

Strengthening Youth Resilience to Radicalization

Evidence from Tajikistan



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Evidence
from
Tajikistan

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Foreword

Tajikistan has been making significant efforts to counter terrorism, religious extremism, and illicit drug smuggling over the last few years. To this end, it adopted national strategies and concepts on Countering Terrorism and Extremism (2016–20), Illicit Drug Trafficking (2013–20), Countering Money-Laundering, Financing of Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction (2018–25). In January 2020, President Rahmon signed the revised Law on Fighting Terrorism. In strengthening the collaboration on related challenges with, inter alia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU), Tajikistan seeks support from the international community to “establish effective cooperation and provide financial and technical support to countries fragile in counteraction to terrorism” (Rahmon, 2019).

As an IDA beneficiary country having oscillated between low and lower middle income in recent years, the inherited restrictions to economic openness have decelerated transition, delayed socio-economic development, and deprived many people (especially young) in Tajikistan of professional perspectives other than those found through migration or illicit, non-productive activities.

Against the backdrop of Tajikistan’s specific politico-geographic context (with 1,400 kilometers of shared border with Afghanistan), demographic pressures, and socio-economic legacy issues, the Government has requested World Bank Group support in efforts to address and overcome its specific fragility challenges. With support from the IDA-18 Risk Mitigation Regime, the country received close to US\$100 million in “top-up” IDA financing for the Resilience Strengthening Program (RSP)¹ that aims to provide a comprehensive package of investments, services and livelihoods to underserved areas bordering Afghanistan. The study presented here has provided critical inputs to the design of this Program, notably with respect to the identification of the local drivers of fragility and violence as well as the tailored measures to address them.

This study is very timely as it coincides with the launch of the World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020-2025. The Strategy emphasizes as one of its four pillars of engagement, Preventing Violent Conflict and Interpersonal Violence, including violent extremism, and stresses the need to support potential sources of resilience to mitigate risks and strengthen coping capacities.

In line with the Strategy, this report on Tajikistan – the first in a programmatic series of a multi-country analysis on Central Asia: *Development Approaches for Preventing Violent Extremism* – has sought to deepen the understanding of related challenges by providing primary research, conducted by the World Bank Group on these issues, applying a structured, qualitative methodology aimed at filling existing knowledge gaps. As such, the evidence provided in this study informs the global understanding of the processes that (could) lead to radicalization and violent extremism, raising as-of-yet unanswered questions as stimulation

¹ The RSP comprises three projects, viz., the *Socio-Economic Resilience Strengthening Project*, the *Tajikistan Rural Electrification Project*, and the *Rural Economy Development Project*.

for future research in Central Asia and other regions of the world, as well on opportunities to strengthen youth resilience as a precondition to addressing risks to politico-economic stability and social cohesion – and, ultimately, internal peace.

The report outlines recommendations for policy responses, centering on youth inclusion as a central strategy to strengthen resilience to radicalization and violent extremism on several levels. They span from interventions aimed at reducing (individual) perceptions of exclusion to increasing economic opportunities and overcoming perceptions of injustice. Through this study, and the interventions thus inspired, the World Bank Group remains committed to collaborating with Tajikistan in its efforts to strengthen its citizens' socio-economic understanding, social cohesion, and experiences (not only perceptions) of social justice.



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The World Bank team is especially grateful for the support for this study from the national and local authorities of Tajikistan, and for the careful review by agencies of the government of Tajikistan of the methodology and content presented in the final report.

Abbreviations

CVE	Countering violent extremism
DRS	Districts of Republican Subordination
FGD	Focus groups discussions
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GoT	Government of the Republic of Tajikistan
IDA	International Development Association
IS	Islamic State
MSDSP	Mountain Societies Development Support Program
NEET	Youth not in Education, Employment, or Training
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
RMR	Risk Mitigation Regime
VE	Violent extremist
WBG	World Bank Group
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate

Executive Summary

What drives young people in Central Asia to become radicalized and vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups, and what can be done to help prevent this? These questions are the focus of this report, which is the first part of a multi-country study called *Central Asia: Development Approaches for Preventing Violent Extremism* that analyzes the youth, gender, and local dimensions of radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist (VE) groups in the region and presents policy recommendations to address them. Tajikistan offers a useful initial analysis for understanding these dynamics and developing approaches to address them. The country is the origin of a relatively high number of Islamic State (IS) recruits² and is one of the four pilot countries for the IDA-18 *Risk Mitigation Regime* (RMR), which seeks to manage fragility risks through tailored development interventions aimed at increasing individuals and community resilience.

The report provides the first primary research conducted in Tajikistan by the World Bank Group (WBG) to analyze the youth, gender and local dimensions of radicalization and recruitment by VE groups, helping fill a gap in such analysis and evidence. It is based on qualitative research conducted across Tajikistan in 2018 and builds on the government of Tajikistan's official statistics as well as existing literature on socio-economic conditions and violent extremism in the country. The research provided critical inputs to three projects under the *Resilience Strengthening Program* (RSP³) which is supported by the IDA-18 *Risk Mitigation Regime* through a contribution close to \$US100 million. In particular, this study informed the design of the \$37-million Socio-Economic Resilience Strengthening Project, an intervention that focuses on vulnerable communities and youth groups along border areas with Afghanistan. This report also seeks to contribute to the global understanding of radicalization and violent extremism, particularly in the context of the first pillar of the WBG *Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence 2020-2025* focusing on preventing violent conflict and interpersonal violence.

² Comparative data on Central Asian states suggests that the number of recruits from Tajikistan who travelled to Syria and Iraq was roughly equivalent to that of Uzbekistan, the population of which is more than four times that of Tajikistan (see, e.g., Barrett 2017). According to the government of Tajikistan, since 2011, 1,899 citizens have joined terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with most choosing IS.

³ The RSP, presented to the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors in summer 2019, comprises three projects: the Tajikistan Socio-Economic Resilience Strengthening Project, the Tajikistan Rural Electrification Project, and the Rural Economy Development Project.

With this research, the WBG aims at providing additional insights and offering innovative solutions to emerging development challenges – with efforts to overcome socio-economic exclusion, as separate dimension from ending (extreme) poverty. The issues covered in this report have important development implications of interest to the WBG and other development organizations. Violent extremism can be viewed as a social phenomenon with greater detrimental impacts than those caused by a single violent attack. As shown in this report, a broad acceptance of radical views is detrimental to young people’s development, cohesive and inclusive communities and has negative developmental impacts that disproportionately affect women and girls, hindering their right to education and self-realization. Preventing violent extremism requires the involvement of actors outside the security realm, including practitioners of psychology and pedagogy, as well as human rights and religious leaders, community development actors, social service providers, civil society, and development organizations.⁴ Tailored development approaches can therefore be instrumental in addressing these challenges and provide preventative responses to affected countries which can be more cost-effective than remedial actions (The World Bank/United Nations, 2018).

Context

“Poverty, unemployment, the low level of literacy and social protection of the population are among factors that urge people to develop violent ideas to seek for social justice”

President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon,
at the opening of the 2018 Conference on Countering
Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in Dushanbe

Tajikistan is vulnerable to the rise of violent extremism. The legacy of the 1992–97 civil war still threatens the country’s social cohesion. The state’s approach to public policy and economic management is centralized. Population growth is high,⁵ per capita income is low, and young people have limited skills and employment opportunities. Such socio-economic conditions increase the vulnerability of young people, both at home and as migrants abroad, to violent extremist ideologies and contributes to social fragility, especially in the southern districts along the border with Afghanistan. In recent years, the domestic risks related to violent extremism in Tajikistan have increased. On July 29, 2018, the first terrorist attack against foreign tourists occurred in Tajikistan’s Khatlon region. The IS claimed responsibility for it, along with major prison riots in Khujand in November 2018 and *Vahdat* in May 2019 that caused dozens of deaths.

⁴ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights. A Guide for South-Eastern Europe. Vienna: April 2019.

⁵ Tajikistan’s population growth rate was 2.2% between 2008-2017.

The government of Tajikistan has made countering the rise of violent extremism a priority. It has banned 17 Islamist groups, including VE groups as well as political Islamist groups advocating for profound social and political change, and enforced other restrictions on religious practice. *The National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2016–20* (GoT 2016) includes several preventive measures, including: addressing socio-economic prerequisites of extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism; conducting awareness-raising, educational, and mindset-related activities to counter radical ideology, especially among adolescents and youth; preventing the radicalization and recruitment of vulnerable women into VE groups by their close relatives through awareness-raising activities and by increasing their economic opportunities; and preventing the radicalization and recruitment of Tajik labor migrants into VE groups by providing more support services at home and abroad. In a statement delivered May 17, 2019, at the high-level international conference on “International and Regional Co-operation on Countering Terrorism and its Financing through Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime,” Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon explicitly referred to the importance of addressing the socio-economic conditions contributing to radicalization in conjunction with the security and military measures against terrorism (President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2019).

Methodology

The study utilized qualitative research tools. The research instruments were customized to the local context and designed to elicit reliable responses to sensitive research questions. The research focused on groups of people at risk of radicalization: young men and women aged 18–30 with low to middle incomes; returning migrants, including deportees and persons banned from re-entry into Russia; and vulnerable women.⁶ The research team therefore used a combination of approaches for the study. Qualitative data were collected from April through June 2018 at 14 locations across every region of Tajikistan using a stratified qualitative sampling frame.⁷ Study respondents, identified using purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods, included 34 focus group discussions with 295 participants and 35 individual interviews, for a total of 330 respondents.

⁶ This first group of respondents included young men and women with a secondary school diploma or less, higher education students, employed, self-employed and youth not in education, employment or training; “vulnerable women” includes those with two or more children, migrants’ wives, and women divorced or abandoned by their husbands. Interviewed women in this category were 35–40 years old.

⁷ The sample consisted of at least one urban and one rural settlement from each of the administrative regions, which means that the sample automatically included all regional capitals.

While the findings cannot be generalized beyond the studied locations, the shared views of the respondents offer valuable and coherent insights that fill knowledge gaps in available data and field research. These narratives also constitute a rich consultative process that provided respondents with the opportunity to express their observations in an open but confidential forum. Decision-makers rarely consult with local populations about relevant solutions for their communities and the broader society. The respondents for this study provided important, practical, and forward-looking views that can inform interventions.⁸

Key Findings

The findings focus on two themes: (1) the processes of radicalization and recruitment into VE groups and (2) grievances and perceptions of exclusion. The first theme identifies which groups of Tajik citizens—especially youths, migrants and single women—are more vulnerable to radicalization of mindsets and examines how they become radicalized and recruited. The second theme focuses on the underlying factors that can contribute to radicalization, such as grievances related to governance and socio-economic conditions.

The study finds that respondents regard the active presence of VE recruiters who proselytize and recruit followers as the primary driver of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism in their respective communities. At the same time, the study finds no direct causality between grievances about living conditions or governance and becoming radicalized or joining an extremist group; it shows that very few narratives from respondents include a direct link between (i) poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic disadvantages and (ii) radicalization of mindsets and violent extremism. Indeed, the vast majority of poor, jobless or under-educated people in Tajikistan or Central Asia do not get radicalized or become violent extremists. The study concludes by recommending a comprehensive set of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention measures to build resilience among vulnerable population segments and communities against radicalization of mindsets and recruitment into violent extremist group.

Processes of Radicalization and Recruitment

Study respondents linked the embracement of radical religious beliefs (radicalization of mindsets) with recruitment into VE groups (behavioral radicalization) and identified

⁸ The study originally was to include a representative household survey aimed at studying the relationships between support for VE groups and low economic mobility, and between socio-economic status and support for VE groups, as well as the role of service provision by extremist non-state actors. This quantitative survey was not conducted due to the absence of government authorization.

these interconnected processes as a primary driver of violent extremism. In 71 of 122 cases referring specifically to radicalization, respondents noted linkages between the propagation of radical religious beliefs and the process of recruitment into VE groups, with the recruitment directly linked to VE groups operating at local level and the radicalization of family or community members.

