.

g. Islamic State (IS) (Central)

The best-known and most successful jihadist group in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) was established as a separate entity in early 2013 by its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi[59]. At present, the group controls no territory, but has successfully transitioned to an insurgency which still commands tens of thousands of fighters.[60]

[57] https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2013/09/130907_ru_s_tatars_syria
[58] https://www.facebook.com/HT.Russia
[59] https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi
[60] https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/baghdadi-recording-iraq-syria-terrorism/568471/

The Islamic State has actively recruited Central Asians since its emergence as an independent actor in northern Syria in early 2013. Many of these joined in 2014 and 2015, when the group's fortunes were at their height. In November 2016, by which time IS foreign fighter recruitment had nearly ceased, the best estimates for the number of Central Asian IS recruits who had traveled to Syria and Iraq was 2,000 to 4,000.[61]

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, VK, and WhatsApp.

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

During the period of study, SecDev analysts were unable to find any accounts that could be directly associated with IS in Russian or Central Asian languages. Historically, Telegram has been the primary IS messaging channel, although official releases are now rare. This may be evidence of the success of social media platforms in identifying and blocking IS accounts, but is probably also a product of the failure of IS military campaigns in Syria and Iraq. Both official IS channels and those of its supporters are frequently shut down by Telegram, making monitoring their content difficult.

iii. What are their key narratives?

Historically, IS has relied on familiar Islamist metanarratives, especially the need to fight the infidel regime of Bashar Assad and to attack those countries harming Muslims wherever possible. As noted above, our analysis found no IS accounts during the study period.

h. Islamic State—Wilayat Khorasan (ISWK)

Also known as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), **ISWK is the Central Asian branch of the Islamic State, asserting claims to an emirate extending over areas of Iran, three Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, Pakistan and even parts of Kashmir and Xinjiang[62].** It is principally active in Afghanistan, where it is battling both government forces and the Taliban. The group also has a presence in Pakistan's Northwest Tribal Areas, and there are unconfirmed reports of ISWK activity on the border of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan with Afghanistan.

Formed in 2014, and loyal to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISWK has recruited a multiethnic force made up of a large number of Central Asians, including ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks from Afghanistan; Uyghurs from China; and Balochis from southern Pakistan; as well as a smaller number of Pashtuns. In early 2018, many of its Central Asian fighters left the group after the Pakistani Aslam Farooqi was chosen as its new leader, instead forming a faction in northern Afghanistan led by Moawiya, a former commander with the now-defunct Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.[63] Through its links in Pakistan, the group has a very strong funding base, with some sources claiming that it was able to raise $271 million in 2016 alone,[64] enabling it to offer high salaries to potential recruits.

[61] https://minerva.defense.gov/Media/Press-Releases/Article/1005777/why-do-central-asians-join-isis/

[62] https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/the-trump-administrations-new-afghan-problem-the-islamic-state/

[63] https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/the-trump-administrations-new-afghan-problem-the-islamic-state/

[64] https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/the-trump-administrations-new-afghan-problem-the-islamic-state/

i. Platforms used:

Telegram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, VK, WhatsApp

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

Like IS, **ISWK has historically been active on social media, but no accounts were found during the study period.** Its media channels are frequently deleted, even on Telegram, although some private channels have persisted longer.

iii. What are their key narratives?

Like IS Central, **ISWK recruitment campaigns have historically relied on familiar Islamist metanarratives** of Muslim oppression, the need to expel foreign forces from Muslim lands and overthrow apostate regimes, and utopic depictions of life in the caliphate. Because no IS accounts were found during the study period, we have no current data on narratives.

i. Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)

Founded in 1989 by a Chinese Uyghur named Ziyauddin Yusuf, **TIP's stated goal is the creation of an independent sharia-ruled Islamic state in Xinjiang**, which the group refers to as 'East Turkistan.' TIP first appeared in Syria in mid 2012, growing in size over the following two years, and is estimated to have 2500 to 3000 fighters in Syria, the vast majority of which are Chinese Uyghur.[65] The group has since taken over primary control of the northwestern Syrian town of Jisr al-Shughur, where many TIP fighters have settled with their families.[66] The group also runs training camps for child fighters, averaging 10 to 12 years of age. TIP also has an Afghan branch that probably does not exceed 1000 fighters, which has pledged allegiance to the Taliban and takes orders from Taliban commanders in many operations.[67] TIP's Afghan branch has more fighters[68] from the five former Soviet Central Asian republics than its Syrian contingent, although the exact number is not known.

i. Platforms used:

Telegram

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

For the past year, TIP's social media messaging has been sparse and intermittent, and SecDev analysts could not find any active accounts in Russian or Central Asian languages. Its Telegram account (@s…) only shared 11 total messages since its creation in June 2017, and had only 161 subscribers; it was inactive as at October 23, 2018. Most of the text in social media posts and recruitment videos is in Arabic, but audio in the videos appjiears to be in Uyghur. The social media silence and lack of a presence in languages beyond Uyghur suggests TIP is not currently actively recruiting Central Asian fighters.

[65] https://www.albawaba.com/news/original-feature%3A-the-chinese-jihadist-separatists-fighting-in-syria-1058170
[66] https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/war-and-opportunity-the-turkistan-islamic-party-and-the-syrian-conflict-07-2017
[67] https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/turkistan-islamic-party-highlights-joint-raids-with-the-afghan-taliban.php
[68] The New Arab, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2018/10/12/islamic-state-seeking-new-stronghold-in-central-asia

iii. What are their key narratives?

TIP's global recruitment strategy is focused on building the group's legitimacy through participating in worldwide jihad before returning to focus its efforts in Xinjiang. Loyal to AQ, TIP echoes AQ leader Aymen al-Zawahiri in its messaging, especially the need to expel foreign apostate forces from Muslim lands, whether Russian, Lebanese Hezbollah or Iranian forces in Syria, US forces in Afghanistan, or Chinese forces in Xinjiang. Themes also include the immorality of life in Central Asia and Xinjiang, with one video in May mixing in shots of drug and alcohol abuse amid haunting music. Another theme is the mistreatment of Muslims and the populace as a whole by authorities in the region.

j. Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (LWA)

LWA, sometimes called Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), is a Russian-speaking foreign jihadist group active in Syria. The group was founded in summer 2012 by a leadership of Chechen jihadists, and included Arab veterans of the 2011 Libyan civil war and Chinese Uyghur and Central Asian fighters.[69] Having pledged allegiance to HTS in September 2015,[70] LWA lost many of its Caucasian and Chechen members[71] to other units as its Syrian membership increased, but remained a popular destination for Central Asian fighters.[72]

i. Platforms used:

Telegram

ii. How do they engage with their followers online?

Although LWA once had a developed social media presence, its current social media activity is limited. Unlike other groups, LMA seems not to have attempted to create new accounts in social networks to replace those which were blocked or deleted. All LMA content is published in Russian, which may have helped network administrators identify and block their content and accounts. As noted above, the position of the LMA in Syria has also significantly weakened recently, and the group may not longer have the resources or personnel to support a strong social media presence.

Currently LMA uses only three Telegram channels for disseminating information, although it previously had active Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts. A total of 17 social media channels directly associated with LMA were found. In addition to the active Telegram channels, six social media accounts were inactive, and a further eight were blocked between July and the end of October 2018.

As of October 31, 2018, the total number of subscribers of all unblocked LMA social media accounts was 1761. The total subscribers of all accounts blocked in 2018 was **2 622**. An earlier incarnation of its main Telegram account, @m..., had 1579 subscribers, but was blocked during the study. LWA posts content and video on average several times a week, almost always in Russian. Its Instagram account is updated irregularly and has 130 followers. The group has also had a website, whiteminaret.info, which is intermittently updated, but it was blocked as at October 23, 2018.

