



DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE: CENTRAL ASIA SUPPORT FOR STABLE SOCIETIES (CASSS)

SUMMARY OF CASSS RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Central Asia Support for Stable Societies used a mixed methods research design to identify and test risk factors for mobilization to violent extremism in Central Asia. Implemented in 2019, this design employed qualitative and quantitative field research in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan as well as online research on the presence of extremist groups on Central Asian social media. This research determined that mobilization to violent extremism is the result of the interaction of three overlapping processes: the development of individual vulnerabilities, the process of selection, and exposure to social settings supportive of extremism.¹

The first process, the emergence of **individual vulnerability** to violent extremism, is determined by six risk factors identified by CASSS research: **age, ethnicity, perceived injustice, experience of a personal or family crisis, lack of strong family and social support networks, and lack of religious freedom.** Our research showed that individuals exhibiting these factors are more susceptible to adopting extremist beliefs or engaging in extremist actions.

Vulnerability alone does not lead to mobilization to VE. Individual paths to mobilization occur through **exposure to social settings which provide moral and intellectual support for violent extremist ideas and actions.** These social settings exist in both real-world and online environments, and the two are increasingly entwined and mutually reinforcing. Absent exposure to these specific social settings, vulnerable people do not radicalize or mobilize to violent extremism.

Not all individuals are equally likely to be exposed to social settings supportive of extremism. The third process, **selection,** is the social process through which individuals with varying degrees of vulnerability are exposed to real-world and online social settings supportive of extremism. CASSS research showed that three factors increase an individual's risk of selection for exposure to social settings supportive of extremism: migration, social and family networks, and interests and preferences.

¹ This document presents an overview of CASSS research findings regarding hotspot communities in Central Asia, the primary risk factors for extremism, and how these risks interact to lead to overall extremism risk. This document does not present evidence or data from CASSS qualitative and quantitative research to support these findings.

Overall extremism risk results from the interaction between vulnerability, selection, and exposure. Individual pathways through these processes are diverse and highly individual, defying easy categorization. In spite of this, there are a cluster of processes – erosion of family and social support, personal and family crises, conflicts in communities and families over religion, migration – that shape individual life trajectories in ways that increase risk and move individuals towards radicalization and mobilization. Understanding how these risks and processes emerge, interact, and impact individuals and communities, is essential for designing risk reduction and prevention programming.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Throughout seven months in 2019, CASSS implemented a mixed methods research design to identify and test risk factors for violent extremism in Central Asia. The research design was informed by a thorough review of previous research on causal factors for violent extremism in Central Asia. During background research, CASSS developed a detailed geographic database of foreign terrorist fighter mobilizations between 2010 and 2018. With this data, CASSS identified hotspot communities, those communities that witnessed disproportionately high rates of mobilization to violent extremism for their populations. Following this, CASSS conducted a qualitative research component, the Individual Risk and Resilience Study (IRRS).² The IRRS was based on interviews with convicted extremists in Kyrgyz prisons and a demographically and geographically matched control group drawn from hotspot communities in the Kyrgyz Republic. The quantitative research component, the Community Risk and Resilience Capacity Study (CRRCS)³, was conducted in hotspot communities that witnessed high rates of mobilization to violent extremism between 2010-2018 and a comparison group of matched communities that had not witnessed high rates of mobilization over the same time period in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Concurrently, CASSS conducted three cycles of digital research and monitoring to define the extent of the extremism ecosystem online in Central Asia.

IDENTIFYING HOTSPOT COMMUNITIES

CASSS developed a detailed geographic database of foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) departures and arrests for extremism and terrorism in Central Asia between 2010 and 2018.⁴ Using this database, CASSS identified hotspot communities in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan that witnessed disproportionately high rates of mobilization to violent extremism. In Tajikistan, the country for which CASSS has the most detailed demographic data for FTF departures, these hotspot cities and districts account for 92% of FTF departures while accounting for 27% of Tajikistan's entire population. In the other CASSS countries, CASSS estimates that hotspot communities account for 80% to 90% of FTF departures from each country during this period. The table below displays the hotspot communities in each country, at the lowest administrative level possible from the data available for each country.