Respondents also identified different types of recruiters and highlighted the role that migration and family as well as social networks played in how people were recruited. Recruiters fell into several categories, most linked to migration. They included those who receive religious education abroad, former or banned migrants recruited in Russia who then recruited members of their households and communities in Tajikistan, informal religious leaders, and individuals involved in trade who traveled abroad—to Afghanistan or to Persian Gulf countries. Family and social networks also played a strong role in recruitment. A common pattern was for men to recruit other men, who then went on to recruit others within his family, including women. However, in large cities, such as Dushanbe and Khujand, participants offered examples of women recruiting women at the market, at the hospital, and at the workplace. In some cases, recruiters can offer jobs overseas and financial assistance for families to get vulnerable young men to join VE groups. This economic incentive exploits the high unemployment and lack of opportunity prevalent in some regions of Tajikistan.

Vulnerable groups at risk of radicalization and recruitment

Youth were the group most commonly identified as being vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment. During discussions and interviews, one out of four of the respondents' narratives mentioned youth as a vulnerable group. Young people, the respondents said, are being recruited in their local communities to "join the war" abroad or to participate in violent extremism within Tajikistan. Recruiters target them where they search for work, in mosques, where they study—fellow university students often recruit others—and in prisons.⁹ Many respondents believe the recruitment of young people has increased over the last four or five years. Three groups of vulnerable youth were cited: male secondary-school students and graduates, aged 14–17; male university students, aged 18–26; and young adult men outside of the labor market and the school system, aged 18–26.

Returning migrants were the second most commonly identified vulnerable group. This suggests that the processes of radicalization and recruitment in Tajikistan and abroad are not

⁹ The off-the-record observation regarding prisons as a locus for recruitment was shared by a respondent with a criminal background from rural Khatlon.

entirely separate. Three sub-groups were described: migrants from Tajikistan living in other countries (e.g., Russia and the Kyrgyz Republic); migrants returning from other countries to Tajikistan, either voluntarily or because they were banned from the country in which they were living; and internal migrants within Tajikistan.¹⁰

Respondents highlighted how and why migrants became vulnerable to extremism. They noted that some Tajik migrants in Russia are recruited into VE groups by radical preachers from Tajikistan who had left the country to avoid state prosecution. Most migrants are young men with no professional experience and with poor knowledge of the Russian language. Illegal migrants are even more isolated and therefore vulnerable. Young men in Vahdat district, in the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS), described the link between isolation and vulnerability of migrants in Russia, noting how some migrants go there with only a vague knowledge of religion, increasing their vulnerability to radical religious ideology.

Women were the third most commonly cited vulnerable group after youth and migrants. Vulnerable women include: the wives and relatives of radicalized individuals; abandoned women with children, such as the wives of labor migrants or prisoners; divorced women, and widows. Most of the radicalization and recruitment of Tajik women happens at the community level, respondents said, citing several factors that make the women vulnerable to radicalization. These include: a desire to get married or to preserve a marriage; demands by a husband or an older household member, for example, a migrant who comes home and orders his wife and children to return abroad with him; a lack of job or source of income to feed their children; grievances against husbands or the husband's family, especially the mother-in-law who can exert undue control over their lives; and stigma in the community against divorced or abandoned women. In all regions, respondents gave examples of women who, influenced by radicalized family members and in order to preserve their marriages, ultimately accepted extremist views, including changing their way of dress and behavior. Some followed their husbands or male relatives to join VE groups in Syria and Afghanistan. However, groups of female respondents interviewed in Khatlon and Sughd also underlined women's resilience and resistance to attempts aimed at radicalizing them, explaining that women can withstand recruiters for the sake of their family and children, either rejecting radicalization attempts outright, denouncing them, or leaving communities of radicals.

¹⁰ The Migration Service estimates that there are approximately 240,000 returning migrants in Tajikistan, the majority of whom are banned from re-entering Russia and are in urgent need of re-integration support services due to their vulnerability to various risks, including radicalization.

Grievances and Perceptions of Exclusion

While grievances and perceptions of socio-economic exclusion may in some cases facilitate the process of radicalization and recruitment into VE groups, they do not necessarily lead to it. Respondents indicated such grievances may—in conjunction with primary drivers such as the presence of VE recruiters—help contribute to radicalization and recruitment but noted the large majority of young individuals in Tajikistan do not become radicalized despite facing similar disadvantages and challenges. Nevertheless, understanding these grievances is necessary for effectively tailoring prevention efforts, even if addressing them alone is insufficient for prevention.

Respondents had multiple grievances but rarely linked these to a rise in violent extremism. Only seven of the 330 narratives in the study explicitly mentioned a link between these grievances and violent extremism.

The most common grievance was dissatisfaction with local government (sub-district and district). Respondents had several complaints, including a lack of responsiveness, unfairness, and poor treatment, as well as exclusion from access to land. Some respondents – mainly young men from low-income households in rural areas – also had significant grievances against state officials and prosperous households driven by a lack of access to land.

Another common grievance was the lack of jobs and opportunities for non-basic education, which left a significant number of young men idle and contributed to making them feel angry, frustrated, depressed, and hopeless. Young people, especially married men with children, are under constant pressure to find a job and earn an income as they are expected to support their parents as well as their new families. With available local jobs being so limited, many will accept any job they can get, regardless of the salary.

The third most common type of grievance was corruption. Participants condemned the common practice of having to pay a bribe or have help from a friend or relative in a given enterprise or state organization to get a full-time job. Middle-income respondents and respondents in urban areas criticized corruption involving state agencies that control local businesses. Respondents also reported several instances of corrupt behavior among local-level police officers, such as soliciting bribes from business owners and market vendors and imposing disproportionate fines on taxi drivers.

A small number of narratives lamented the high level of state pressure on religious institutions and practices. Such grievances were concentrated among respondents in Dushanbe; in Vahdat

and Rasht, in DRS; and in Khujand, in Sughd. Specific examples included the shutting down of mosques, especially in rural communities, imams adopting the state agenda in their speeches, and women being prohibited from covering their heads in public places and at religious events. Narratives also referred to state regulation on celebrations, such as weddings, funerals, the end of fasting, and relatives of prosecuted individuals being targeted by law enforcement agencies.

Geographical areas vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment

The domestic risks of violent extremism have grown. Many respondents report that since late 2017, recruitment of foreign fighters has slowed down, but homegrown radicalization and VE activities—particularly by the IS in Khatlon and by Salafists in Dushanbe and DRS—have increased. In about two thirds of the cases mentioned by respondents, people had been recruited into violent extremist groups in Tajikistan, rather than abroad.¹¹

Many respondents raised concerns over areas bordering Afghanistan, especially Khatlon and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). Both community leaders and focus groups participants reported that recruiters from Afghanistan, where they said “life is harder,” easily cross the border. They mentioned the most at-risk districts, all in Khatlon, are Farkhor, Hamadoni, Kubodiyon, Kulob, Shartuz, Shurobod, and Panj.

Respondents’ Proposals to Strengthen Youth Resilience

Respondents suggested several important measures to prevent violent extremism, focusing on increasing youth resilience to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups. Narratives revealed the following recurring themes: the importance of involving parents, especially mothers and other family members; the need to ensure better access to jobs, education, and skills; the need to engage in dialogue with community members and youth on how to best mitigate the risks of violent extremism; and school-based prevention measures, including building the capacity of teachers and principals to positively influence parents and students, as well as programs and extracurricular activities focused on violence prevention. Additional suggestions included religious training and education to ensure an accurate understanding of Islam, information and awareness campaigns, and legal support. Suggested measures to support vulnerable young women included psycho-social assistance to address trauma, awareness-raising, livelihood support, and legal services. Youth-focused recommendations echo recent literature that emphasises involving/targeting young people in efforts to prevent

¹¹ Respondents knew where people had been recruited from in 92 of the 122 reported cases of recruitment. 62 of these 92 recruits were recruited in Tajikistan.

violent extremism because they are the primary recruitment target of VE groups (Sommers 2019). For example, the development of critical thinking skills in young people can help them overcome or reject the simplistic narratives of extremist ideology that put one group against another and spread intolerance and gender discrimination.

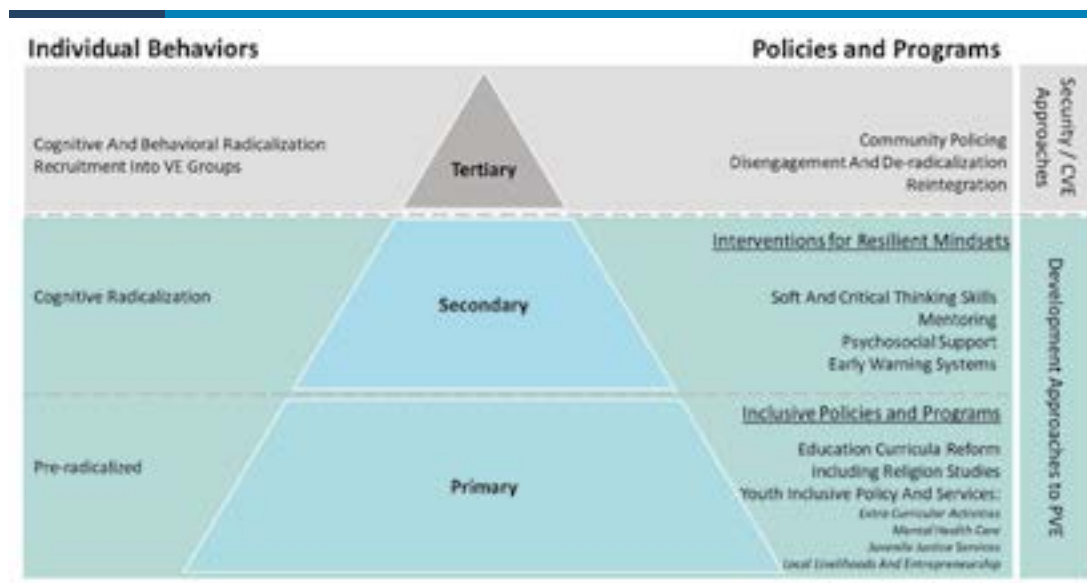
Development Approaches to Strengthen Youth Resilience

The findings of this study highlight the pressing risks among young Tajiks and their communities relating to radicalization and violent extremism. These fragility risks can and should be mitigated through tailored development interventions. The findings also suggest that policy makers and development partners should consider a wider range of development policies and programs for young people who have not yet been radicalized. Such an approach would also require addressing the grievances and perceptions of exclusion related to poor local governance by district and sub-district administrations, and lack of affordable access to services and economic opportunities.

The government of Tajikistan has already introduced measures to address the identified risks. These include the Youth Development Strategy for 2020 and the related agenda promoted under the 2017 Year of Youth, which emphasizes youth participation, cultural and social inclusion, and empowerment as measures to prevent violent extremism. The government also prioritizes: the promotion of balanced regional development, including support for local development and fiscal and administrative decentralization; measures to reduce unemployment among youth and women, including the promotion of entrepreneurship; and reforms geared toward reducing the tax burden, especially on micro-, small, and medium enterprises. In addition, job creation efforts have been undertaken by the Ministry of Labor, mostly for temporary and public jobs, including in rural areas, and for returning migrants banned from re-entry in Russia (World Bank 2019). Returning migrants also benefited from information and awareness-raising to prevent the involvement of migrant workers in extremist movements, infectious diseases, and drug addiction. Development partners have funded promising initiatives in cross-border districts that can be replicated and scaled up, including innovative extracurricular activities for disadvantaged young men and women, livelihood support, and community policing initiatives.

Youth resilience to radicalization and violent extremism can be further strengthened through primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention measures, implemented in compatible and complementary ways (see Figure 1). Primary prevention refers to inclusive policies and programs that address vulnerable individuals who are not yet radicalized but who are exposed to radical influences, such as VE messaging. Secondary prevention refers to measures targeted at individuals who are at high risk of cognitive radicalization¹² or violent extremism due to proximity to radical and recruiting networks. Effective referral systems for secondary prevention should rely on the support of affected families and communities, as well as on the protection of identified individuals, to motivate their participation. Such referral systems also apply to tertiary prevention, which refers to measures directed at radicalized individuals who have adopted VE ideas, although they may not have committed any violent attacks (OSCE 2019b). While primary and secondary prevention measures address risk factors through development approaches, tertiary prevention focuses on tailored security and judicial measures, such as community policing, deradicalization, and reintegration of concerned individuals. Well-designed community policing can effectively contribute to preventing support for violent extremism by fostering cooperation with local government officials, community stakeholders, and the police. Overall security measures should be complementary with other prevention efforts, such as steps to build resilience against radicalization or keep already radicalized people from being recruited into VE groups.