[69] https://jamestown.org/program/obliged-to-unite-under-one-banner-a-profile-of-syrias-jaysh-al-muhajireen-wal-ansar/

[70] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra/insurgent-group-pledges-allegiance-to-al-qaedas-syria-wing-idUSKCN0RN1Z920150923

[71] https://jamestown.org/program/chechen-ousted-as-amir-of-jaish-al-muhadjireen-wal-ansar-rebel-group-in-syria-2/#.VaL6hvmqqkp

[72] https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1033478.html

iii. What are their key narratives?

Opposition to the Russian government, in Syria and at home, is LWA's central message. Muslims in Russia are reminded of the country's destruction of the North Caucasus in bloody wars over more than two centuries and called upon to make *hijra* to Syria to join the group. Central Asian Muslim migrant workers in Russia are also targeted, with their abuse by ethnic Russian employers and discrimination by Russian society emphasized. Finally, Russia's actions in Syria are a crucial component, with LWA media regularly posting destroyed buildings, civilians mutilated in Russian airstrikes, and Russian warplanes firing munitions as a constant reminder that Russia is engaged in daily crimes against the Islamic *umma* in Syria, which all Muslims should attempt to halt.

LWA regularly releases videos as well, including a ten-minute film released on August 22, 2018 entitled "Islam in Our Days" that features testimonials from a number of the group's fighters and media activists regarding the hollowness of their lives in Russia and the former Soviet Union that drove them to make *hijra* to Syria. Released on Kurban Bayram (Eid al-Adha), it also condemns the official Kremlin-appointed leaders of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims—a Russian government body that controls much of the Islamic activity in the country—as puppets and traitors, while the country's Muslims are oppressed and unable to worship and act freely. Russian rule over Chechnya and the North Caucasus is lambasted: Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is described as *murtad*[73] (apostate) and depicted alongside scenes of destruction from the Chechen wars, while the Chechen military police in Syria are described as traitors to the heroic resistance of Imam Shamil and Shamil Basayev. The crimes of the USA, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are also described, with a LWA preacher lamenting the transformation of Iraq, the former heart of the Abbasid caliphate, into a "Shiite state." Sectarian language also factors into their Syria coverage, calling on followers to eliminate the godless and apostate "Nusayri" Syrian regime.

2. Reach and resonance of VE on social media

The rapid turnover of social media accounts through takedowns, and differential use of platforms by groups, makes a direct comparison of social media strategies by group challenging. Some general observations about reach and resonance can, however, be made.

Despite their narrow ethnic and linguistic focus, the groups whose content is either mostly or entirely in Uzbek (TJK, IJU, and KIB) have a similar reach to Russian-language groups. The fact that groups with an almost entirely Uzbek base and target audience compare in reach to groups targeting the entire Russian-speaking community could indicate a greater receptiveness among the Uzbek community to radical ideas. The relative strength of TJK in particular suggests their messaging, driven by their leader Abu Saloh, is particularly effective, and appears to confirm the widely-held notion among observers that Abu Saloh is indeed the most effective orator and recruiter among Central Asian militant groups active in Syria and Afghanistan.

TIP does not appear to use open social media for recruitment of Central Asian foreign fighters. Given its sizable presence (3000-4000 members) as the single largest grouping of Central Asian foreign fighters in Syria after IS, this is somewhat surprising. It is likely that the group has social media accounts that were not located in the study, including those in Uyghur. If this is not the case, the group has been extremely effective in recruiting in person.

[73] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy_in_Islam

Resonance of social media platforms

Given the difficulty of maintaining stable accounts on social media, how effective are different social media platforms, and online recruitment in general, for VE actors seeking to recruit in Central Asia?

Research on the overall impact of social media on VE recruitment is still inconclusive.[74]The majority of those who consume VE content online are not radicalized and do not progress to VE activity in physical space. At the same time, social media allows not just for content dissemination, but also for direct and personalized interactions between recruiter and recruits, even at great distances.[75] Social media may also function as effective advertising, even if the critical phases of recruitment do not take place there. Islamic State's online recruitment campaign deployed slick video production to glamorize the group's activities and induce potential recruits to engage more closely with the group's recruiters.[76]

Among Central Asian recruits, evidence for the role of the Internet and social media in radicalisation and recruitment to VE is largely anecdotal. The evidence that exists suggests that social media may play more of a supportive or amplifying role in the recruitment of Central Asians, with the primary pathways of recruitment still occurring through a direct relationship between recruiter and recruit.[77] Delivery of increasingly extremist content by recruiters through messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram) is a common thread to these anecdotes, however, suggesting that social media may be used to supplement the recruitment process offline.[78]

[74] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408?src=recsys

[75] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408?src=recsys

[76] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12115-017-0114-0

[77] https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RUSI-report_Central-Asia-Radicalisation_ENG_24042018.pdf

[78] https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RUSI-report_Central-Asia-Radicalisation_ENG_24042018.pdf

C. Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE)

As part A of this report outlined, one pillar of Central Asian responses to violent extremist material online is the use of criminal penalties for those found responsible for creating and disseminating it. This section examines a second pillar: the use of content blocking, by both states and social media platforms, to restrict the dissemination of VE content in Central Asian cyberspace. It then surveys non-legislative approaches to the prevention of violent extremism, in the form of education and engagement programs.

Approaches to counter and prevent VE in Central Asia have been undertaken by actors including national governments, social media platforms, local organizations and civil society, and international organizations. These efforts can be grouped into three major categories:

- **content blocking and takedowns:** the primary PVE tool online, this involves identification and removal of both online VE content (content blocking) and accounts, pages, or groups sharing it (takedowns) by governments, platforms and watchdog groups;
- **education:** the use of education by national governments and their agencies, NGOs, and international organisations to inform and protect the public from online radicalisation by means of curriculum development on risks and counternarratives, and educational reform to promote broad and balanced educational systems; and
- **local engagement:** discussion and work by NGOs and international organizations among local communities and civil society to strengthen resilience among vulnerable groups and rehabilitate those who have been radicalized.

1. Content blocking and takedowns

The following is an overview of the legal framework in Central Asian countries for restricting access to extremist content using Internet blocking.

Restricting access to Internet content, or content blocking, is the main tool for countering extremist ideology online in Central Asia. Those countries with a highly centralised, presidential system of government (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) use extrajudicial (administrative) blocking. In Kyrgyzstan, which has a parliamentary system of government, blocking occurs through judicial decision in Kyrgyzstan, while Kazakhstan uses both extrajudicial and judicial blocking. In the systems practicing extrajudicial blocking, there are no any reliable and updated registers documenting decisions and practice of restricting access to the Internet resources.

Central Asian states see their cyberspace as a frontier for geopolitical confrontation. By blurring national boundaries, the Internet has become a tool of soft power, through which the foreign policy and economic objectives of large powers, including Islamist players, are asserted, sometimes to the detriment of Central Asian sovereignty. Central Asian states view control of the Internet as a way to resist, and blocking unwanted Internet content under the pretext of countering extremism as one of the most effective countermechanisms. These methods gained importance after the Arab Spring, which clearly demonstrated how the Internet could be used as a tool to catalyse political, social and economic change, and social media became tools for external political intervention against sovereign states.