² The Individual Risk and Resilience Study and its associated interview tools and sampling methodology were developed by CASSS.

³ The Community Risk and Resilience Study, its survey questionnaire, and its sampling methodology were developed by CASS based on the results of the IRRS.

⁴ This database drew on a number of different sources, including official government figures for FTFs for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (<https://akhbor-rus.com/-p1350-122.htm>), open source reporting of FTFs for each country, and government figures for arrests on terrorism and extremism charges.

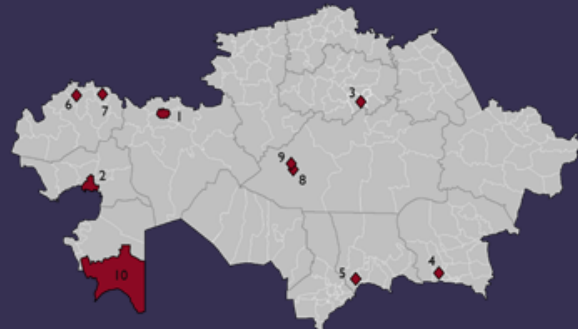
Violent Extremism Hotspot Communities in Central Asia



KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Districts and Cities

1	Ton
2	Suzak
3	Bazar-Korgon
4	Osh city
5	Aravan
6	Nookat
7	Kara-Suu
8	Kadamjai



KAZAKHSTAN

Region District City

1	Aqtobe	Aqtobe
2	Atyrau	Atyrau
3	Astana	Astana
4	Almaty	Almaty
5	Zhambyl	Zhambyl
6	Western KZ	Uralsk
7	Western KZ	Aksay
8	Karaganda	Zhezkazgan
9	Karaganda	Satpaev
10	Mangystau	Karakiya Zhanaozen



TAJIKISTAN

Districts and Cities

1	Isfara
2	Spitamen
3	Istarazshan
4	Dushanbe
5	Vahdat
6	Shahrinaw
7	Nurobod
8	Norak
9	Kulob
10	Qubodiyon
11	Shahrituz
12	Vanj



UZBEKISTAN

Regions

1	Andijan
2	Fergana
3	Tashkent
4	Jizzakh
5	Samarkand
6	Surxondaryo

VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Vulnerability to violent extremism is defined as the level of individual susceptibility to adopting extremist beliefs or engaging in extremist actions. CASSS research identified six specific risk factors that raise individual susceptibility to violent extremism.

CASE STUDY: YOUNG WOMAN FROM UZBEKISTAN

A young nurse lives with her mother and abusive stepfather who tell her she is worthless and unworthy of love as she is unmarried at age 30. Increasingly isolated, she reaches out to people online and meets and falls in love with a man in Syria. He tells her that her skills are valuable and much needed in Syria. She leaves Uzbekistan and makes her way to Syria where she treats wounded militants for two years.

PERSONAL OR FAMILY CRISIS

CASSS research confirmed that experience of a personal or family crisis increases vulnerability to extremism. In CASSS case studies, significant life events, such as an economic dislocation, becoming married, or the death of a close friend or family member caused personal crises and openings to radical changes in beliefs and values. These personal crises led to a rapid increase in interest in religion, beginning a process that eventually led to radicalization and mobilization. This personal crisis is often accompanied by a related crisis with the family when an individual's new beliefs and attitudes cause tension and conflicts within their families. Family crises can be either the cause or the result of processes leading towards mobilization. An example from our case studies of family crisis as cause is domestic violence driving a young woman to find friendship and support online, leading to her recruitment (see highlight). An example from our case studies of family crisis as a result of radicalization was the case of a young man's religious awakening after the death of a close friend causing conflict with his secular family. Whether the family crisis precedes the initiation of the process of radicalization, or happens concurrently with it, the fact that the personal crisis may sever or strain ties with family and social networks shows how this risk can compound and augment other risks.