Figure 1. Levels of Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism



¹² Cognitive radicalization refers to extremist beliefs/mindsets, including radical religious beliefs. (Neumann, 2013)

Development actors, such as the World Bank, would normally focus on primary and secondary prevention policies and programs. Recommendations for primary prevention include:

- (i) interventions for adolescents and young men and women exposed to VE messaging, such as tailored soft skills, extracurricular activities, violence-prevention training, and livelihoods support in districts and communities experiencing lack of trust in local authorities due to perceptions of injustice and socio-economic exclusion, and exposure to VE narratives; and,
- (ii) systemic policies and reforms—such as improved local governance and service delivery; improved access to land by vulnerable rural families, youth and vulnerable women; education curriculum reform, and introduction of regulations to ensure that minors are not imprisoned with adult inmates.

Under secondary prevention, development actors would support interventions that contribute to shifting mindsets away from radicalization while promoting a more positive outlook on life opportunities. These interventions include curricula of soft and critical thinking skills and mentoring tailored to preventing violent extremism, with greater intensity and duration than those offered under primary prevention. Interventions should also include psycho-social support for vulnerable returning migrants who are facing barriers to re-integration into their families and communities, and for vulnerable women, including those exposed to trauma and gender-based violence. Overall, development approaches and prevention measures discussed in the report are more comprehensive than conventional youth employment measures that donors and international financial institutions tend to prioritize.

Tajikistan is at an important crossroads. If successful in strengthening youth, women and community resilience to radicalization and violent extremism, it can offer a model for other countries facing similar challenges. Moving forward, investing in the different dimensions of prevention will be key for Tajikistan, by leveraging local resilience and comparative advantages of different actors. To maximize the impact of prevention programming, government actors, donor programs and civil society organizations should act in complementary ways, especially at the local level, starting from the most vulnerable districts and communities. Engaging civil society organizations will be critical as government-led programming might not attract the groups most at-risk, who may fear being stigmatized or being referred to security bodies. By adopting these approaches, Tajikistan can offer a much-needed model of resilience to its Central Asian neighbors, Afghanistan, and other countries facing similar radicalization and VE challenges.

1. Introduction

1. This report presents key findings of a qualitative study on youth inclusion and resilience in Tajikistan. It is the first part of the multi-country study *Central Asia: Development Approaches for Preventing Violent Extremism*. Tajikistan was selected as the first Central Asian country to study because of the relatively high number of Islamic State (IS) recruits that originated there,¹³ and because it is among the four pilot countries selected by the World Bank Group (WBG) for additional financing from the International Development Association (IDA) to institute the Risk Mitigation Regime (RMR). The RMR seeks to address fragility, conflict and violence risks through tailored development interventions aimed at increasing overall resilience at the individual and local levels.

2. The goal of the broader regional initiative funded by the World Bank is to explore causes of violent extremism in Central Asia, and present policy recommendations to the governments of the region to address them. This study provides evidence-based research on the drivers of violent extremism in Tajikistan, with a specific focus on youth, gender, local, and regional dimensions. It outlines development approaches to prevention that can complement security approaches and recommends development interventions to promote youth inclusion and resilience, and also mitigate the risk of radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups. A subsequent World Bank study will investigate the drivers of violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley.

3. The World Bank/United Nations (2018) report *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* presents a review of evidence and points to a multiplicity of motivations that drive people to voluntarily join VE groups. Individuals who join such groups do not fit one profile or follow a single trajectory; their motivations are complex and context-specific. Employment can, in some cases, protect youth from being mobilized into violent extremism, but motivations are

¹³ Comparative data on Central Asian states suggests that the number of recruits from Tajikistan in Syria and Iraq is roughly equivalent to that of Uzbekistan, the population of which is more than four times that of Tajikistan (see, e.g., Barrett 2017). According to the government of Tajikistan, since 2011, 1,899 citizens have joined terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with most choosing IS.

not solely economic (World Bank/UN 2018). Other key drivers include: the propagation of extremist ideologies, online and through the presence of radicalization hubs operating locally (Vidino et al. 2017); the desire to follow a family member as a way of expressing common purpose and social belonging (also a key driver for women); a dearth of religious literacy and critical thinking skills, which increases vulnerability to local recruitment efforts; grievances based on perceptions of social injustice and exclusion, or state pressure on religious practices; and criminal behavior among vulnerable young men, which can lead to their recruitment in prison. Most young people are not violent. At the same time, the majority of VE recruits are young men (Sommers 2019). Until recently, the role of women in the radicalization of men was considered marginal, but recent research has found that a woman can exercise agency as an effective mediator or an extremist. Some have traveled to Syria or Iraq with their families and, in some instances, by themselves (d'Estaing 2017; UN Women 2017).

4. To date, there is limited primary research and evidence on the drivers of radicalization in Tajikistan, impeding the development of tailored preventive measures. To address this gap, this study presents findings from qualitative research conducted across Tajikistan in the spring of 2018 that informed WBG programming in Tajikistan for 2019-23, the period of the current Country Partnership Framework. The study offers a unique in-depth understanding of the process and mechanisms of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremist (VE) groups. It also builds on official statistics and existing literature on the socio-economic situation in Tajikistan and violent extremism in the country and seeks to contribute to a global understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism, particularly in the context of the first pillar of the WBG Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence 2020-2025 focusing on preventing violent conflict and interpersonal violence.

5. The study contributes to the implementation of the *National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2016–20 (GoT 2016)*, including several important preventive measures to:

- Address socio-economic prerequisites of extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism;
- Conduct awareness-raising, educational, and mindset-related activities to counter radical ideology, especially among adolescents and youth;

- Increase economic opportunities and conduct awareness-raising activities to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of vulnerable women into VE groups by their close relatives; and,
- Prevent the radicalization and recruitment of Tajik labor migrants into VE groups by providing more support services at home and abroad.

These preventive approaches complement security measures by the government, such as steps to counter violent extremism and drug trafficking, and prison reform.

6. The issues covered in this report have important development implications of interest to the WBG and other development organizations. The WBG defines *violent extremism* as the use of violence driven by ideology to advance socio-economic and political objectives, resulting in continuous destabilizing economic and social impacts (World Bank 2015). Like *radicalization*, violent extremism can be viewed as a social phenomenon with greater detrimental impacts than those caused by a single violent attack (OSCE 2019b). As such, preventing violent extremism requires the involvement of actors outside the security realm, including practitioners of psychology and pedagogy, as well as human rights and religious leaders, community development actors, social service providers, civil society, and development organizations.

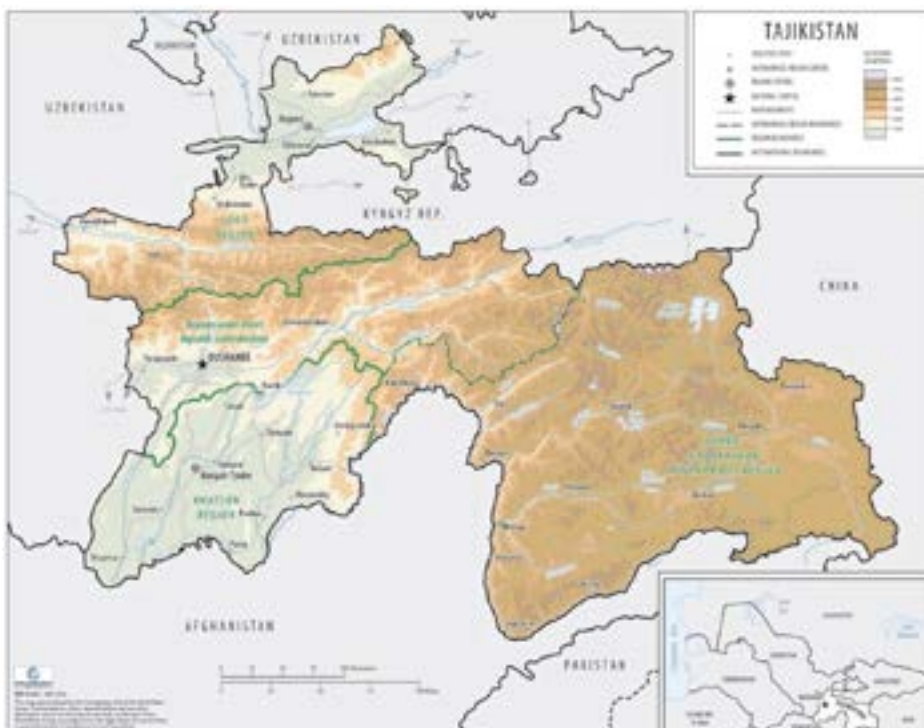
7. Relevant terms have been adapted to the Tajik context based on extensive consultations with local researchers and pilot testing of qualitative instruments. As examples, notions of radicalization that emphasize extremist beliefs are referred to as *radicalization of mindsets*; those focused on extremist behavior are referred to as *behavioral radicalization* (Neumann 2013), even though there is no inevitable link between extremist political beliefs and violent action. Radicalization of mindsets is also referred to here as the *process of radicalization* because study respondents report the experiences of how they and other community members were influenced by radical religious beliefs. *Behavioral radicalization* refers to the process of recruitment into VE groups. The notion of resilience as used in this report refers to the capacity of a person or community to positively resist, withstand, or recover from exposure to various shocks, threats, and stressors, such as adverse processes and disturbing events that could lead to cognitive or behavioral radicalization (Masten 2019).

2. Context

2.1. Tajikistan: Fragility Risks

8. Tajikistan is a transition country affected by multiple vulnerability factors stemming from: the legacy of the 1992–97 civil war, which still threatens the country’s social cohesion; a centralized, state-led approach to public policy and economic management; a high population growth rate of 2.2 percent for the period 2008–17 combined with very low per capita income; limited employment opportunities for and low-skill level among youth, which exposes them to disproportionate socio-economic vulnerabilities and risks at home and as migrants abroad; and fragility risks, especially affecting southern districts along the 1,400-kilometer border with Afghanistan. The internal risks related to violent extremism have become more pronounced recently. On July 29, 2018, the IS claimed responsibility for an attack on foreign tourists in the Khatlon region, the first such incident in Central Asia; and supporters of the IS launched major prison riots in Khujand in November 2018 and Vahdat in May 2019 that caused dozens of deaths (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism 2019).

Map 1. Topographic Map of Tajikistan: Geographic Challenges



9. Each of Tajikistan's regions has a strongly distinct identity.

Due to the country's geography and its historical and cultural cross-border links to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, some regions share closer ties with the neighboring countries than with the rest of Tajikistan, which hinders internal cohesion. The Northern Sughd region, with its large ethnic Uzbek population, was once the center of political and industrial power. It is separated from rest of Tajikistan by mountain ranges but is closely connected to the Fergana Valley territories of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its western areas are deeply connected to historic Tajik centers in neighboring Uzbekistan; its southern areas are similarly linked to the Tajik population in Afghanistan's northern provinces and major urban areas; and its mountainous areas east of the capital have strong connections to southern Kyrgyzstan. Sparsely populated Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in the east of Tajikistan, which is separated from the rest of the country by mountains, is closely connected to Northern Afghanistan; central GBAO is particularly connected to the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, where the same Pamiri languages are spoken (Nourzhanov, Kirill, and Bleuer 2013; Bergne 2007).