The nature and extent of threats to Central Asia from international extremist organizations has changed. The Internet's many advantages—easy and ubiquitous access, lack of geo-referencing, unlimited audience, high speed

of data transmission, protected communications, and anonymity—have been harnessed by extremists to provide effective platforms for accessing and disseminating radical ideologies, planning attacks, and attracting new adherents. The primary stage of recruiting has almost completely shifted online. Extremist organizations actively use social networks to collect and analyze user data to identify potential recruits. States try to counter the spread of radical ideology in the digital space restricting access to such content, as they do offline.

The open and decentralized nature of the Internet, and its role in democratization, the emergence of a global civil society and increased interdependence are perceived as a threat to the stability of political regimes in Central Asia. Filtering and blocking Internet content under the pretext of combating extremism can also be used to repress political criticism and dissenting voices. The vagueness of legal definitions of the term "extremism" increases this risk to freedom of expression.

Current practices for blocking Internet content in Central Asia contravene international norms and agreements. A UN resolution states that restrictions on access to content must meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality, and that decisions to block content must be judicial and free from interference. Intermediaries should receive "postman immunity", with the responsibility for illegal content borne by the creators and distributors of such content. Providers may not be charged with general responsibility for monitoring information.[79] Similar positions regarding digital rights are adopted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

a. Kyrgyzstan

Content blocking in the Kyrgyz Republic is a judicial responsibility. Article 13 of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Countering Extremism" directly prohibits publication, storage, transportation and dissemination of materials identified as extremist by the court based on the signs of extremism set out in the Law.[80] Procedures are laid down in the Civil Procedure Code of the Kyrgyz Republic.[81] The court is obliged to send its decision to the justice authority to be added to the list of extremist materials as a precondition for lawful blocking of extremist content. The Civil Procedure Code of the Kyrgyz Republic provides for temporary restriction of access to information materials containing extremism signs from the point at which a case is admitted until a court decision is made.

Restrictions are sometimes overbroad and applied to entire sites. While obliging a provider to block prohibited material, the court does not specify how this should be done, or ensure that only the prohibited material and not the entire website is blocked. Moreover, sometimes the courts directly prescribe the latter in the decision, leading to abuse and violations of user rights. Kyrgyzstan does not use the justification of countering extremism to block Internet resources of a political nature, but political content has been blocked by the court for other reasons. In 2017, a court approved the blocking of the Internet news resource Zanoza.kg to protect the honor and dignity of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic after it posted articles critical of him. The same year, the court blocked the independent regional news agency "Fergana-News" because of an article it ruled was inciting ethnic hatred. These decisions to block entire sites based on a single article led to criticism from the international community and the public.

[79] General Assembly resolution/A/HRC/32/L.20/The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet

[80] ILS "Toktom". https://online.toktom.kg/Toktom/58589-0

[81] ILS "Toktom". https://online.toktom.kg/Toktom/140345-0#g25_1

State bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic do not provide any open statistics on blocked resources. According to Internet providers, a total of 131 Internet resources were blocked over the past 3 years based on judicial decisions, including 9 in 2015, 26 in 2016 and 96 in 2017.

- The web archive www.archive.org and www.wordpress.com – a platform for creating websites and blogs have both been banned in the Kyrgyz Republic because of certain pages or blogs of extremist nature posted or archived on these platforms.[82]

- In 2017, a Bishkek court banned TV and radio broadcasting by the "September" channel in Kyrgyzstan and restricted access to the Internet website www.september.kg because of an interview it had aired with Abduldy Kaparov, the former Head of the Osh Regional Department of the Interior, which was classified as an "extremist material".

b. Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has a hybrid system with mechanisms for both extrajudicial and judicial blocking of Internet websites. Under Kazakhstani legislation, all Internet resources are recognized as mass media and are subject to the Mass Media Law. If the court recognizes information disseminated via information and communication networks as contradicting the law, the state, IP providers, and owners of the information are obliged either to suspend or terminate dissemination of production in the Republic of Kazakhstan, or this media. The court's decision to suspend an Internet resource leads to a ban on the use of the domain name for up to three months, while a decision to stop dissemination of an Internet resource entails cancellation of the domain name for up to a year.[83] The Kazakhstan law "On Countering Extremism" also prohibits the use of networks and communications for extremism, and the publication and dissemination of extremist materials.[84] In case of extremism using a mass media, the activity of the owner or disseminator of this mass media outlet is suspended or prohibited by the court.

Extrajudicial blocking is also permitted under Kazakhstan's law on communications. Before April 2014, websites could only be blocked by a court decision until a new article introduced into the Law "On Communications" legalized extrajudicial blocking in Kazakhstan[85] based on a decision of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to this article, if networks and (or) communications means are used for criminal actions, including disseminating information with calls for extremist and terrorist activities, the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan can temporarily suspend networks and/or communications means, communications services, as well as access to Internet resources and (or) posted information.[86] The Article was amended in December 2016 to expand the bodies able to suspend networks.

[82] I. S. Baykulova https://digital.report/irina-baykulova-yurist-internet-po-suti-eto-otrazhenie-nashey-deystvitelnosti/

[83] Article 13 of the Mass Media Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan

[84] Articles 12 and 16 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Countering Extremism"

[85] Article 41-1 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Communications"

[86] ILS "TOKTOM", 2018

Content blocking is widely and continuously used by the Kazakhstan authorities. In 2017, all platforms hosting user content were periodically blocked, often without any public justification. Social networks and communications applications in Kazakhstan are sometimes restricted, and Internet speed decreases, during politically sensitive events. Users report difficulties accessing Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and most Google services for several hours in the evenings when political opponents broadcast live online interviews while abroad.[87] The regulator has introduced an automated monitoring system to identify prohibited content. New legislative amendments force Internet providers to track online space for allegedly illegal content and provide for sanctions, if they fail to remove it.[88]

The most common reason used to justify restrictions on online content is extremism. In response to public complaints about blocking of social networks and messengers since March 2018, the Ministry of Information and Communications reported the actions were pursuant to a court decision to remove materials of the movement "Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan", recognized by the court as extremist. Numerous other requests to block extremist content, or to appeal blocks, are currently being considered, in court proceedings that are not transparent.

- In 2017, about 9,000 websites promoting terrorism, extremism, violence and suicide were blocked according to the Minister of Information and Communications of the Republic of Kazakhstan.[89] In March 2017, the Ministry announced that a total of 32,000 illegal online resources were blocked in 2016.[90]

- From 2009-2018, Kazakhstan state bodies made 146,606 requests to delete YouTube videos with reference to the Law on Countering Terrorism, of which the platform deleted 72,618 videos for violating community standards.[91] No similar requests were made by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

- From 2014-2018, the Republic of Kazakhstan made 52 requests to restrict access to its content for violations of national legislation, all but two of which related to the Law On Countering Terrorism.[92] No similar requests were made by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

c. Uzbekistan

Content blocking in Uzbekistan is extrajudicial or administrative. According to the Law "On Informatization", a website can be blocked if it is used for the purposes of propaganda of violence, terrorism or ideas of religious extremism and fundamentalism.[93] Until October 2018, Internet content in Uzbekistan was blocked without any legal ground and legally approved procedure, mainly in order to restrict access to online information related to politically or socially sensitive topics. In 2018, Uzbekistan also adopted a Law "On Countering Extremism" prohibiting importation, production, storage, dissemination, and demonstration of extremist materials, emblems and symbols of extremist organizations, including on the Internet. In 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan approved a resolution setting out the procedure for restricting access to websites or webpages.[94]

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[87] "The largest social networks and envoys are temporarily closed in Kazakhstan", *Tjournal.ru*.