STRENGTH OF FAMILY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

CASSS research confirmed that weak family and social support networks increase individual vulnerability to violent extremism by increasing the impact of personal and family crises on individuals and by increasing susceptibility to exposure to social settings supportive of extremism. As we will see in the following section, exposure to social settings that provide moral justifications for violent extremism are essential in facilitating processes of radicalization and mobilization. When faced with a crisis, individuals with weak family and social support networks are less able to cope constructively with their challenges and are more likely to look to outside sources for moral, emotional, or practical support, increasing their chances of exposure to violent extremist networks and also increasing the impact of that exposure due to the absence of strong countervailing effects of family and community.

FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

CASSS research confirmed that individuals who do not feel free to express their religious beliefs in their community are more vulnerable to violent extremism. When we discuss lack of religious freedom we are addressing two related but distinct topics. The first is state control of religion and suppression of modes of religious expression that the state deems deviant or threatening. The second are divisions and conflicts within communities and families over religious expression that are independent of state action. This conflict in communities often plays out intergenerationally with youth adopting new modes of religious expression at odds with the normative Islamic practice of older generations, leading to family conflicts and crises which increase vulnerabilities.

It is important to point out that CASSS research revealed starkly different impacts on vulnerability between increased religiosity and lack of religious freedom. The CRRCS survey showed no correlations between increasing religiosity and feelings of freedom of religious expression, or to other measures of vulnerability. In fact those who said that religion plays a more important role for them reported significantly *lower* levels of marginalization in their communities. Conversely, those who reported feeling not free to express their religious beliefs in their communities were much more likely to report perceptions of injustice and low levels of family and social support. These stark differences show that ***it is not the issue of increasing religiosity per se that increases extremism risk. Rather, it is adopting religious beliefs that put one at odds with one's community, and the resulting social opprobrium, stigmatization, and marginalization, that increases vulnerability.***

PERCEIVED INJUSTICE

CASSS research confirmed that a sense of perceived injustice increases individual vulnerability to violent extremism. CASSS research has shown that perceptions of injustice and discrimination are quite widespread, and exist not just in communities that experienced high levels of foreign fighter mobilizations, but throughout regions populated by ethnic minorities, peripheral regions often neglected by the state, and communities whose economic fortunes have evaporated. CASSS research showed that many individuals who mobilized to violent extremism shared similar views as those in their communities regarding the corruption of the police and other state bodies. Several cases framed jihad as a way to fashion a more just society, though a just society was defined more in moral and religious terms than in political and social terms. For these cases, grievances about injustice were focused on the moral and religious corruption of their communities and countries. In some cases, specific experiences of injustice were instrumental in individuals' paths to mobilization

CASE STUDY: YOUNG COUPLE FROM UZBEKISTAN

A young couple from Uzbekistan tragically lose their only child at the age of one. The loss and grief deepen their religious faith and the husband begins growing a beard while his wife begins wearing the hijab. The local security forces take notice and begin bringing the young couple into the police station for questioning. The man finds it hard to find a job. Under pressure from family and state, the couple decides to migrate to the Gulf for work and more freedom. There they are drawn into extremist circles, after which they depart for Syria.

AGE

CASSS research confirmed that age is an important risk factor for mobilization to violent extremism. Demographic evidence gathered during CASSS research showed that youth between the ages of 18 and 35 were significantly overrepresented in those who mobilized to violent extremism and those arrested for extremism and terrorism charges.

CASSS research suggests that the primary reason youth are more vulnerable is that other risks for vulnerability tend to cluster and overlap in youth. CASSS research showed that youth reported significantly higher levels of perceived injustice and lower levels of religious freedom and weaker family and social support networks than older generations. Young people are also more inclined to risk-taking behavior, less tied to family and community, and more prone to crises of identity, all of which increase vulnerabilities.

CASE STUDY: YOUNG MAN FROM THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

A young man makes ends meet by running a small stall in the bazaar. One day, the man from whom he rents the stall tries to extort him for more money, threatening to evict him from the stall if he doesn't pay. A confrontation ensues involving the owner's bodyguard who tries to evict the young man. The police are called and only the young man is arrested and charged. Although not in the past interested in extremism, he has two relatives, a brother and cousin, already in Syria. Knowing the young man's predicament, they reach out to him and tell him he will never receive justice in the Kyrgyz Republic. The young man's relatives help facilitate his travel to Syria to join the Islamic State.