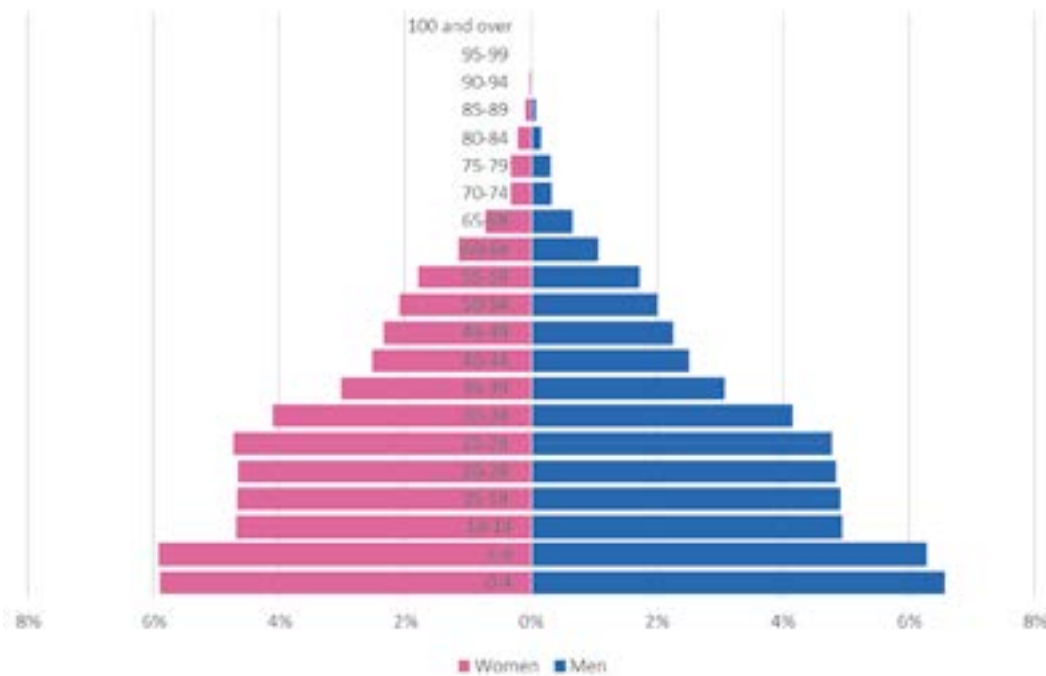
10. Compared with all other post-Soviet republics, Tajikistan has the highest proportion of youth.

Sixty-three percent of the country's approximate 8.9 million population is under 30 years old; 28.6 percent is between the ages of 15 and 29 (see Figure 2) (TAJSTAT 2018). Youth aged 15–24 face limited economic opportunities. According to the 2016 Labor Force Survey, 29.3 percent of youth in Tajikistan aged 15–24, or 435,621 people, are not in employment, education or training, a designation known by the acronym NEET (TAJSTAT 2016). Within that age group, just over 49 percent of Tajik women are NEET compared with seven percent of men (TAJSTAT 2016). Overall, the country's NEET population is 88.4 percent female and 11.6 percent male. In addition, about one in six men and one in 10 women aged 20–24 are too discouraged to look for work. The highest concentration of NEETs is in Dushanbe at 40.4 percent, followed by the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) at 36.1 percent, and GBAO at 30.4 percent (TAJSTAT 2016).

11. Adolescents suffer from distinct social vulnerabilities.

According to a recent national survey of almost 5,000 Tajik youths 19 years old and younger, one in three young people (33.9 percent) aged 15–19 are depressed. The rate is higher among female youth (36 percent) than male youth (32 percent). The highest rates were found in the DRS, (41.4 percent), followed by Khatlon (39.5 percent), Dushanbe (32.6 percent), GBAO (31.4 percent), and Sughd (21.6 percent). Ninety-seven percent of respondents were enrolled in formal education, but only two percent were involved in non-formal education, such as extracurricular activities. Another issue of concern is reports by rural adolescents about school-related violence: 47 percent reported that teachers use violence as a form of punishment,

Figure 2. Population of Tajikistan by Age Group and Gender



Source: TAJSTAT, Annual Population Data, January 1, 2018. http://stat.wv.tj/files/cislennost_naselenia_na_1.01.2018.pdf.

followed by peers in the streets (24 percent), and other peers (20 percent). Fifty-two percent of adolescents in GBAO aged 10–19 reported having experienced peer-to-peer violence—the highest rate among the regions (Center for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan and UNICEF 2018).

12. About one-third to one half of Tajikistan’s gross domestic product is dependent on remittances—one of the highest global rates (Kireyev 2006; Ratha 2016). As many as 0.5 million Tajik citizens, 78 percent of whom are young men, emigrate to find job opportunities abroad.¹⁴ Most of these migrants are married with children and support households with an average of seven to eight persons.¹⁵ The social and economic impact of this excessive reliance on remittances and years of limited investment in human capital have significantly reduced Tajikistan’s productive capabilities and made the economy acutely vulnerable to external shocks (World Bank 2018). Following the Russian economic crisis of 2014, remittances sent to Tajikistan decreased significantly—

¹⁴ According to data from the State Migration Service of the Republic of Tajikistan under the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Migration, 2018.

¹⁵ Most migrants have completed general secondary education but are unskilled and not employed in Tajikistan prior to migrating abroad (World Bank 2017a).

with a 44-percent drop from 2014 to 2016—and the country’s economy contracted (World Bank 2018). However, the downtrend in remittances has partially reverted since 2017 (World Bank 2019).

13. The dependency on remittances affects women and the structure of the family. Many Tajik women live in single-parent households or with their husband’s family, partly because most migrants are men. These women are often deprived of their husband’s remittances, which are sent to members of his family. Twenty-three percent of Tajik households are headed by women, including abandoned wives, including those whose husbands are abroad or in other parts of the country working as migrant labor, sometimes for years at a time. This pressing phenomenon has resulted in increased longterm poverty and social vulnerability among women, children, and youth living in single-parent households (Olimova 2010; UNICEF 2011).

2.2. The History and Status of Violent Extremist Groups in Tajikistan

14. The government of Tajikistan views most Islamist groups as extremist, particularly those who are part of the Salafi movement, or *Salafiya*. It has introduced policies to restrain religious practices regarded as alien to local traditions. Two 2009 laws—*On Religious Freedom and Religious Associations and Law on Parent’s Re-sponsibility*—sought to reduce the appeal of radical religious ideology among Tajik youth under 18 years old by prohibiting them from visiting mosques or attending religious education (EFCA 2018). Wearing a hijab or *satr* (an Islamic scarf) was banned at educational institutions and government agencies, and there have been reported instances of police forcibly shaving men’s beards (EFCA 2018). Since 2010, the government has repatriated Tajik students attending religious universities and madrasas in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In addition, the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center lists 17 VE groups that have been banned in Tajikistan,¹⁶ including well-known VE groups that were also mentioned by the study respondents, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the IS; political Islamist groups advocating profound societal changes such as *Jamaat Tabligh*, the Muslim Brotherhood, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, and *Salafiya*; and indigenous groups such as *Call to Islam*, and *Free Tajikistan* (Taarnby 2012). See Box 1 for an overview of banned groups in Tajik-istan.

15. By 2012, extremist groups with direct connections to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East had already established a presence in Tajikistan. The process was primarily

¹⁶ In addition to the Commonwealth of Independent States list of banned VE groups, the National Bank of Tajikistan lists 15 banned groups. https://nbt.tj/en/financial_monitoring/perechni.php

led by individuals who had traveled abroad for religious education and returned to spread extremist interpretations of Islam (Taarnby 2012). During the late Soviet period and following independence, these groups established underground mosques and study circles propagating a Salafi-inspired interpretation of Islam in Tajikistan (Naumkin 2005: 40; Peyrouse 2007; Olcott 2012: 81; Taarnby 2012). The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan moved into Tajikistan at the beginning of the 1992-97 civil war. Groups connected to Afghan *mujahideen* factions, and subsequently the Taliban, developed a stronghold in the Rasht Valley during the 1992–97 civil war (Cornell 2005; Naumkin 2005); and the global Islamist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir expanded, particularly in the northern Sughd province (Baran 2004; Karagiannis 2010). Salafi groups then developed a presence, particularly in the central areas of the country and in the capital Dushanbe.¹⁷ IS activity has also been observed in the Khatlon region since 2014.

16. Most Tajiks think that VE groups represent a danger to society. A 2012 survey of 3,502 respondents across Tajikistan sponsored by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Taarnby 2012) found that Tajiks think the most dangerous VE groups are the Taliban (59 percent), Salafiya (52 percent), Hizb-ut-Tahrir (47 percent), and al-Qaeda (40 percent). Regional divergences are substantial. For example, 83 percent of respondents from the Sughd region are aware of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and 68 percent consider it dangerous—rates considerably higher than the national average. In Khatlon and Dushanbe, 79 and 77 percent of respondents, respectively, have heard about Salafi groups; and 69 and 55 percent, respectively, consider them dangerous. Recently published government data indicates that the highest number of IS recruits are from the Khatlon region, reflecting a further shift to areas bordering Afghanistan (GoT 2018b).

17. Since 2011, Russia has emerged as a locus of global recruitment. Many Tajik men spend considerable time in Russia as labor migrants, and some are exposed to IS recruitment efforts. Russia is a middle-point country for individuals radicalized in Tajikistan who travel to Turkey, Syria, and Iraq; and many migrants who are radicalized while in Russia become agents of radicalization in Tajikistan and recruit from their households and communities. The Tajik government reports that up to 85 percent of Tajik citizens who are recruited as foreign fighters are solicited while in Russia as labor migrants rather than in Tajikistan (OSCE 2019a). However, as the findings from this study show, the processes of radicalization and recruitment in Tajikistan and Russia cannot be entirely separated.

¹⁷ The local Salafi movement is considered a VE group by authorities, but its internal cohesion and particular orientation has not been the subject of detailed research (see Taarnby 2012).

Box 1. Banned Groups in Tajikistan

The government of Tajikistan has banned many groups and movements because of their presumed radical and extremist ideology. The list includes extremist groups that support violence as well as some that do not. Unlike Western states, the government does not base its ban solely on a group's position on the use of violence, but also on the nature of its ideology (Taarnby 2012). Banned groups include:

- **Salafiya** is a broad term used to denote the followers of the ultra-orthodox Salafi interpretation of Sunni Islam. This revivalist movement emerged in the 19th Century, inspired by the teachings of the Saudi cleric Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, which is why some scholars use the terms Wahhabi and Salafiya interchangeably (Commins 2015: 151–66). The movement's followers do not recognize other branches of Islam, such as Shi'a and Sufism. Its world-wide growth is partly due to considerable missionary activity, financially supported by actors in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states (Kepel 2006: 61–80; Commins 2006; Thaler 2004: 99–109). Different groups might share a Salafi ideology but diverge on attitudes regarding political involvement or violence. Some oppose political engagement of any kind; some are politically active. Some—often referred to as “Salafi-Jihadi”—embrace armed struggle to recreate the caliphate that existed after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Wiktorowicz 2006). In Tajikistan, the labels of Salafiya and Wahhabi denote a stricter practice of Islam, which many consider alien to the local, more tolerant interpretations. Wahhabi groups were identified during the 1992-97 civil war, particularly in eastern areas of what is presently the DRS. More recently, since about 2008, Salafi groups emerged and grew stronger, first in Dushanbe, and after government interdiction efforts, in other parts of the country, particularly Khatlon.
- **The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan** is a Salafi-Jihadi group that originated in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan in the late 1980s. It is currently based in Afghanistan, operating primarily in its northern areas and along the border with Pakistan. It is a VE group with known links to the Taliban and Al Qaeda. While it originated in Uzbekistan, the group moved into Tajikistan at the start of the civil war in 1992 and fought on the side of the United Tajik Opposition (Naumkin 2005); it was particularly influential in the eastern parts of DRS, such as the Rasht Valley. In August 2015, the group released a video expressing its allegiance to the Islamic State in Khorasan, although some factions remain loyal to Al Qaeda (Giustozzi 2018).
- Created in Jerusalem in 1953, **Hizb-ut-Tahrir** is a globally active international political organization aimed at re-establishing the Islamic caliphate (Baran 2004). It envisages a three-stage approach toward achieving this goal: proselytizing, infiltrating government structures, and replacing national governments with the caliphate. The first two phases are non-violent, but the last is unlikely to take place without armed action. The group has expanded across Central Asia since the mid-1990s (Karagiannis 2010). In Tajikistan, it was primarily active in the northern Sughd region, but government interdiction efforts have reduced the organization's footprint in the country.
- The **IS** originated from Al Qaeda in Iraq. It is a VE group that became the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria before proclaiming a global caliphate in June 2014. In 2015, the IS set up a division focused on Afghanistan and Central Asia: the Islamic State in Khorasan. It sought to attract Central Asians, including Tajiks, especially following the 2015 defection to IS of Gulmurad Khalimov, a special police force commander in Tajikistan (Giustozzi 2018).

18. Recruitment of Tajik nationals gained momentum after January 2015 with the establishment of the IS in Khorasan, which includes Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia. Recruitment peaked with the first terrorist attack perpetrated in Central Asia against foreigners — on July 29, 2018, in Dangara, Khatlon. The strong presence of IS in Northern Afghanistan heightened the risk in Tajikistan, especially because, at the same time, Salafi-inspired groups were expanding into areas of the country close to Afghanistan that had not previously experienced radicalization, particularly Khatlon province (Giustozzi 2018). Abu Usama Noraki, a prominent IS spokesman who is originally from Khatlon, is known to have actively recruited Tajik countrymen beginning in 2015, including from his home district of Nurek (Mehl 2018). Two of the assailants in the July 2018 attack that killed foreign cyclists were from Nurek, and afterward, Noraki released an audio message in Tajik announcing the intention of IS to perpetrate similar attacks across the country.