[88] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/kazakhstan

[89] https://www.zakon.kz/4904265-9-tysyach-saytov-zablokirovali-v-2017.html

[90] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/kazakhstan

[91] https://transparencyreport.google.com/government-removals/by-country/KZ

[92] Facebook Transparency Report https://transparency.facebook.com/content-restrictions/country/KZ, accessed 09 January 2019

[93] ILS TOKTOM, 2018

[94] Resolution "On Measures to Improve Information Security in the global information network Internet"

Decisions to blocking access are made by the Monitoring Centre for Mass Communications of the Uzbek Agency for Press and Information. If the Monitoring Centre concludes that a website has prohibited information, the website disseminating prohibited information is entered into a register and blocked within 12 hours. The Monitoring Centre will exclude remove the website from the registry within 24 hours of receiving a written (electronic) request from the owner of the resource confirming that they have removed the prohibited information from the website. The decision of the Monitoring Centre can be appealed or canceled in court.

Very little official information about content blocking is available in open sources. Unofficial sources suggest that access to 250 Internet resources is blocked in the country.[95]These include websites of numerous Russian television channels and online publications, and the international information services Deutsche Welle, Fergana, Radio Freedom Europe, Uzbek BBC and "Voices of America".[96] The list of blocked Internet resources differs depending on the operator. Users of the Internet service provider Sharktelecom cannot visit the Google search engine and Rambler portal, while some VoIP services, such as Skype, WhatsApp and Viber remain inaccessible except when using a virtual private network (VPN). In order to filter more efficiently, a number of national search engines were developed and launched to ensure state censorship of citizens' searches for information.

d. Tajikistan

Tajikistan also practices extrajudicial blocking, although there are no formal procedures for this process and its legality is questionable. The Law "On Countering Extremism" prohibits publication and dissemination of printed, audio, audiovisual and other materials containing at least one sign of extremism but does not lay down a procedure for blocking or unblocking Internet content. In practice, these actions have been carried out by phone, SMS, or official letter from the communications industry regulator. Since 2013, the Communications Service has officially denied its involvement in blocking, attributing it to telecommunications operators. When questioned, however, it has refused to take action on these violations, despite pressure from industry, journalists, the country's Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN.[97] Telecommunications providers such as Telia Sonera Company, the owner of TCell, a mobile provider, have repeatedly said that they have received instructions from the state to block websites.[98]

Official data about blocking is not released. Tajikistan's register of prohibited resources is published on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs but has no information about blocked Internet resources and social networks. The creation of a Single Communication Centre under the the state-owned operator OJSC Tojiktelecom, established in 2016 "to run control and regulation of incoming and outgoing traffic of international telecommunications and internet services"[99] did not facilitate formation and maintenance of such a register. According to unofficial data, many websites and social media platforms, including the Central Asian portals centrasia.ru and ferghana.ru, topnews.tj, news.tj, tojnews.org, ozodi.org, ozodagon.com, faraj.tj, youtube.com, yandex.ru, Вконтакте.ru, facebook.com, Одноклассники.ru., instagram.com, and twitter.com were blocked at different times on the instruction of the Communications Service of the Republic of Tajikistan.

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[95] http://www.refworld.org.ru/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=5252a52c4&skip=0&query%D0%98% D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82&coi=UZB

[96] Committee for Protection of Journalists "Attacks on the Press 2010: Uzbekistan", February 15, 2011, http://cpj.org/x/40d0.

[97] https://www.ohchr.org/ru/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17197&LangID=R

[98] https://www.ohchr.org/RU/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17193&LangID=E

[99] The Government of Tajikistan Decree No.765 On Singlee Commutation Centre of Telecommunucations from 30 December 2015 - http://www.adlia.tj/show_doc.fwx?Rgn=126007

Content blocking and control over the Internet in Tajikistan is increasing. In 2016, the UN expressed serious concern over the increasing number of websites and networks blocked by the Tajik authorities and plans to expand monitoring of the Internet environment through a single gateway.[100] In July 2018, the country's parliament supported amendments to the legislation that allow intelligence agencies to monitor citizens' online activity by recording exchange of messages and comments in social networks. Internet access in the country was almost entirely disconnected following the killing of four tourists by Islamic State militants in August 2018.[101]

Attempts by Central Asian governments to block VE content and take down VE actors online have generally been repressive, relying on intermittent but wide-ranging blocks and bans on platforms and prosecution of individuals accused of engaging with VE content. In its 2017 Freedom on the Net report, Freedom House listed Internet access in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as 'not free', with their respective governments blocking political and social content and arresting users for social media activity.

e. Russia

The Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) has wide-ranging powers to block websites, content, and users, including those considered to be distributing extremist material. Since the implementation of its Internet blacklist in 2012, the list of banned sites has been steadily expanding. In April 2018, the Federal Security Service (FSB) obtained a court order banning Telegram in Russia over the platform's refusal to provide access to encrypted user communications.[102] In August 2018, an amendment to the Law "On Information" extended the right to block any information containing "justification and excuse" of extremist and terrorist activities without a judicial decision. According to the Ministry, the current version of the law allows to block the media before the court proceeding, but based on the decision of the Prosecutor General only when there is evidence of a call for riots and extremism.

f. Blocking by platforms

Many platforms have also made efforts to restrict VE content and content distributors from accessing or effectively using their services.

- After questioning from the US House of Representatives in early 2018, **Facebook** announced new measures to combat VE material, including increased counter-messaging strategies targeted at vulnerable users.[103] In April 2018, the platform stated that it had removed 1.9 million pieces of IS and AQ content in the first quarter of 2018, 99 percent of which had been flagged by the company itself rather than users.[104]

- In 2017, **Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter** jointly created the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism,[105] including a shared industry hash database containing over 40 000 hashes to create digital fingerprints for terrorist content.

[100] https://www.ohchr.org/RU/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17193&LangID=E

[101] https://eurasianet.org/internet-grinds-to-near-halt-in-tajikistan

[102] https://www.theverge.com/2018/4/13/17233112/russia-telegram-ban-court-ruling

[103] https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/17/facebook-google-tell-congress-how-theyre-fighting-extremist-content.html

[104] https://www.bloomberg.com/technology

[105] https://www.blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/update-global-internet-forum-counter-terrorism/

- **VK (formerly VKontakte)**, the largest Russian-language social media site, had previously been a favoured site of VE actors and content, but after the implementation of new measures in 2015 most VE material has been removed.[106]

- **YouTube** stated in January 2018 that its algorithm for locating VE content had advanced to the point where it was capable of identifying and removing 70 percent of violent content within eight hours of posting.[107]

- **Telegram** has remained problematic for its refusal to police its own content, and the site today is the favoured platform for VE actors and groups, including those in Central Asia. Despite warnings from the EU and other legislators, this situation appears unlikely to change soon.[108]

Watchdog groups have also played a role in monitoring VE content. Chief among these in the Central Asian context is Kaspersky Lab, a Moscow-based cybersecurity and antivirus firm. Kaspersky's 2018 Parental Control Report reviewed the content available to youth, including teenagers vulnerable to VE material. The report found that inappropriate material had become harder to find over the past year, but remained easily accessible without parental or other controls in place.[109] While VE content was not a chief focus of the report, its findings are significant in this context as the firm regularly consults with governments and data regulators, including at the 2018 2nd Annual Symposium on Countering Violent Extremist Material Online in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan[110].

g. Have content blocking and takedowns worked?