Another important dynamic of youth vulnerability to mobilization to violent extremism is the cohort effect. A cohort effect is when a group that is born in a certain time and region experience the same or similar life experiences simultaneously, leading to shared perceptions, characteristics, or outcomes that are unique to that group and different from other age cohorts. It is clear that the category of youth in our study experienced several exceptional circumstances over the past two decades that shaped youth vulnerability and contributed to the mass mobilizations to violent extremism witnessed in Central Asia between 2010 and 2018. First, there was the spread of internet access among youth in Central Asia, particularly through mobile internet, beginning in the mid-late 2000s. This rapid growth in access to the internet after 2008 overlapped with another external event which had dramatic impacts in Central Asia: the conflict in Syria and the rise of the associated armed extremist groups. Images and videos of the conflict in Syria, particularly the suffering of civilians, women, and children, were instrumental in mobilizing individuals to Syria from Central. There were also national-level trends which compounded risks for the youth cohort entering adulthood in the 2010s, the most prominent being the 2010 ethnic conflict in the Kyrgyz Republic and its impact on Uzbek-majority communities. While structural inequalities and discrimination impact Uzbek communities as a whole, it is clear that the 2010 events created unique vulnerabilities for Uzbek young adults in the Kyrgyz Republic.

MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

CASSS research confirmed that membership in marginalized communities, particularly but not exclusively ethnic minorities, is a risk factor for vulnerability to violent extremism. Much like age, vulnerabilities overlap in marginalized communities in ways that increase risks. Ethnic Uzbek populations in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan mobilized at significantly higher rates than other groups in both countries between 2010 and 2018. Uzbek respondents reported consistently higher levels of perceived injustice, frequency of bribe payment, lack of religious freedom, and lower levels of family and social support. Additionally, Uzbek respondents in Tajikistan reported much higher levels of labor migration than Tajiks. With high rates of outward migration from Tajikistan, and also Uzbekistan, this facilitates increased exposure in migration to social settings supportive of extremism.

Marginalized communities are not limited to ethnic minorities, and indeed there are some ethnic minorities in Central Asia that don't exhibit similar levels of increased vulnerability. Patterns of mobilization in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan showed that economically distressed and peripheral mono-industry towns witnessed disproportionate levels of mobilization. The social, economic, and political situations in these communities mirrors those experienced by Uzbek minorities in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Membership in marginalized communities, like the other demographic risk factor of age, is critical in that it is in these communities that other risk factors overlap, compounding and increasing overall extremism risk. Marginalized communities reported more experiences of injustice and perceptions of powerlessness and marginalization. CASSS research showed that in some cases marginalized communities presented weaker family and social support networks, perhaps a social result of marginalization and discrimination itself while also being an important risk factor for vulnerability. While confirming that membership in marginalized communities is an important risk factor, **CASSS research does not suggest that there is anything inherent in ethnic minorities' or marginalized communities' culture or identity which raises risk. Instead it is the social, economic, and political position of these communities that facilitates the overlapping and compounding of risk factors for vulnerability.**

OVERALL VULNERABILITY

Overall vulnerability to extremism results from the clustering and interaction of these factors, and not their operation in isolation. CASSS research showed that these vulnerabilities are widespread and not confined to communities that witnessed high rates of mobilization to violent extremism. While processes of vulnerability are important in creating a susceptible population, they are insufficient on their own in explaining why some people mobilize to violent extremism and others do not, or why some communities witness high rates of mobilizations while other very similar communities do not.