2.3. Existing Data, Limitations, and Gaps

19. This section provides an overview of data published by the government of Tajikistan in November 2018 on Tajik nationals recruited into IS, and Daesh Personnel Records¹⁸ for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, including files of recruited individuals registered by IS operatives between early 2013 and late 2014. Statistics released by the government of Tajikistan indicate that 1,899 Tajik nationals were recruited into IS, a considerably higher number than an earlier estimate of 1,100 (GoT 2018b).¹⁹ Tajikistan's estimated per capita rate of recruitment is the highest of all Central Asian countries. Comparative data suggest that the number of recruits from Tajikistan is roughly equivalent to that of Uzbekistan; however, the population of Uzbekistan is more than four times that of Tajikistan (see e.g., Barrett 2017). The Tajik government released data on the key districts affected by recruitment. Most recruits originated from Khatlon or DRS (see Table 1); and most were in their 20s. Since 2010, the government has repatriated around 3,400 young Tajik nationals pursuing an Islamic education abroad due to concerns that they were being radicalized (GoT 2018b).

¹⁸ The Daesh Personnel Records database includes over 4,600 files of individuals registered by Daesh operatives between early 2013 and late 2014. The World Bank acquired these documents through a news network, which obtained them from a defector. The records contain detailed information from individuals arriving from over 70 countries, including Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries, constituting a rich source for the study of the profiles of recruits. They include details on place of origin, age, education level, employment status, and religious background, among other elements. For a comprehensive description of the Daesh personnel records see Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler (2016).

¹⁹ The same source indicated that out of that total number, only 71 had returned.

Table 1. Violent Extremist Recruits from Tajikistan by Region

Region	District or City	Number of Fighters
Khatlon Region Population: 3.124 million Poverty rate: 37.4%	Kushoniyon	67
	Kubodiyon	74
	Shartuz	76
	Balkhi	36
	Kulob City	99
	Farkhor	37
Districts of Republican Subordination Population: 2.02 million Poverty rate: 32.4%	Vahdat	128
	Tursunzade	39
	Rudaki	107
	Shahrivar	54
Sughd Region Population: 2.56 million Poverty rate: 19.1%	Isfara City	111
	Istaravshan	84
	Buston	12
	Spitamen	35
	Konibodom	22
Dushanbe Population: 816,000 Poverty rate: 18.2%	Dushanbe City	239
Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast Population: 220,000 Poverty rate: 39.3%	Vanj	37

Sources: *Government of Tajikistan 2018b; TAJSTAT 2017a, b.*

20. The published data by the government of Tajikistan offer new insights into regional patterns of recruitment. They are further validated by the qualitative data collected for this study in 2018, although some limitations and gaps remain. The origin of recruits is available for the most relevant districts, but the data does not systematically include all the country's districts. The district of origin is only known for 1,388 of 1,899 recruits, or 73 percent. The published data also lack the employment status, socio-economic conditions and year of recruitment, which constrains the analysis of the backgrounds of recruits.

21. According to the government, most of the approximately 200 Tajik women who traveled to Syria and Iraq were following their husbands, including entire families from Sughd and Khatlon provinces. A UN Women (2017) study found that some women had little knowledge or choice about their final destinations, while others openly accepted or encouraged the move. There also have been reports of women traveling without a male partner with the clear intention of joining a VE group. The UN Women study found that some women engaged in recruitment efforts by promoting

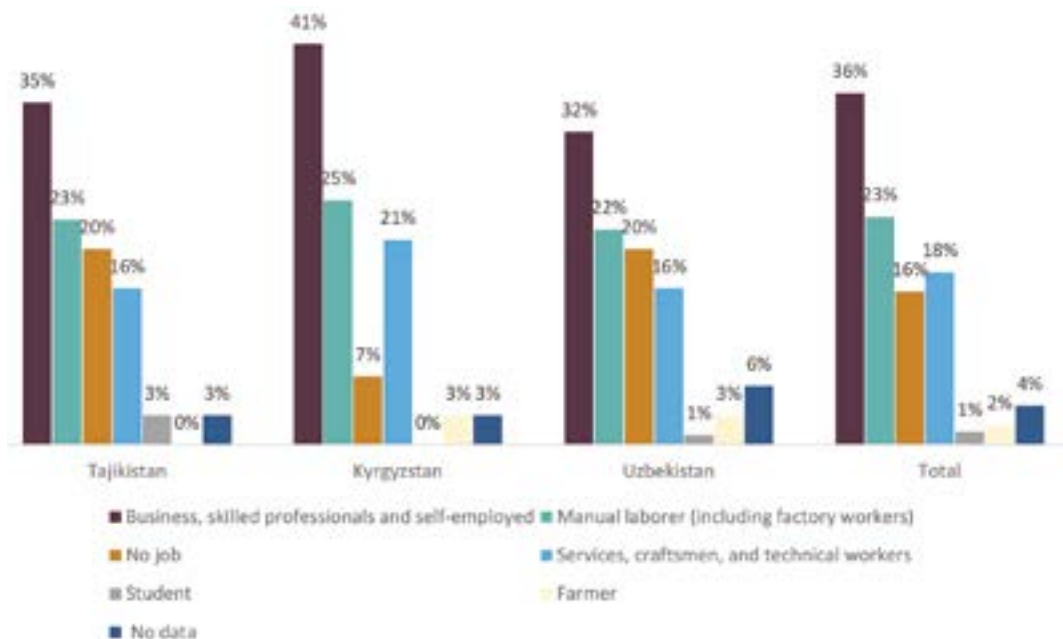
the narratives of VE groups at the local level. More recent reports indicate that 43 Tajik women have been imprisoned in Iraq after being found guilty of belonging to IS (UN 2019).

22. The Daesh Personnel Records database includes 223 IS recruits from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in 2013–14, of which 71 were from Tajikistan. The database provides a rare glimpse into the characteristics of a recruit, including place of origin, age, education level, employment status, and religious background (Dodwell, Milton, and Ressler 2016). The records are significantly limited, however. The sample from Tajikistan is very small and is part of a database of 4,600 recruits from 70 countries; how representative it is of the totality of fighters who joined the IS during this period is uncertain. Despite these caveats, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point claims that the database provides an accurate understanding of who exactly was joining IS in 2013–14 (Dodwell, Milton, and Ressler 2016).

23. In absolute terms, most recruits came from Dushanbe and Khujand, the country's largest urban centers, followed by the urban areas of the DRS and from the rural areas of Sughd province. There were only a few recruits from Khatlon and GBAO. Recruits who had never been to Russia were predominantly from Dushanbe; Khatlon's border areas with Afghanistan and its major cities; DRS's rural areas bordering Kyrgyzstan; and Sughd's urban areas, including the cities of Khujand and Panjakent. Local recruits who had not been to Russia knew significantly less about religion—even the IS considered 76 percent of this group to have a low level of religious knowledge compared with those who had been to Russia. The number of married men was higher among recruits who had been to Russia than among those who had not. Recruits who had not been to Russia were less likely to be employed than those who had migrated there.

24. According to the Daesh records, 74 percent of Tajik recruits were employed or self-employed prior to their recruitment (see Figure 3). Only 20 percent of recruits from Tajikistan were jobless. Over one-third were business owners, skilled professionals, or self-employed; 23 percent were manual laborers or factory workers; and 16 percent were involved in services, including as drivers, hairdressers, salespersons, or artisans. The pattern for recruits from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is similar to Tajikistan, which confirms the consistency of the employment status of these recruits. In Kyrgyzstan, the level of joblessness among IS recruits is even lower.

Figure 3. Type of Employment Held by Central Asian IS Members Prior to Recruitment



Source: Daesh Personnel Records 2013–14.

25. Recent sources suggest that the number of recruits is higher in DRS and Khatlon than in other regions. The Daesh Personnel Records 2013–14 showed most recruits originating from Dushanbe and Sughd region. More recent data from the government of Tajikistan suggest that the proportion of fighters from these regions decreased in 2015 while the proportion of fighters increased from DRS and Khatlon.²⁰ However, it should be noted that a rigorous comparison of these various sources is not feasible due to the variations in the data.

²⁰ The government list was generated by combining three sources: (1) a list of 29 Tajik IS members: <https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20161124/mvd-opublikovaldo-spisok-tadzhijskih-boevikov-v-igil>; (2) names included in the list of wanted individuals by the Tajik Ministry of Interior Affairs: <http://mvd.tj/index.php/ru/rozysk/rozysk1>; and (3) the list of people associated with terrorism published by the Central Bank of Tajikistan http://www.nbt.tj/ru/financial_monitoring/perechni.php.

3. Methodology

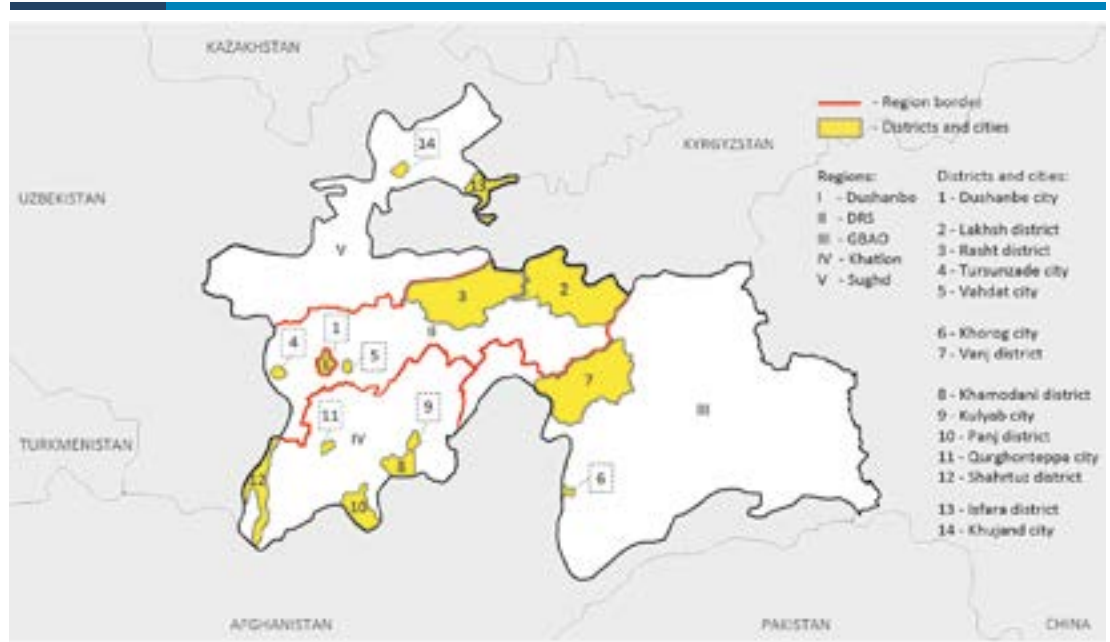
26. This qualitative study focuses on groups at risk of radicalization: young men and women aged 18–30 with low to middle incomes; returning migrants, including deportees and persons banned from re-entry into Russia; and vulnerable women.²¹ Qualitative data were collected from April through June 2018 in 14 locations across every region of Tajikistan, using a stratified qualitative sampling frame (see Map 2 and Appendix A for further details on sampling). Seven of these 14 districts are listed on the government of Tajikistan's (GoT's) official data on the origin of recruits into VE groups (see Table 1). The criteria for selecting the cities and districts included: reported geographic origin and number of recruited individuals according to Daesh Personnel Records and public data from the GoT presence of minorities; proximity to borders; distribution of the IS follower accounts on Twitter; poverty levels, and crime rates (see Appendix A). The sample consisted of at least one urban and one rural settlement from each of the administrative regions, which means that the sample automatically included all regional capitals. Study respondents were identified using purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods. The study consisted of 34 focus group discussions with 295 participants and 35 individual interviews, for a total of 330 respondents. (See appendix A for a full description of the methodology.) The six field researchers who conducted the individual interviews and focus groups received training in both types of data collection, participated in the review of the instruments, and provided feedback after each of the pilot tests.