Social media blocking and content takedowns by Central Asian governments have been largely ineffective and probably counterproductive. While some targeted measures have succeeded in lessening extremist access and reach in the short term, mass blocking and takedowns—like the removal of 32 000 VE pages and posts by the Kazakh government in 2016—often only result in VE content producers transferring the content to another site, setting up new accounts to replace those blocked, migrating to another open platform, or moving to encrypted social media or the dark web.[111] Once in the dark web, material is neither monitored nor controlled, and cannot be blocked. While platforms like Telegram—currently the medium of choice for extremist and radical groups operating in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere—have been justly criticised for providing a safe haven for VE actors, the reality is that Telegram is merely the latest medium for VE groups. If Telegram were to implement content blocking and account takedowns, VE actors would simply find another platform to use.[112] Facebook has responded to pressure to curb the spread of VE content by adding 3 000 additional content reviewers to its initial 4 500, but its enormous user base of over two billion accounts makes policing content a Herculean task.[113]

To be effective, blocking must be excessive—but new techniques to bypass blocking are constantly being developed. Current blocking technologies do not work well for a specific URL without expensive Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), and do not work at all with the https data transmission protocol on which most social media platforms are built. As a result, it is almost impossible to block a particular page or account without blocking the

[106] https://meduza.io/en/feature/2016/07/07/in-kontakt-with-the-cops

[107] https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/17/facebook-google-tell-congress-how-theyre-fighting-extremist-content.html

[108] https://techcrunch.com/2017/09/20/tech-giants-told-to-remove-extremist-content-much-faster/

[109] https://www.kaspersky.com/about/press-releases/2018_kaspersky-labs-latest-parental-control-report-reveals-what-kids-are-searching-for-online

[110] https://centralasiasecurity.org/en/

[111] https://www.secdev-foundation.org/online-extremism-central-asia-repression-not-effective-whats-alternative/

[112] https://techcrunch.com/2017/09/20/tech-giants-told-to-remove-extremist-content-much-faster/

[113] https://techcrunch.com/2017/06/27/facebook-2-billion-users/?_ga=2.165718397.274303565.1538375639-2102909372.1538375639

entire service,[114] [115] platform, or web archive, as Central Asian governments have repeatedly done. With the emergence of blocking as a legalized measure, however, the Internet erupted with instructions on how to bypass it,[116] through browser extensions, apps, anonymizing websites, and anonymous networks such as Tor, and new technologies are constantly being developed to circumvent it.

Blocking has some significant side effects for the function of national networks. Such Overzealous blocking also reduces the quality of national communications networks and digital services. Blocking entire sites or platforms can ultimately lead to a significant increase in routing tables and affect the quality of data transmission services for users of networks throughout the country, including access to public information systems.[117] This has flow-on effects on the availability of telecommunications for social and economic development goals.

Overzealous, partisan or repressive blocking and takedowns can also infringe citizens' human rights and reduce options for legitimate, non-violent political expression. Such repression can reduced trust in government and encourage radicalization among a frustrated populace which sees no other outlets for their grievances. As the Arab Spring demonstrated, the use of Internet content and social media blocking technologies by the Maghreb countries[118] failed to ensure political stability. Paradoxically, blocking content can also increase public interest in accessing it, and encourage legal nihilism as citizens are forced to circumvent the law to access material caught up in platform-wide blocking. None of the four countries is currently monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of blocking Internet resources as a tool for countering extremism. Ultimately, given the inherently reactive nature of content takedowns and account blocking, there is a limit to what these measures can accomplish in countering the spread of violent extremism.

[114] A. Verhovsky. The main problems of the application of anti-extremism legislation in the field of freedom of speech on the Internet. https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2015/07/d32473/

[115] Thomas Hammarberg EC Commissioner for Human Rights. Social Media and Human rights/Issue Discussion Paper/CommoDH (2012)8.P.8.

[116] https://www.macdigger.ru/news/post/5-sposobov-obojti-blokirovku-rutracker or https://medium.com/meduza-how-it-works/unblock-800c2f8bb8e3

[117] Newspaper "Commersant" №151 of 23.08.2018, p. 1. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3720410

[118] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maghreb#Maghreb_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)

2. Education and local engagement

a. Education

Education has a crucial role in the fight against VE content and recruitment worldwide, but its potential remains underutilized in most parts of Central Asia.

Since education is primarily the purview of the state, the national governments of the various Central Asian states play the largest role in shaping the educational landscape of the region. Unfortunately, **few tangible changes appear to have taken place in national curriculums**, though international actors are attempting to spur change on this front. UNESCO hosted a regional summit in May 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan on the importance of cultural and religious education in preventing the resonance of VE narratives.[119]

Some NGOs have also encouraged governments to address the problem of insufficient religious and secular education, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyzstan-based NGO Search for Common Ground has been one of the most effective advocates for education, driving the Kyrgyz government to engage with the previously-taboo issue of VE education and rehabilitation. A project run by the group from 2013 to 2016 enabled cooperation between officials and security forces, religious leaders, and local civil society groups for the first time in the country.[120] The Kyrgyz women's organization Mutakallim,[121] probably the leading women's group in the region, has also advocated on VE issues.

Intergovernmental organisations have also introduced regional programs to counter VE through education. Launched in May 2018 by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) with funding from the Government of Japan, the Central Asian Network for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CAPVE) collates a large number of CVE resources, including research publications and training modules, in both Russian and English. Designed for both international and local practitioners, the aim of CAPVE is to increase the accessibility of P/CVE material on Central Asia.[122] The European Union also runs a series of regional education programs under the auspices of the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP),[123] launched in 2012. The program aims to facilitate education reform in the region, including a greater focus on religious and cultural issues.

b. Local engagement

Engagement with local communities, usually by NGOs and CSOs with support from national governments and international actors, is the most important element of C/PVE efforts in Central Asia.

NGOs, especially in Kyrgyzstan, have been the most significant actors in local engagement to counter and prevent violent extremism in Central Asia, working with local stakeholders and at-risk populations to identify and address factors driving radicalization and extremism. Kyrgyzstan hosts two very important NGOs, Search for Common

[119] http://www.unesco.org/new/en/tehran/about-this-office/single-view/news/unesco_participates_in_regional_seminar_on_prevention_of_vio/

[120] https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CSSF_KGZ501-Review-Final-Report_13052016.pdf

[121] http://www.mutakallim.kg/

[122] https://www.capve.org/en/

[123] http://www.caep-project.org/

Ground[124] and Saferworld[125], both of which have undertaken extensive work in the communities where radicalisation has occurred. From its base in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, home to many foreign fighters, Saferworld in particular has established itself as a leader in regional C/PVE efforts, working with the families of the radicalized. While Kyrgyzstan possesses the most developed NGO engagement, there are also incipient efforts in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, although these are almost entirely under state auspices.

Government efforts in local engagement have occurred mostly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the State Commission for Religious Affairs,[126] created in 2017, has taken the lead in engagement with local communities, particularly in the south, though it has faced some difficulty gaining civilian trust because of its ties to state security agencies. Kazakhstan has likewise created the Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs, which aims to rehabilitate radicals and disenfranchised communities.[127] In a first for the region, Kazakhstan has undertaken the peaceful return of 81 of its citizens from Syria and Iraq[128] under an amnesty program, establishing a precedent other Central Asian states could follow as they attempt to address this problem. There is still much work to be done, however, in terms of building trust in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have yet to make any real efforts to engage civil society and local communities in C/PVE work.

Intergovernmental organizations have also played an important role in spurring engagement efforts. Guided by the December 2015 General Assembly Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,[129] the UN launched a 30-month "Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation for Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Asia" program in February 2018 to support local community education in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.[130] Two of its ongoing one-year programs in 2018 include a €100,000 project on local education and social programs in southern Kyrgyzstan with the group Youth of Osh, and a €90,000 program aimed at strengthening the resilience of Tajik youth and labour migrants to VE narratives run with the Eurasia Foundation.[131] The EU also regularly engages in high-level consultations, including a November 2016 summit led by EU HR/VP Federica Mogherini, to support and build on the work of local groups like Saferworld, and funds local engagement programs through partner organisations such as the Hedayah Center, a foundation based in the United Arab Emirates.

c. Have education and local engagement worked?