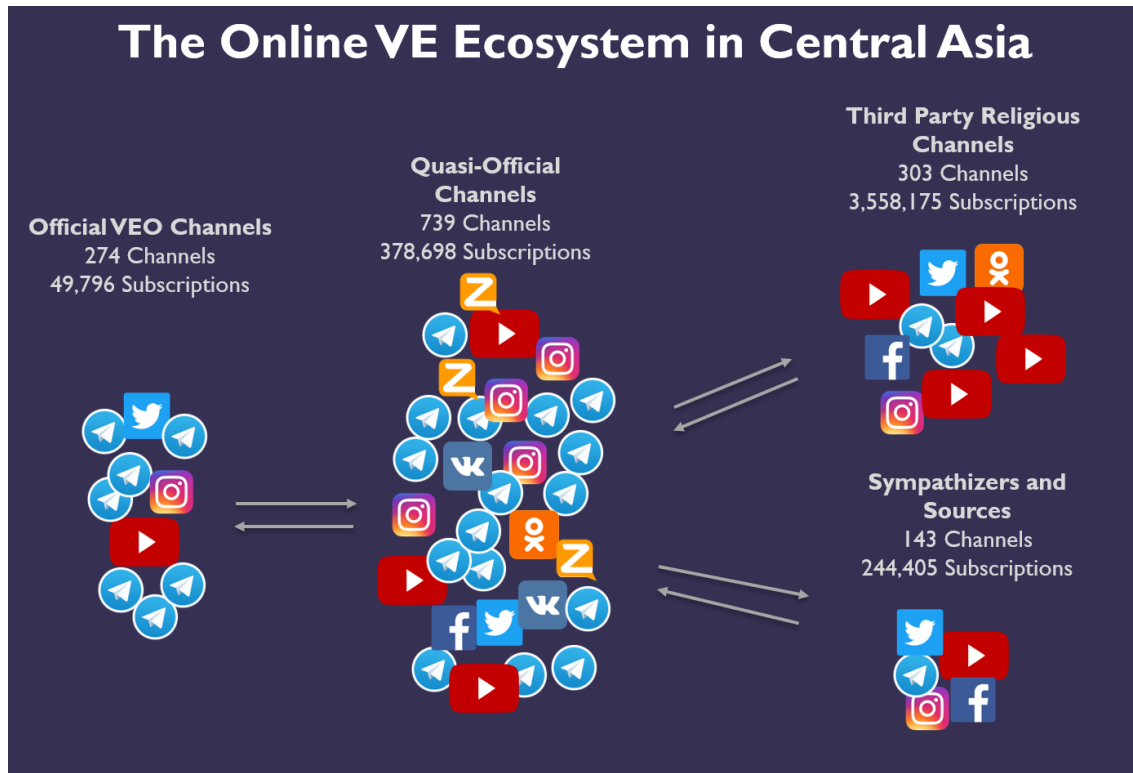
EXPOSURE

Vulnerability alone does not lead to radicalization or mobilization. CASSS case studies showed that vulnerability only facilitates radicalization or mobilization when an individual is exposed to social settings that provide moral and intellectual justification for extremism and violence. Exposure to these settings, and deeper involvement in them, presents the individual with the *possibility* of extremist action as modeled by a peer or family member, and immersion in a community whose morality supports extremist actions, be it mobilization to a foreign conflict or conducting a domestic attack. When exposed to these social settings, individuals with higher levels of vulnerability are more likely to be influenced and to adopt extremist ideas or take violent action. CASSS research showed that these social settings exist in both real-world and online settings, and also that the distinction between real-world and online settings is becoming increasingly blurred due to the pervasive influence of social media and digital communications.

Extremism-enabling social settings are not equally distributed in space and time. Online, they are associated with particular platforms, forums, or networks. Offline, some communities, cities, or countries have more of these kinds of settings at particular times. This is critical to understand in Central Asia, as most individuals encountered these social settings in locations far distant from their home communities – specifically while in labor migration in Russia and Turkey. Three-quarters of CASSS cases of mobilization either mobilized while in migration or spent time in migration in the three years before their mobilization. Migration did not show a strong connection with vulnerability in CASSS research. Other than generally selecting for youth and individuals from marginalized communities, individuals with experience in migration did not show increased levels of vulnerability when compared to those in their communities who had no experience in migration. ***Why then the connection between migration and mobilization?*** It appears that migration settings were particularly conducive to the development of the social settings supportive of extremism, and it was here that young people from Central Asia were most often exposed to these settings. What determines why these settings emerge in some places and not others, and what are the peculiar features of these settings that support processes of radicalization?