27. The qualitative research delved into the following five questions:

- What political grievances against local or central government authorities drive support for VE groups among individuals and communities?
- What role does the perception of exclusion play in individual and community support for VE groups?
- What role does socio-economic status play, including employment, in the support for VE groups?
- How does exposure to extremist ideology contribute to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups?
- What role do women play in supporting or moderating the influence of VE groups?

²¹ Vulnerable women include those with two or more children, migrants' wives, and women divorced or abandoned by their husbands. Interviewed women in this category were 35–40 years old.

Map 2. Districts Where Qualitative Research Was Conducted



DRS = Districts of Republican Subordination; GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.

Overall, the qualitative research emphasizes the internal dynamics at the individual, group, and local levels while recognizing the interconnectedness with the external drivers and risk factors pertaining to the Tajik migrants to Russia and other neighboring countries.

3.1. Research Instruments

28. The research conformed to relevant international standards with respect to protection of human subjects (see appendix A for the protocol for the protection of human subjects). This included but was not limited to the protection of confidentiality and privacy, rigor of research ensuring that its scientific value outweighs any potential harm to the human subjects, and completion of research in an independent and neutral manner.

29. Research instruments were customized to the local context to elicit valid and reliable responses to sensitive research questions. An initial set of questionnaires for individual interviews and a guide for the focus groups was tested in Dushanbe in December 2017. Based on the results of this pilot test, the team revised the instruments and developed specific guides for each category of respondent for the focus groups and individual interviews. The guides were modular: some questions were asked of all the respondents, while others were specific to a particular

group. The pilot testing of these instruments was conducted in Dushanbe, DRS, Sughd, Khatlon and GBAO in January–February 2018. This rigorous second pilot test included field testing of the instruments and also a detailed review and critique by the researchers, who discussed revisions to the guides and data collection process. Individual interviews were designed to last 60–90 minutes; the focus groups were designed to last two to two-and-a-half hours. The final data collection instruments were translated into Russian, Tajik, and Uzbek.

3.2. Data Collection Procedures

30. The pilot tests demonstrated that respondents spoke more openly in focus group discussions than in individual interviews about issues related to violent extremism in their communities, regions, and the country as a whole. However, when discussing events related to personal or family experience, members of the vulnerable groups to radicalization and local community leaders preferred the individual interview format. The research team therefore used a combination of approaches for the study.

31. Focus group discussions were conducted with individuals who were defined as vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups. The construct of the following three types of vulnerable groups, which met separately, was based on a desk review and consultations with local experts:

- Young men and women aged 18–30, from low- and middle-income households, and from rural and urban areas;²²
- Returning migrants, aged 18–35, from rural and urban settlements, including men that migrated for financial reasons to other regions of Tajikistan or abroad (Russia, Turkey, or Kazakhstan) for at least three months within the 12 months prior to the study; and
- Vulnerable women, including the wives of economic migrants and single mothers of two or more children from low-income households, above 18 years of age.

32. To encourage the respondents to speak openly, several conditions were met:

- The groups were all homogeneous by gender and socio-economic status;
- No officials were present;

²² This first group of respondents included young men and young women with a secondary school diploma or less, higher education students, employed, self-employed, and NEET youth (not in education, employment or training).

- Informed consent was individually obtained from all respondents prior to the study;
- Focus group discussions were conducted at safe, neutral facilities—never in government or government-related facilities;
- No personal information was requested from respondents;
- Respondents were asked to use nicknames in lieu of their real names; and,
- Relatives were not allowed to participate in the same group.

33. Respondents were asked to provide their socio-economic background including gender, employment status, level of education, and experience with migration. This information was provided by 248 participants of FGDs and by the 35 local leaders or experts, as summarized below. As illustrated in Table 2, FGDs respondents were distributed across education levels, with the largest proportion having completed the full secondary school cycle, also among women. A large proportion of respondents among young men and women were NEETs, reflecting the importance of including the views of this especially vulnerable group. Table 3 summarizes the profiles of individual respondents. In total, 35 interviews were conducted: 27 with men and eight with women. The respondents' ages ranged from 23 to 60 years old, with the average respondent being 43 years old. Individual respondents included local government officials, mahalla (local self-government) representatives, religious leaders and local service providers/professionals. "Other" individual respondents included entrepreneurs, market traders, taxi drivers, and NGO representatives.

34. Because of the sensitive nature of the study topic, it was important to ensure that respondents felt comfortable in sharing their views and opinions and provided extended answers—narratives—in response to questions from the guides. During the pilot test, when respondents were asked to vote, indicate a definite opinion, or agree on a group answer, some refused to do so or felt uncomfortable about participating. As a result, voting and ranking exercises—which are not common to focus groups anyway— were excluded from the research guides.

35. Trained researchers conducted individual interviews with members of vulnerable groups, including youths; returning internal and external economic migrants; and vulnerable women, especially the wives of migrants with children and single mothers with two or more children. Local government representatives, local community leaders, local religious and spiritual leaders, elders, and other respected community members were also interviewed individually. The interviews did not include private sector and law enforcement representatives.

TABLE 2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS) PARTICIPANTS, (248 TOTAL)

Respondents Profiles				
	Young men	Young women	Vulnerable women	Returning migrants
Number of study respondents (n)	64	62	100	22
Age (range)	18-30	18-30	21-55	19-35
Age (average)	25	27	32	25
Experience with Migration	66%	14%	38%	100%
Education	Primary school	0%	8%	0%
	Basic secondary school (up to 9th grade)	5%	25%	17%
	Full secondary school (up to 11th grade)	58%	44%	49%
	Vocational education	17%	11%	14%
	Higher education	20%	11%	8%
Employment	Full-time	16%	25%	
	Part-time	36%	13%	
	Labor migrant17F	5%	3%	no data
	NEET	44%	59%	no data
Marital status	Married	53%	75%	77%
	Divorced	0%	14%	21%
	Single	47%	11%	2%
Number of children (range)	0 to 4	0 to 4	0 to 7	0 to 4

Table 3. Profiles of individual respondents, (35 total)

Respondents Profiles								
	Local government officials	Mahalla leader/representative	Religious leaders	Local service providers/professionals	Migrants	Young people	Vulnerable women	Other
Number of interviews	1	9	2	3	8	3	4	5
Age (range)	N/A	49-63	41	51-60	28-32	23-34	32-36	24-56
Age (average)	N/A	56	N/A	56	30	30	34	39
Men	1	6	2	3	8	3	0	5
Women	0	3	0	0	0	0	4	0

3.3. Data Analysis

36. Data from the focus group discussions and interviews were analyzed using axial coding methods. This methodology categorizes each question by reviewing and synthesizing individual participant responses into themes and then building linkages across themes and categories. Initially, two international consultants reviewed several transcripts and independently designed a coding structure to sort and analyze responses using the programming software Dedoose.²³ The two consultants then jointly reviewed the transcripts to verify the coding structure, uploaded it to Dedoose, and applied it to the transcripts of focus group discussions and interviews. Coders subsequently read the transcripts, identified categories of responses, and applied one or more codes to the responses to yield the participants' narratives. To shed light on the findings, the frequency of a code's appearance and its joint appearance with other codes were considered in relation to multiple factors; for example, the type of respondent (i.e., vulnerable women, migrants, young men and women), gender, and type of settlement and region.

37. The research team analyzed the transcripts of focus group discussions and interviews together. To illustrate trends in participant responses, the research team counted the number of narratives about certain topics—rather than the number of participants who shared an opinion— and then estimated the proportion of narratives on certain subtopics. Since voting and ranking exercises were excluded, it was not possible to estimate the proportion of respondents who shared a view, only the number of narratives that expressed a particular idea.

38. The research sample included 330 respondents selected through rigorous qualitative methods of inquiry, yielding suggestive evidence on the drivers of violent extremism in several Tajik communities. While the findings cannot be generalized beyond the studied locations, the shared views of the respondents offer valuable and coherent insights that fill knowledge gaps in previously available data and field research. These narratives also constitute a rich consultative process that provided respondents with the opportunity to express their observations in an open but confidential forum. Decision-makers rarely consult with local populations about relevant solutions for their communities and the broader society. The respondents for this study provided important, practical, and forward-looking views that can inform interventions.²⁴

²³ Dedoose is a cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, videos, and spreadsheet data.

²⁴ Originally, the study was to include a representative household survey aimed at examining the relationship between support for VE groups and low economic mobility, the relationship between socio-economic status and support for VE groups, and the role of service provision by extremist

4. Key Qualitative Findings

39. This chapter presents the key qualitative findings of the study, which reflects the frequency and coherence of respondents' views along two main issues: (1) the processes of radicalization and recruitment into VE groups; and (2) grievances and perceptions of exclusion. The findings provide an overview of the breadth and depth of respondents' narratives. Responses are aggregated to facilitate the qualitative analysis but are not statistically representative.

40. The first theme identifies which groups of Tajik citizens—especially youths, migrants and single women—are more vulnerable to radicalization of mindsets and examines how they become radicalized and recruited. Respondents' narratives regard the active presence of VE recruiters who proselytize and recruit followers as the primary driver of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism in their respective communities.

41. While most radicalized individuals do not ultimately engage in violent acts, respondents regard a broad acceptance of radical views inciting hatred and violence as detrimental to the development of cohesive and inclusive communities. This also has negative developmental impacts that disproportionately affect women and girls (World Bank 2015), such as their right to education and self-realization.

42. The second theme focuses on contextual issues raised by study respondents, including grievances related to governance and socio-economic conditions. The study finds no direct causality between grievances about living conditions or governance and becoming radicalized or joining an extremist group. Very few narratives include a direct link between (i) poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic disadvantages and (ii) radicalization of mindsets and violent extremism. Indeed, the vast majority of poor, jobless or under-educated people either in Tajikistan or Central Asia do not get radicalized or become violent extremists. However, socio-economic disadvantages can generate enabling circumstances for radicalization. An understanding of these issues is important because, as noted earlier, the process leading to radical religious beliefs and violent extremism is part of a broader social phenomenon with more significant detrimental impacts than can be caused by a single violent attack (OSCE 2019b). A better understanding of the wider context is critical to the design of effective prevention measures.

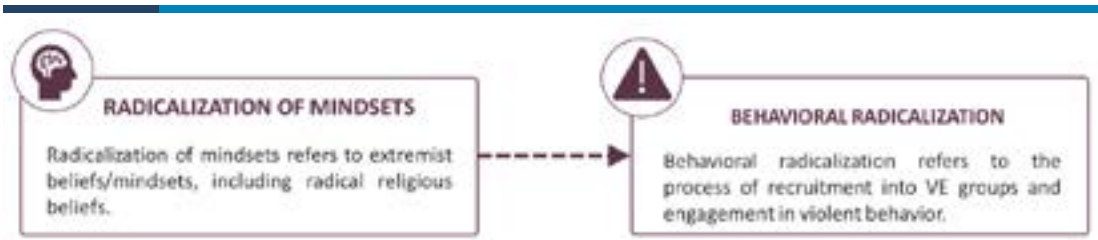
non-state actors. However, in the absence of government authorization, this quantitative survey was not conducted.

43. The chapter concludes by presenting suggestions from study respondents about how to strengthen youth resilience to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups. Measures should involve parents, women, teachers, and communities, in addition to youth.

4.1. The Processes of Radicalization and Recruitment

44. According to respondents' narratives, the processes of embracing radical religious beliefs (radicalization of mindsets) and recruitment into VE groups (behavioral radicalization) are interconnected and constitute a primary driver of violent extremism. These two dimensions of the radicalization process and their relationship are represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Definitions of Radicalization *



* These definitions are drawn from Neumann, 2013.

45. Study respondents recalled 122 cases of recruitment, and in 71 of these cases referred to linkages between the propagation of radical religious beliefs and the process of recruitment into VE groups. The 71 cases of recruitment, i.e., nearly 60 percent of the 122 cases cited, were directly linked to violent extremist groups and radicalized family or community members. In the remaining 51 cases, no information was provided about these linkages.