Unlike content blocking, whose efficacy has failed to match the attention it receives, **local engagement and education initiatives run by state, international and civil society actors among local communities and at-risk populations have had significant success in countering the appeal of violent extremist content.** While relatively well developed in Kyrgyzstan and under development in Kazakhstan, these approaches remain highly underutilized in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Several research and local consultation projects have had a demonstrably positive impact on reducing the vulnerability to VE of at-risk groups. One of the most successful has been Search for Common Ground, which has successfully gained the trust of both state security agencies skeptical of such an approach and local communities

[124] https://www.sfcg.org/kyrgyzstan/

[125] https://www.saferworld.org.uk/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan

[126] http://religion.gov.kg

[127] https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/why-kazakhstan-created-the-ministry-for-religious-and-civil-society-affairs/

[128] https://knews.kg/2018/08/01/skolko-kazahstantsev-nahoditsya-za-reshetkoj-v-sirii-i-irake/

[129] http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

[130] http://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2018/02/22/the-united-nations-development-programme-commences-a-regional-initiative-on-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-central-asia-funded-by-the-government-of-japan.html

[131] https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/STRIVE-Global_Central-Asia_UN-CTC-Meeting.pdf

traditionally distrustful of authority. The organization's extensive 2013-16 project[132] is in many ways a model for P/CVE work in the region, having successfully countered much of the potency of radical narratives by enhancing religious and Quranic knowledge among the local populace. The project also laid the groundwork for exploring other unacknowledged but significant vectors of radicalization, such as prisons.

While NGO efforts at local engagement in Kyrgyzstan have born fruit, the environment elsewhere in Central Asia is not yet conducive to such work. With groups like the Civil Internet Policy Initiative,[133] Tajikistan continues to boast a fairly robust network of experts and practitioners, but its civil society is heavily constrained by authorities, a trend that appears to be worsening. Uzbekistan is moving in a more positive direction, but is still a long way from producing genuine CSOs and local NGOs like those in Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan also remains stifled by official pressure and unwillingness to allow open discussion of VE by local activists. Without a greater opening on the part of regional authorities, the problem of insufficient education and local engagement will continue to plague efforts to combat VE actors, disseminators, and activity in the Central Asian context.

[132] https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CSSF_KGZ501-Review-Final-Report_13052016.pdf

[133] http://cipi.tj/

D. Conclusion and Recommendation

Violent extremism is a problem of growing public and legislative concern in Central Asia, driven by the collision of technology, demographics and identity politics within the region. The effect of these drivers has been amplified by the fact that populations in these countries have begun to drift away from their legislative base. This tension leaves a vacuum VE actors can exploit, with some communities increasingly being drawn towards regional conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan.

The manifestations and drivers of violent extremism will be challenging to confront. Poorly articulated definitions of extremism and institutional weakness have led to legal uncertainty, selective and unpredictable law enforcement, politically motivated prosecutions, invasion of privacy, and restrictions on freedom of conscience, all of which discredit government efforts to counter extremism. The lack of a coordinated legislative response further hampers cooperation in tackling the digital drivers of violent extremism, particularly when social media companies and platforms are located outside these jurisdictions and beyond the reach of national legislation and regional agreements.

Analysis of social media demonstrates that violent extremism has a rich ecosystem in Central Asian cyberspace, and one that is likely to expand. The current resonance and significance of this messaging is perhaps overstated, since radicalization to violent extremism in Central Asia overall is very low. Given that those most at risk are young, and that structural factors driving radicalisation—economic stagnation, labour migration, and lack of opportunity at home—show no signs of abating, this resonance could increase over time and must be monitored.

No single approach to countering or preventing violent extremism in Central Asia is likely to be effective. In the short term, the most genuinely violent sites will need to be filtered and blocked using legal means—but these will be very few in number. The majority of sites are those for which extremist content represents a discourse of opposition or discontent, often over legitimate grievances. They require engagement rather than repression if the dissent they reflect is not to spill over into the broader community, and if government responses are not to slide into "unlawful anti-extremism."[134] Engagement with citizens will be necessary, too, to build the digital literacy and public awareness on which community safety from violent extremism depends.

National laws on extremism require amendment to clarify definitions and remove internal contradictions and inconsistencies with other laws. Definitions of extremism should be restricted so that they include only direct calls for or acts of violence, while protecting vulnerable groups and guaranteeing freedom of assembly, expression, thought and conscience. They must also be harmonised across the region and aligned with international instruments on extremism and digital rights.

Greater government transparency would help to increase citizens' confidence in operation of the justice system in both extremism cases and judicial blocking. Lists of prohibited extremist materials and groups should be be established according to clear and well-publicised criteria. All legal decisions in such cases should also be publicly accessible, and stakeholders guaranteed an unconditional right of appeal. Uniform standards for forensic examinations in extremism cases, and qualification requirements for expert witnesses should also be developed through public consultation.

[134] Coined by the Russian non-profit organization SOVA Information and Analytical Center, this term designates state actions undertaken to counter aggressive nationalism or other radicalism, but in fact primarily aimed at unlawful restriction or violation of civil liberties.

In the long term, engagement—informed by careful research and monitoring—is the most durable solution to violent extremism. A successful response to violent extremism will require a broad and integrated strategy that addresses both structural drivers and political realities through a shared commitment to digital citizenship, and will demand a coordinated response from governments and civil society at both national and regional levels. It will require the ability to invite communities currently engaged with violent extremism into a normalized political discourse, while creating space for such discourse through legislation in line with international norms regarding freedom of expression and digital rights.

Based on these conclusions the research team proposes the following recommendations to address identified challenges:

No single approach, relying on one form or one set of actors, can provide a solution to content concerns in the changing and shifting environment that is the Internet. For a public response to be effective, it must be integrated, systematic and dynamic, sensitive to public needs and national differences within a framework that encourages robust communication. Only such a systematic approach – bringing technological potential together with the energies and capacities of government, the Internet industry and the citizenry – has the promise of success in meeting what often seem to be competing goals. Given the global and borderless architecture of the Internet, such a systematic approach requires not only coordination at a national and regional level, but its scope must be international.

Context and legislation

- The legal definition of extremism should be clear to avoid legal uncertainty, unpredictable enforcement, and politically motivated prosecution. Definitions relevant to terrorism and extremism should be precise, clear, accessible and harmonized with the international norms.
- Laws on extremism should be aligned with international norms on countering extremism and protecting digital rights and freedom of expression.
- Ensure transparency and public access to the lists of prohibited extremist content and organizations/groups.
- Legal remedies for VE content should be transparent and such content must be restricted by a judicial authority order.

Preventing and countering violent extremism

- Education system must be used more effectively for building capacity of digital literacies (competencies) and engagement have been far more effective, but are underutilised in most countries, largely because civil society is underdeveloped in the region.
- Ensure implementation of self-regulation mechanisms of social media companies as complementary component of the state regulation of the illegal online content to improve cooperation with the online content providers.
- Ensure building capacity of digital literacies (competencies) through education establishments.
- Stimulate engagement of civil society in P/CVE in the national and regional levels.

G. Glossary

Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS): HTS (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) is the latest incarnation of the official branch of AQ in Syria. Most of the Central Asian militants affiliated with the group are members of Tavhid va Jihod Katibasi (TJK) (see below).