REAL-WORLD SOCIAL SETTINGS

There are several features of these extremism-enabling social settings. First, they are generally characterized by a preponderance of young men. Second, these settings lack traditional authority figures like parents/older generations or traditional religious leaders that can promote and enforce community moral rules. Third, these settings often have antagonistic relationships with local security and political authorities, and the law-based moral rules they reinforce. These settings provide contexts in which young people, often men, explore and adopt new moral and religious values. Migrant communities in Russia and Turkey, which skew young and male, provide closed social settings absent the moderating influence of older generations and traditional leaders, and weaker enforcement of norms due to the peripheral presence of policing. In Kazakhstan, the social contexts of isolated, mono-industry towns appear to provide similar ecologies to those experienced in migrant communities. There were numerous cases of radicalization in such cities associated with mixed martial arts clubs and petty criminal networks, both of which are also dominated by young men and lack moderating influences and policing.

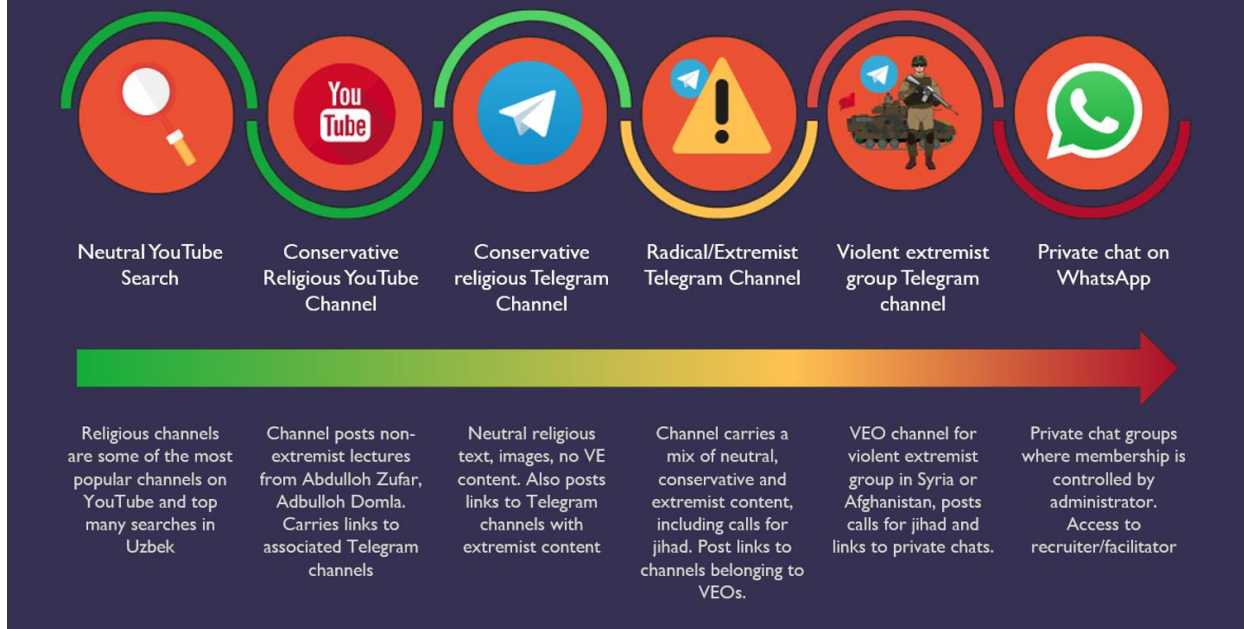


ONLINE SOCIAL SETTINGS

The characteristics of online extremism-enabling social settings mirror and reinforce those of real-world settings. Generally, decisions to mobilize to violent extremism were not the result of consuming extremist media online but of engaging in online communities of like-minded individuals that provided moral and intellectual justification for extremism. It is on forums and chat rooms on encrypted social media and messaging platforms that we located such activity. Although a minority, CASSS research identified several cases of individuals who mobilized to Iraq and Syria solely through online engagement without any face-to-face interaction with extremists. How do some individuals find themselves involved in these specific online environments? Both the structure of the online extremist ecosystem and the online experiences of our case studies provide insight here.