46. The following narratives exemplify the relation between radicalization of mindsets and recruitment into VE groups.

My classmate from university was a good person. We were at our second year of studies. He would come to all classes. His performance at university was good. I would wear European style of dress to university. Then, he sent me a video clip and told me to watch it [...] The video would show how a person would die. There were strong religious narratives. He would call them statements from [H. M.] a mullah from Dushanbe. After the second year of studies, he took academic leave and disappeared. Nobody knows where he is. DRS, Tursunzade,

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with middle-income young women

There was one relative of ours who was bringing commodities from Turkey [...] He also had a [mullah] friend [...] who cannot come back to Tajikistan. So, he sent us the travel document and we traveled there. [...] We stayed there for almost six months. Then the women that were dressed in black were captured and back then I said I do not want to stay there [...] people dressed in black blew up their largest airport. Khatlon,

Panj, FGD with low-income young women

47. A young returning migrant recalled how a group of Tajik construction workers was quickly radicalized and recruited by radical preachers in Russia.

I was working as a plasterer in a nine-story building in Moscow. There were three to four young people working with us from Kulob [Khatlon]. During lunch, we saw a vehicle [...] three to four mullahs came out of the car and they went into the apartment that we were repairing. Then they began talking and they looked like hypnotists. They also spoke about Syria, about jihad. Then my father entered this apartment and said: 'Let's go to another apartment.' We left this apartment. In 10 to 20 minutes, I saw the car leaving [with the three or four young people working with us]. I called these young people I worked with, but their phones were off. They all left. These recruiters preach their religious views, but what they are saying is not in the Qur'an.

DRS, Vahdat, FGD with migrants

48. Community leaders from Dushanbe expressed fears that the spread of religious extremism that fuels the radicalization process will lead to violent extremism:

[VE groups] are eager to break the peace, turn people against each other [...] they are not violent yet [...] they are just at the beginning and then they would use violence. I think it is basically about radicalization for now.

Dushanbe, interview with community leader

49. As part of the narratives on the 122 cases of recruitment, respondents indicated that radicalized Tajik individuals and VE recruiters reportedly originated from diverse categories, including: those who receive religious education abroad, former or banned migrants recruited in Russia who then recruit members of their households and communities, informal religious leaders, and individuals involved in trade who travel abroad to Afghanistan or to Persian Gulf countries.

These people studied in Madrassa in Pakistan in early 2000s, at that time the state did not control where and to which schools the teenagers went for study. And in a short

period of time hundreds of young people who returned to their home country [Tajikistan] started to spread their radical ideas. They were supported by many young people here in the region.

Rasht (rural), DRS, interview with local expert

50. Members of radical groups are said to have distinct appearances and tactics. Men have beards and wear white clothes and short trousers; women wear hijabs or black scarves. Respondents also noted that supporters of these groups are aggressive toward other members in the community, openly criticizing them for their way of life. Female supporters often aggressively engage other women in the community with respect to their attire, uncovered faces, or “incorrect” prayers. Many young girls are said to imitate supporters in the way they dress and in how—and how often—they pray.

51. When one member of a household joins a group, others will likely be recruited. It is usually men recruiting other men, who then recruit their household members, including women. However, in large cities, such as Dushanbe and Khujand, participants offered examples of women recruiting women at the market, at the hospital, and at the workplace.

52. Recruiters in Tajikistan identify and target vulnerable individuals who can easily be influenced due to their lack of religious knowledge. Several respondents indicated that young people are exposed to extremist narratives and radical messages that are shared at closed gatherings with recruiters and then via instant messaging and SMS. A young woman from Khatlon describes the process of radicalization this way:

Young people learn about extremist narratives via mobile phones, they listen to sermons by radical clergymen (who are banned due to their extremist views), receive special invitations, and communicate with members of radical groups via internet and imo.²⁵

Kurgan-tube, FGD with low-income young women

This description is consistent with reports from IS recruiters, such as Abu Usama Noraki, who frequently disseminated audio messages in Tajik via the Zello mobile application (Mehl 2018).

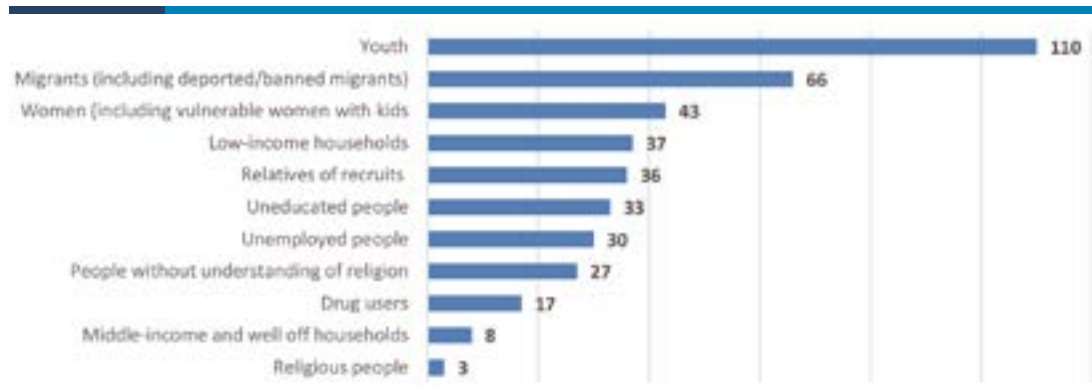
4.2 Groups at Risk of Radicalization and Recruitment by VE Groups

53. Participants indicated that the groups most at-risk of radicalization and recruitment are youth; followed by returning migrants, including deported and banned migrants; and vulnerable women (see Figure 5).

²⁵ Imo is an instant messaging application widely used in Tajikistan.

Figure 5. Groups Vulnerable to Recruitment into Violent Extremism (410 narratives)

Could you tell me if you believe that there are certain groups or populations who are most at-risk for being engaged or likely to join radical groups?



Youth

54. During discussions and interviews, respondents cited youth as being vulnerable 110 times—or one out of four of the narratives on specific vulnerable groups. Many radicalized young men, they claimed, have never been to Russia or anywhere else outside the country. Instead, they said young people are being recruited in their communities to “join the war” abroad or to participate in violent extremism within Tajikistan. Recruiters target them where they search for work, in mosques, where they study—fellow university students often recruit others—and in prisons.²⁶ Many respondents think the recruitment of young people has increased over the last four or five years. Youth who are vulnerable can be divided into three sub-groups: (1) male secondary-school students and graduates, aged 14–17; (2) male university students, aged 18–26; and (3) young adult men outside of the labor market and the school system, aged 18–26. Each group is described in more detail below.

55. Male secondary-school students and graduates aged 14–17. This sub-group includes vulnerable young men who have limited access to education as well as those from low-income or female-headed households. There are more radicalized individuals in rural areas where it is difficult to attain an education beyond the compulsory level, or to get a full-time job. Young men from female-headed households experience additional trauma and can be the subject of ridicule and discrimination by other students at school or by community members. In a focus group of women from an urban area of DRS discussing cases of radicalization and recruitment of secondary-school students, one offered an example of how it happens:

A Salafi group was formed [in 2017] among secondary-school students [young men, aged 16–18]. Somebody gathered them, and four of them left for Syria for big money.

²⁶ The off-the-record observation regarding prisons as a locus for recruitment was shared by a respondent with a criminal background from rural Khatlon.

The families of these students were not aware that their children had joined Salafists and were paid, as nobody in their families saw any cash.

Vahdat (urban), DRS, FGD with vulnerable women

56. A woman from a focus group in GBAO's regional capital explains: "It's youth, basically. My son is in the 11th grade now, he is doing sports [...] I am always worried about him [...] there is always a risk." A vulnerable woman in urban DRS highlighted in an individual interview the plight of youth from families abandoned by male migrants:

This [men abandoning women with kids] affects children very badly. Their mental state gets worse, their views change, they get angry. They show jealousy and hate. They say: 'He has this and that, and I don't. Why did their dad buy it for them, and nobody bought it for me? Why does his father pick them up from school? Why does their mom dress them so nicely? Why do teachers like them more?'

Tursunzade (urban), DRS, interview with a vulnerable woman

57. Male university students aged 18–26. This sub-group is more common in urban areas and among middle-income households.

These young men have many grievances regarding corruption in the education sector, their limited access to employment, and corruption in the labor market that prevents them from getting jobs. Respondents believe that youth from urban households with middle or high income can also be radicalized by the extensive propaganda of VE groups.

58. Young adult men outside of the labor market and education, aged 18–26. This sub-group includes the recently married, young men with children, returning migrants who contracted an illness while abroad, and young men in female-headed households. These young men lack educational and job prospects in their home communities, particularly in rural areas; they need money to feed their families, have a poor understanding of religion, and have grievances against the state and local institutions. At a focus group discussion with middle-income young women in an urban area of Khatlon, one participant explained:

They [recruiters from VE groups] search among people, among the youth, among poor families to offer them money. They know that they can't offer money to well-off people [...] They offer it mostly to young students from rural areas who rent flats, to young jobless guys.

Kulob (urban), Khatlon, FGD with middle-income young women

A participant in a focus group discussion with migrants in rural DRS bordering Kyrgyzstan explained:

According to statistics, our district is ranked second in the country in terms of problems with extremism. Many young people aged 16–24 joined such groups because of lack of knowledge and unemployment.

Lakhsh (rural), DRS, FGD with migrants

59. Youth who have engaged in criminal activity seem particularly vulnerable. Many respondents report that over the past five years, crime—often committed by youth—has increased in their communities, including burglary, theft, fighting, and gang-related incidents. In 2018, according to the general prosecutor’s office, 907 offenses (288 in Khatlon) were committed by minors, a 31 percent increase from 2017. UNICEF indicates that children who commit offenses tend to come from the most vulnerable segments of the population, and conviction and criminal records may make them vulnerable to joining criminal groups or to radicalization (UNICEF 2019). For example, prisons are a known recruiting venue for extremists. Migrants deported from Russia are particularly vulnerable to committing crimes. One participant at a focus group discussion with middle-income young women in Dushanbe noted:

Once [crime] was a rare phenomenon, and as soon as Russia started to deport people, the theft rate has gone up.

Dushanbe, FGD with middle-income young women

During an individual interview, a returning migrant in DRS explained:

What else can he [a deported migrant] do if there is no work and his family is hungry? They begin to engage in thefts and robbery.

Rasht (rural), DRS, interview with returning migrant.

60. According to many respondents, radicalization and recruitment into VE groups is still occurring in Tajikistan, but since late 2017, a shift in emphasis has occurred. Instead of seeking people to fight in foreign countries, recruiters tend to focus more on radicalization and VE activities in Tajikistan, particularly by IS in Khatlon and by Salafists in Dushanbe and DRS. Respondents in Khatlon reported at least nine instances of young people displaying the IS flag in front of administrative buildings in regional centers or at the entrance of towns or villages in areas bordering Afghanistan since 2017 (see Box 2).

Migrants

61. After youth, the second vulnerable group most frequently mentioned by study participants was returning seasonal migrants. This demonstrates that the processes of radicalization and recruitment in Tajikistan and abroad cannot be entirely separated from one another. References to returning migrants appeared in 16 percent of the narratives about vulnerable groups. Three sub-groups were described: migrants from Tajikistan living

Box 2. Raising the Islamic State Flag in Khatlon

Five respondents described nine incidents of the Islamic State (IS) flag being displayed in front of a local administrative building or at the city's entrance within the six months prior to the study, all in the Khatlon region. The key motive, they explained, was to raise fear among local community members. The flags were placed in regional centers, such as Kurgan Tube and Kulob, and in towns and villages bordering Afghanistan, such as Farkhor and Shartuz. In most instances, groups of two to eight young men from low- or middle-income households, including recent secondary-school graduates as young as 18–20, were involved in displaying the flag. None had ever been out of the country (Eurasianet 2018; RFERL 2015).

A respondent in the Shartuz area, who asked that the interview not be recorded, described an incident in which eight local young men who had graduated from the local high school two years prior, some from well-off and respected families, raised an IS flag in front of the district administration building. They were all convicted of extremism and sentenced to prison for 27–28 years. Members of their families lost property and jobs. Named as potential recruiters were locals who often travel to Afghanistan, as well as people from Vahdat in the DRS who recruit young men in Khatlon.

in other countries (e.g., Russia and Kyrgyzstan); migrants returning from other countries to Tajikistan, either voluntarily or because they were banned from the country in which they were living; and internal migrants within Tajikistan.

62. The financial advantages of labor migration are considered negligible. Many who work in Russia do so for six months of the year. Earnings for the first two to three months often only cover the repayment of loans incurred to cover travel expenses. Only then can they send some money to their families for the next three or four months. Deported migrants accrue very limited or no savings.

63. Respondents note that while in Russia, some migrants from Tajikistan have been recruited into VE groups by radical preachers from Tajikistan who had left the country to escape state prosecution.