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT): A transnational organization committed to reviving the second Caliphate, it formally rejects VE, but its social media content contains appeals to join jihad in Syria to establish a caliphate. There is evidence of links between HuT and extremist groups in Syria.

Islamic Jihad Union (IJU): The IJU's goal is the overthrow of the Government of Uzbekistan. It has carried out attacks and suicide bombings within Uzbekistan, and is active within Afghanistan, where it is loyal to the Taliban.

Islamic State (Central) (IS): The best-known jihadist group in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) is now an insurgency which still commands tens of thousands of fighters. IS has recruited thousands of Central Asians since its emergence in northern Syria in early 2013.

Islamic State—Wilayat Khorasan (ISWK): Also known as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), ISWK is the Central Asian branch of the Islamic State. It is principally active in Afghanistan, but also in Pakistan's Northwest Tribal Areas, and on the border of Afghanistan.

Katibat Imam Bukhori (KIB): The largest Uzbek militant group in Syria, and a pivotal player in northern Syria, KIB has close ties with AQ and HTS. Recruitment to Syria has halted, but the group is expanding in Afghanistan.

Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (LWA): Also called Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), LWA is a Russian-speaking group in Syria allied to HTS and composed of a leadership of Chechen jihadists, Arab veterans of the Libyan civil war, Chinese Uyghur and Central Asian fighters.

Malhama Tactical (MT): A private military contractor offering training to other jihadist groups in Syria, especially HTS. MT also conducts occasional raids and acts as a strike-force-for-hire. MT is comprised almost entirely of fighters from the former Soviet Union and does not recruit.

Tavhid va Jihod Katibasi (TJK): Also called Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ), TJK is the second-largest Central Asian militant group active in Syria. While maintaining its autonomy, it operates closely alongside HTS and has maintained strong loyalty to AQ.

Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP): Based in Syria and composed of Chinese Uyghur, TIP's goal is the creation of an independent Islamic state in Xinjiang, which the group calls 'East Turkistan.' TIP also has an Afghan branch loyal to the Taliban with some Central Asian recruits.

F. APPENDICES

Appendix 1. List of VE groups prohibited in CA countries[135]

№	Name of VE group	Kyrgyzstan[136]	Kazakhstan[137]	Tajikistan[138]	Uzbekistan[139]
1.	Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra)	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.	Tavhid va Jihod Katibasi (T&JK), Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ)	✓	x	x	✓
3.	Katibat al Imam al Bukhari (KIB)	✓	x	x	✓
4.	Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)	✓	✓	x	✓
5.	Malhama Tactical (MT)	x	x	x	x
6.	Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT)	✓	✓	✓	✓
7.	Islamic State (IS) (Central)	✓	✓	✓	✓
8.	Islamic State—Wilayat Khorasan (ISWK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
9.	Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
10.	Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (LWA)	x	x	x	x
11.	Jannat Oshiklari	✓	x	x	x

✓ - prohibited

x - not prohibited

Note: No official source for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

[135] The list is not complete. It includes those organizations that are mentioned in this study.

[136] http://religion.gov.kg/ru/relgion_organization/%D1%82%D1%8B%D1%8E%D1%83-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%80/

[137] https://din.qogam.gov.kz/ru/content/spisok-zapreshchennyh-terroristichesk

[138] Data on prohibited VE organizations and groups in Tajikistan is not available for public. Research team collected data from different sources online and offline

[139] Data on prohibited VE organizations and groups in Uzbekistan is not available for public. Research team collected data from different sources online and offline

Appendix 2 Definition of terms used for the research

Terminology	Definition used in the Study	In Russian
Unlawful anti-extremism	The conditional term “unlawful anti-extremism” is coined by the Russian non-profit organization “Information and Analytical Center SOVA” specializing in the study of the problems of nationalism, xenophobia and political radicalism. The term defines the actions of the state and public groups, undertaken within the framework of countering aggressive nationalism or other forms of unacceptable radicalism, but in fact aimed primarily at unlawful restriction of civil liberties or even directly violating civil liberties. SOVA believes that it fully describes this phenomenon.	Неправомерный антиэкстремизм
Extremism	Ideology of calling for a violent change of the fundamental principles of a democratic state, its constitutional system, its territorial integrity, call for forcible seizure of State power or/and creation of illegal armed groups to achieve these goals, including through undertaking of terrorist acts, and incitement of racial, inter-ethnic, religious or social discord and other antisocial actions.	Экстремизм
Terrorism	The ideology of violence and the practice of committing violent and/or other criminal acts related to the intimidation of the people or violation of public safety, as well as the call for such actions to undermine the constitutional order or to provide Influence on decisions taken by public authorities, local governments or international organizations	Терроризм
Violent Extremism	Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political views	Экстремизм и терроризм
countering extremism	Identification, prevention and suppression of extremist activities by individuals, groups or organizations.	Противодействие экстремизму
radicalism	The beliefs or actions of people who advocate thorough or complete political or social reform	Радикализм

Appendix 3 Linguistic patterns to identify violent extremism content

The goal of this task is to identify the linguistic pattern (a list of commonly used words, phrases) of the terrorist and extremist content from the practice of blocking, as well as online research of the SecDev Foundation through comparative analysis of offline and online listings often used words.

Linguistic patterns, used by extremist and terrorist organizations, can be an effective tool for detecting online content related to violent extremism.

The list of keywords, used by the extremist and terrorist organizations that are prohibited in Kyrgyzstan and a number of other Central Asian countries, developed through this research is based on an analysis of secondary data retrieved from various studies in the field of violent extremism. Samples of the Analyzed studies to identify "linguistic patterns of violent extremism" covered different groups of population with various degrees of radicalization such as: (1) youth, (2) women, (3) migrant workers, (4) convicted for extremist and terrorist offences, (5) foreign fighters returned from war zones.

The list of banned extremist and terrorist organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic[140] (see annex 2), as well as the registry of literature recognized as extremist by the Kyrgyz courts [141] were other useful sources to run this task.

To compile the list of words the content analysis of available interviews, literature, and video products was applied. It is important to mention that the sources of information, including personal data, reflect a different level of radicalization. The German non-governmental organization "Violence Prevention Network" introduces a number of indicators of radicalization, acknowledging it as a dynamic process[142]. A joint study of the Public Council of the State Penitentiary Service of the Kyrgyz Republic and the UNODC among convicted for crimes of extremism and terrorism in 2017 has adapted this system of indicators to the regional context of Central Asia. This model of indicators is a classification tool for extremist ideologies. As a criterium of classification the model also contains speech peculiarities of persons under extremist ideology. This classification model was applied as a methodological framework for the compilation of linguistic patterns reflecting the different levels and patterns of radicalization leading to violence[143].

A brief description of the radicalization model is given below. The figure below illustrates stages of radicalization (adapted from the Violence Prevention Network[144]).