CASSS research defined the structure of the online violent extremism ecosystem in Central Asia. Despite the efforts of social media platforms and regional governments to remove violent extremist media and accounts over the preceding decade, a vibrant and active VE information and communication ecosystem exists on Central Asian social media. CASSS began by identifying the official social media accounts (channels) of the twelve VE groups known to recruit Central Asians and distribute content in Central Asia languages, finding over 250 channels on a variety of social media platforms. These accounts are constantly being removed by social media platforms though they are just as quickly replaced by extremist groups, leading to a general stasis of the number of official accounts online. CASSS then identified all the accounts that share links to or content from these Official Channels. These accounts represent a larger group of Quasi-Official Channels. These channels are clearly affiliated with extremist groups, and much of their content is drawn from these groups, but they do not directly promote their affiliation, which allows them to avoid removal by social media platforms. CASSS then explored all of the

Pathways Through the Online VE Ecosystem



social media channels that share content from or links to the Quasi-Official Channels. The largest group that CASSS identified is the Third-Party Religious Channels. These channels are predominantly conservative Islamic religious channels, mostly Salafi in orientation. Most of the material these channels share is not violent or extremist, though a small percentage (under 5%) is, and shares links back to Quasi-Official channels. This allows Third Party Religious channels to generally avoid deplatforming, increasing their time online and ability to attract large followings. It is often through these Third-Party Religious channels where individuals are first exposed to extremist media.

Individuals generally do not first access extremist material from extremist social media accounts – they access this material when it is shared through other neutral networks, or shared by friends or relations within their own online networks. The structure of the online ecosystem facilitates the movement of media out from extremists to neutral audiences, while also facilitating the movement of individuals from neutral channels, to channels sympathetic to extremists, to the channels of extremist groups themselves. Likewise, this inward flow moves users from open platforms used primarily for sharing content (YouTube), to hybrid channels used to share content that can also host encrypted communication (Telegram), to channels predominantly used for group and person-to-person communication in an encrypted setting (WhatsApp, Signal). Users move from being content consumers to active engagers in online communities and networks, and it is here that we find the extremism-enabling social settings. This structure and pathway conforms to processes described in case studies of individuals' engagement with digital media, where initial engagement with neutral material led individuals to more extreme material and networks, through which they made contact with individuals and groups that facilitated their mobilization.

The centrality of exposure in online or real-world settings in case studies of mobilization highlights the impact of close social networks on individual decisions around mobilization to extremism. Individual decisions regarding mobilization to violent extremism are primarily impacted by the opinions, values, and morals of an individual's immediate social environment. In sixty-four percent of CASSS's case studies of mobilization to violent extremism, individuals had a family member, friend, or acquaintance who was already involved in extremism.

SELECTION: WHO GETS EXPOSED AND WHY

The key process that links vulnerability to exposure is selection. The previous section highlighted the importance of exposure to social settings that provide moral and intellectual justifications for violent extremism in facilitating processes of radicalization and mobilization. Our research suggests that not everyone is equally likely to be exposed to these settings, and those who are considered highly vulnerable are not necessarily more likely to be exposed to these settings than those who are considered low vulnerability. Selection is the collection of social processes by which individuals with varying degrees of vulnerability are selected for exposure to social settings supportive of extremism.

MIGRATION

CASSS identified three primary factors for selection. The first is migration. As shown above, migrant communities in Turkey and Russia provide conducive environments for the development of social settings supportive of extremism. Individuals who migrate to these locations are at increased risk for exposure to these settings. Migration, then, selects individuals with varying levels of vulnerability for increased risk of exposure to radicalizing social settings.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

The second selection factor is social and family networks. CASSS case studies of radicalization show clearly how social and family networks make some individuals more likely to be exposed to social settings supporting violent extremism. The mechanism for this is easily intuited: our social interactions and the social environments we encounter are largely structured by our family and social networks. Those who have extremists within their family and social networks are much more likely to find themselves in social settings supportive of extremism.