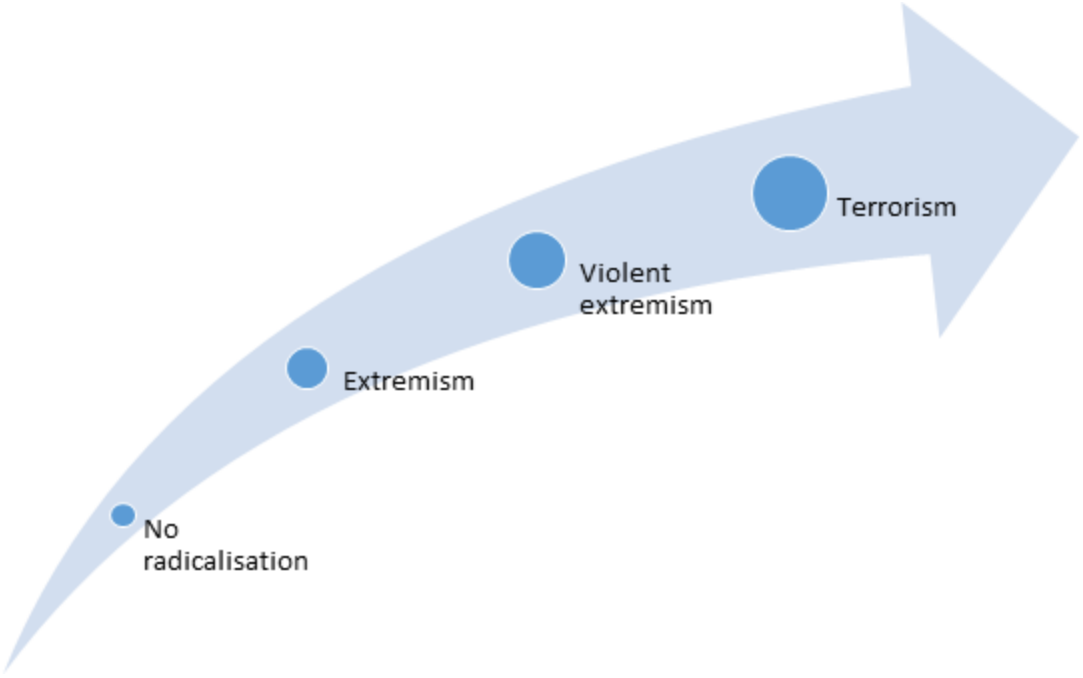
[140] Available by reference: http://religion.gov.kg/ru/relgion_organization/%D1%82%D1%8B%D1%8E%D1%83-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%80/

[141] Available by reference: http://minjust.gov.kg/ky/content/469

[142] Violence Prevention Network, "Deradicalization, Intervention, Prevention", accessed December 20, 2018, http://violence-prevention-network.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Violence-Prevention-Network-Deradicalisation_Intervention_Prevention.pdf

[143] Final report on monitoring of penitentiary establishments on works with convicts for crimes related to terrorism and extremism, Bishkek 2018 - https://capve.org/components/com_jshopping/files/files_products/Monitoring_Report_FINAL_Penitentiary_System_KYR_russian_unodc_2018.pdf

[144] Violence Prevention Network, "Deradicalisation, Intervention, Prevention", accessed December 20, 2018, http://violence-prevention-network.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Violence-Prevention-Network-Deradicalisation_Intervention_Prevention.pdf



As experts argue the context of radicalization leading to violence in Central Asia is closely linked to the misuse of religious beliefs for engaging citizens to radical groups and organizations. This causes a large number of linguistic patterns rooted to religions in general and the Islam in particular. "However, it does not exclude the existence of other violent extremist groups, especially nationalist and xenophobic oriented, which are gaining strength in Central Asia. It is important to understand that violent extremism is not bound to a particular religion or ethnic group."[145]

The analysis of speech and typical words used by persons involved in radicalization leading to violence helped to observe the following two tendencies:

- ❏ Increased degree of radicalization to levels of violent extremism and terrorism is reflected in speech of adherents of these ideas with clear division into "we vs they" There are expressions and words that help do this -"correct Islam" or "true Islam", "wrong", "Murtads", "Kafirs" and so on.

- ❏ The same words used at different levels of radicalization have contradictory meanings. The brightest example of this trend is interpretation of word "jihad". Thus, at level 0 aka "absence of radicalization", this word contains meanings of "self-improvement", "spiritual growth", "overcoming ones weaknesses, bad habits", "serving other people and country through good deeds." At level 2 aka, "violent extremism" and 3 aka "terrorism", the concept of jihad includes other meanings, namely, "armed combat for spreading of Islam", "jihad for the hearts through the sword". The same applies to the terms "Khalifat", "Hijra", and others (see Ladder of Radicalisation).

[145] Citate from: Женщины и насильственный экстремизм в странах Европы и Центральной Азии. Краткие выводы и рекомендации. - ООн Женщины, июнь 2017 \\ Available online: http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2017/women%20and%20violent%20extremism%20in%20europe.pdf?la=ru&vs=944

Level 0	Jihad, Khalifat, Strong faith, Syria, Allah
Level 1	Khalifat, true Muslims, corruption, righteous life, injustice, Allah, Tahir Yuldash, weak state, Hizb-ut Tahrir, Yaquyn Inkar, Islamic State, peaceful way, education, “dua” through prayer (Namaz)
Level 2	Jihad, caliphate, jihad by sword, struggle in the name of Allah, ordinary Islamic State, Amaliyat, Paradise, righteous life, die in the name of Allah, Shia and Sunni, Takfir, Shahid, True Muslims, Murtadis, Hijra, Warriors of Allah, Kufr, kafir Infidels, Syria, preserve Islam in its original form, war against Muslims, blood of an unbeliever
Level 3	Jihad, caliphate, Syria, true Muslims, ordinary Islamic State, Kufr, Mujahijā of Shaama, Amaliyat, kafir Infidels, Daish, warriors of Allah, Shia and Sunni, Abu Bakr, Righteous Path, takfir, Paradise, original Islam, IMU (Islamic Movement Uzbekistan), Abu-Salkh, Hijra, Shahid, jihad through the sword, Jakhshul Mahdi, die in the name of Allah, brothers by Faith, war, true life, Jaamat osclary, Murtadi, Jabhat an-Nusra
Ladder of Radicalisation. Adapted from the Violence Prevention Network[146]	

Level 0. No radicalisation. There are no problems in interaction with representatives of other currents and/or religions, there are no notions of “wrong”, “wrong Islam “. The terms "Jihad ", "Caliphate " are not used in the political sense. Often, words are used related to ritual behavior- "Oroso“, “Namaz" etc. Sources of study of religion-Quran, Hadith, Ijma, for Central Asia-Books of Hanafite and Shafiite Mazhaba. There is no negative attitude to the ideas of the secular state, the caliphate is perceived as a historical tradition.

Level 1. Extremism. Extremism is a radical idea in thinking and behavior. Islam is perceived not only as a religion, but also as a political system. The construction of the caliphate is a farce (required). They do not share the idea of violence. As a way to complete the mission in the construction of the caliphate, they use education, ideas of jihad as a war against the infidels do not share. If their ideology is prohibited in the country, they create an extensive network with followers, in which new members are actively involved. People are divided into believers and unbelievers, but “takfir” (accusation of unbelief) can be made only by Allah or the person himself publicly recognizes the way out of faith. The joint, peaceful residence of representatives of different religions is considered possible. Negative attitude to the ideas of democracy, secular state.

Level 2. Violent extremism. Islam is perceived as a political system. It is allowed to use violence to achieve the goals. There is a clear separation of not just Muslims and representatives of other religions, but also inside Islamic currents on "different" Muslims. They consider it possible to endure takfir, Kafirs (infidels) are those who do not share their

[146] Violence Prevention Network, “Deradicalisation, Intervention, Prevention”, accessed December 20, 2018, http://violence-prevention-network.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Violence-Prevention-Network-Deradicalisation_Intervention_Prevention.pdf

ideas, including family and close environment. They consider it impossible to live together with the representatives of different religions who have peaceful views of Islam religion. They call and force for jihad as a "war with the infidels." It brings very negative attitude to the ideas of democracy, secular State, and human rights. They are actively calling for the departure to the zones of armed conflict.

Level 3. Terrorism. The ideology is the same as at the previous level, expressed in its extreme degree. At this level, they commit active actions such as the establishment, organization and implementation of terrorist activities.

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