CASE STUDY: YOUNG MAN FROM THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

A young man from Osh has a personal crisis after the death of his best friend in an accident. Drawn to religion, he embraces his Islamic faith with new vigor which places him at odds with his largely secular family. Engaging with local religious leaders, he is not impressed by their level of religious learning, so begins to research religion online. There, he is drawn first to conservative Salafism, and then to increasingly extreme material. Further isolating himself from his family, he contacts a recruiter online who eventually facilitates his mobilization to Syria.

INTERESTS AND PREFERENCES

The third selection factor is interests and preferences. CASSS research showed that individual interests and preferences may play a role in selecting some individuals for higher levels of exposure to violent extremist networks and ideas in a way that cannot be adequately explained by other risk factors. These interests and preferences fall into several categories. The first is a preference for thrill seeking behavior. The second is engagement in a specific activity or field of activity which on the surface may not be directly related to extremism, but in fact provided an environment where social settings supportive of extremism arose. One example of this is sports clubs in Kazakhstan. While engagement in sport does not make one more vulnerable to extremism, sports clubs could provide a conducive environment for social settings supportive of extremism – mostly populated by young men, little oversight – and may be disproportionately targeted by extremists. Finally, individuals who actively pursued religious knowledge online, and particularly engaged in online forums and discussions on conservative Islamic practice were at higher risk of selection.

CONCLUSION

Extremism risk results from the complex interaction of the three processes of vulnerability, exposure and selection. Processes that give rise to vulnerability are necessary to provide a population that is susceptible to adopting violent extremist ideas or engaging in extremist actions. Vulnerability alone, however, does not fully explain who mobilizes and who does not, or why some communities witness higher rates of mobilization than others. Social settings that provide moral and intellectual support for violent extremism are necessary to provide a context in which individuals access models of behavior that present extremist actions as possible and justifiable. These social settings are not equally distributed in the real world or in the online environment. This highlights the necessity of the third process, the process of selection. For the most part, Central Asians did not mobilize to violent extremism in large numbers in Central Asia over the past decade, but it was in migration that individuals found themselves exposed to the social settings that facilitated mobilization and radicalization.

These processes do not occur in a linear fashion (increasing vulnerability leads to selection leads to exposure) but should be understood as occurring at the same time in parallel. At any one time, risk factors are increasing individual vulnerabilities, while selection factors are selecting individuals with varying degrees of vulnerability for exposure to social settings conducive to extremism. The presence or absence of selection and exposure risk factors for specific individuals explains why some low vulnerability individuals may mobilize to violent extremism, while many high vulnerability individuals never mobilize at all. CASSS research also suggests that the geographic distribution of mobilizations to

CASE STUDY: YOUNG MAN FROM THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

A young man from the Kyrgyz Republic migrates with his father to Russia for work. In Russia, he meets a group of young men at the mosque who are interested in extremism. The young man begins adopting more conservative expressions of Islam. This causes conflict with his father who does not approve, and the young man moves to a different city in Russia to work. There, he meets a recruiter who further influences the young man's beliefs and eventually facilitates his travel to Turkey and Syria.

violent extremism over the past decade is not determined solely by vulnerability. Hotspot communities that witnessed high rates of mobilization did not necessarily show higher levels of vulnerability than neighboring communities that had lower rates of mobilization, suggesting that selection and exposure processes, in particular social and family networks, played an important role in the emergence of hotspot communities.

FROM RESEARCH TO PROGRAMMING

These research results provide a coherent framework for understanding how overall extremism risk arises in Central Asia and is captured in CASSS's Extremism Risk Framework. This framework provides an important foundation to programming:

- 1) The risk framework identifies the key risks that need to be addressed through prevention programming.
- 2) The risk framework models how different risks interact which can guide multi-layered interventions.
- 3) The risk framework can assist in the development of more effective risk assessment tools to support program targeting and recruitment.
- 4) The risk framework identifies key social processes linked to the emergence of vulnerability, selection, and exposure. Interruption of these processes should be a primary objective of prevention programming.