Some people came to mosques [in DRS] and directly and openly stated: 'Your prayers are wrong, you pray incorrectly.' And as soon as the state started to prosecute them, they migrated to Russia and to Pakistan. They started to propagate their ideas among migrants from Tajikistan there.

Rasht (rural), DRS, interview with local expert

64. Young men in Vahdat district, DRS, express some understanding of the process whereby individuals are radicalized in Russia due to their isolated and vulnerable situation. Migrants, they say, arrive in Russia with only a vague knowledge of religion, which increases their vulnerability to radical

religious ideology. Also, most migrants have no professional experience and poor knowledge of the Russian language. Illegal migrants are even more vulnerable.

65. A local expert lamented the long prison sentences of some returning Tajik recruits, despite being initially granted immunity.

I have heard of two cases, when guys from Gharm were recruited to Syria. According to the parents, their children were working as migrants in Russia, after some time it turned out that the sons went to Syria. Under the pressure of law enforcement agencies, the fathers persuaded their sons to come back. Immunity was guaranteed to them. But as soon as they came back, they were charged with criminal cases. They received eight and 12 years in prison. The father lost his state job, he was fired.

Rasht (rural), DRS, interview with local expert

66. As Box 3 illustrates, youths radicalized in Russia return to Tajikistan to radicalize and recruit others.

The five individuals who perpetrated the attack against foreign tourists in Dangara, Khatlon province, on July 29, 2018, share characteristics with the groups considered vulnerable to recruitment into VE groups. They were male university students, recent secondary-school graduates, relatives of recruits, and raised by female-headed households. They all originated from Khatlon and struggled to find steady incomes in their home country. The leader of the group and two other members had been radicalized and recruited in Russia, returning to Tajikistan just before the attack (see Box 3).

Box 3. Biographical Backgrounds of Recruits into Violent Extremism

On July 29, 2018, while on a sightseeing bicycle tour in the Dangara district of the Khatlon region, four foreign tourists—two U.S. nationals, one Dutch citizen, and one Swiss citizen—were murdered, while three others were injured and taken to the hospital. The assault, for which IS claimed responsibility, was allegedly carried out by five young Tajik men ranging in age from 19 to 33 who had planned to cross the Panj River and escape to Afghanistan afterward. Of the five suspected perpetrators, only Hussein Abdusamadov, 33, remains alive. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in November 2018. The other attackers were 19-year-olds Asomiddin Majidov and Zafarjon Safarov, 21-year-old Asliddin Yusupov and his 26-year-old brother, Jafariddin Yusupov. All four were all killed during the ensuing police operation (Ministry of Internal Affairs 2018). The publicly available information about the suspects is summarized below.

Hussein Abdusamadov, the group leader, was reportedly radicalized in Russia. He was born and spent his early childhood in the village of Selga, Khatlon, in the rural Panj district bordering Afghanistan. His father died when he was 3 years old. In the early 1990s, he, his mother, and his two brothers moved to Dushanbe where Hussein attended a prestigious boarding school, the Presidential Lyceum. After graduation, he enrolled in the Tajik State University of Commerce, where he was elected head of the student council. He dropped

out of the university after his third year and moved to Russia in search of a job. His mother claims that she had become suspicious of his behavior in recent years, and that it was clear to her that her son was not working in Russia. He would call her from various countries, including Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia. Hussein's brother, Bahtier, was reportedly a member of the Turkistan Islamic Movement and is currently in prison for engaging in terrorist and extremist activities (RFERL 2018a; RFERL 2018b). **Asomiddin Majidov and Zafarjon Safarov** were relatives of Hussein from the village of Selga. They traveled to Russia in 2017 after failing their university entrance exams. One worked in the Moscow region and the other in Novosibirsk. Without informing relatives, they returned to Tajikistan two days prior to the attack. They met with **Jafariddin and Asliddin Yusupov** in the city of Nurek, Khatlon. Like Hussein, the Yusupov brothers were raised by a single mother; their father abandoned the family in 1996 and moved to another district. Their mother worked as a deputy director at a school. Jafariddin was a graduate of Vahdat Technical College. Asliddin had previously served as a soldier in the Tajik army at a post in the district of Isfara in the Ferghana Valley; he was married and had two children. Media outlets reported that Jafariddin, who was radicalized by Hussein Abdusamadov, had persuaded his younger brother to join in the attack (RFE/RL 2018a; Asia Plus 2018). Their mother claims that they were good students and did not grow up religious. She says that both tried their best to earn incomes in their home country to support their family but were not very successful.

Vulnerable women

67. The third most commonly cited vulnerable group is women, including the wives and relatives of radicalized individuals as well as abandoned women with children, such as the wives of labor migrants or prisoners, divorcees, and widows. The report includes findings and recommendations regarding the roles of wives, sisters, mothers, and abandoned wives of labor migrants in preventing violent extremism (PVE), with examples of the impact of vulnerabilities specific to them and their children.²⁷

68. Respondents cited several factors that make women vulnerable to radicalization. These include: a desire to get married or to preserve a marriage; demands by a husband or an older household member, for example, a migrant comes home and orders his wife and children to return abroad with him; lack of job or source of income to feed their children; grievances against husband or his family and stigma in the community against divorced or abandoned women. In all regions, respondents gave examples of women who, influenced by radicalized family members and in order to preserve their marriages, ultimately accepted extremist views, including changing their way of dress and behavior. Some followed their husbands or male relatives to join VE groups in Syria and Afghanistan.

69. The impact of abandonment on women and children—and their communities—is profound. Female respondents expressed anger at husbands (primarily labor migrants) who abandoned

²⁷ The study does not explore questions on gender norms, such as relationships between single mothers and their sons and daughters, or between female and male spouses, and how these influence behaviors.

them and their children. These women face abuse from their husbands' families, especially mothers-in-law against their sons' abandoned wives, as well as stigma from the community, which is particularly acute in rural areas. Some say that even if a husband sends money home, he gives it to his father or other male family member, leaving women with no control over it. Many women are unable to provide for their children's basic needs—they must choose between clothes and food or school fees and supplies. One woman from rural Khatlon described her agonizing options: "My children ask me, what we are going to buy them next time when father sends us money—clothes or something to eat." If a child falls ill, the husband's family may still not offer the wife any money, instead claiming that the parents of the wife are responsible for paying for the treatment. A respondent in an urban area of DRS (*Tursunzade, FGD with middle-income young women*) described how susceptible these women are to recruitment into violent extremism: "If they [women] face difficulties in the family, and they are promised something, they could agree for the sake of their children." Notably, many cases of VE activity have been perpetrated by the children of households headed by abandoned women.

70. In Tajikistan, 24 percent of women aged 15 to 49 have been the victim of physical violence since age 15. Divorced, separated, or widowed women are more likely to have experienced physical violence than are married women or never-married women, with rates of 44, 26, and 10 percent, respectively. The country's highest rate of women suffering physical violence are found in Khatlon (36 percent). However, only one in 10 women sought help, while 75 percent neither sought help nor told anyone about the incident (SA, MOHSP, and ICF 2018). Suicide and suicide attempt rates are high among female adolescents, with domestic violence serving as a key driver. Adolescent girls and youth in general across Tajikistan have scant access to psychological support and counseling (UNICEF 2018). Although no respondents directly referred to gender-based violence as a driver for radicalization and recruitment, some noted that women recruited in Tajikistan become victims of human trafficking, slavery, forced prostitution, or forced marriage in Turkey or Syria.

71. Vulnerable women, including wives of migrants, single mothers, and widowed or divorced women with children, were more forthcoming than other respondents, offering detailed accounts of radicalization in their communities, including among other women:

Once I was in [a] market working as a seller, a woman talked to me and asked about religion. I said I started prayers some time back, and she said, 'You should come to my house I will give you books, and I will teach you.' I understood that I do not need that, and I told her no thanks. They engage you in conversation with the aim to recruit.

Khujand (urban), Sughd, FGD with vulnerable women

A friend of my mother has a son who has been a member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir for many years. He run away with his family from here to Moscow, but their mother still lives here. As soon as she heard that her son traveled to Syria, she is very nimble and knows laws very well, she traveled there and took her son out of Syria.

Khujand (urban, regional capital), Sughd, FGD with middle-income young women

72. Radicalization and recruitment among women in Tajikistan is a phenomenon that deserves to be further explored. As emerged from study responses, women can play different roles, either as victims of radicalization, as recruiters, or as agents of resilience, recognizing early signs of radicalization and preventing relatives from joining VE groups. Box 4 explores instances of women being recruited into VE groups and women who managed to withstand recruitment and radicalization attempts, as cited by study respondents.

Box 4. Understanding Women's Vulnerability to Recruitment and Their Resilience to Violent Extremism

Study respondents from Dushanbe, DRS, Khatlon, and Sughd noted that vulnerable women have been victims of recruitment but that they have also demonstrated resilience to efforts of radicalization and recruitment into VE groups.

Respondents from all regions provided examples of women who were influenced by radicalized family members and who then accepted extremist views, including changing the way they dressed and behaved in order to preserve their marriages, with some even leaving with their husbands or other male relatives to join radical groups in Syria or Afghanistan. One respondent in Sughd explained:

"In our mahalla we have few families, their husbands joined those groups, men forced women to wear the Muslim headscarf [...] they became like fanatics."

Khujand, Sughd, FGD with middle-income women

Another woman received a call from her husband who told her:

"Right now, a black car will come to your place and bring you to my place. Do not say anything to anybody. Leave the kids at your father's house."

Dushanbe, FGD with vulnerable women

In addition to wives and relatives of radicalized individuals, vulnerable women included abandoned wives of labor migrants with children, divorced women, wives of prisoners, and widows:

"There was a young divorced girl in our village, she stayed with her child at her mother's place. A woman entered their house one day and said: We will find a good job for your daughter, give us her passport. They took the girl with them, until now no news from her. Her child left alone."

Dushanbe, FGD with vulnerable women

However, a focus group of female respondents interviewed in Khatlon and Sughd also underlined women's resilience to recruitment and radicalization attempts. Study respondents explained that women can withstand recruiters for the sake of their family and children, either rejecting radicalization attempts outright, denouncing them, or leaving communities of radicals.

“Our neighbor was left with four children alone; her husband was arrested. She found a job as a dishwasher in the canteen and works full time. She said that [a recruiter] had offered her a job several times with a salary twice as big as here, but she would have to carry out other kinds of work. She didn't agree to it. She has children and parents.”

Kulob, Khatlon, FGD with middle-income young women

“In my case, if I come to know about any radical I will inform the police, or head of the mahalla [local self-government]. This happened in our apartment block, such people [extremists] appeared. Then they reported them and got arrested.”

Khujand, Sughd, FGD with vulnerable women

A woman from Khatlon explained how she was almost radicalized while living with her husband in a community of violent extremists in Turkey.

“I almost got to become like them. You must dress only in black and leave open only your eyes. And you only read Quran and that is all [...] I did not stay there, my (ex) husband wanted to stay, and I did not. Later, he brought me back himself.”

Panj, Khatlon, FGD with low-income young women

4.3 Areas Vulnerable to Radicalization and Recruitment

73. Study respondents demonstrated an awareness of the radicalization that is occurring and the VE groups that are operating in various regions of Tajikistan. Many shared concerns about recruitment efforts near or in their own communities. Respondents identified five main domestic and international radical or VE groups operating in the country, as well as specific categories of recruiters. The Salafiya were the most frequently mentioned group, especially in DRS; Hizbut-Tahrir was mentioned only in Sughd; the IS was mentioned primarily in Khatlon, and the Taliban and “Wahhabis” were mentioned in DRS. In Sughd, support for VE groups began to emerge 20 years ago; in Dushanbe, 9–10 years ago; in DRS, 4–6 years ago; and in Khatlon, “three to four years ago” (prior to the time of data collection.)

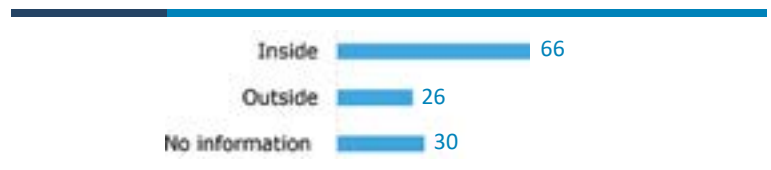
74. As reflected in official statistics presented in Table 1, Khatlon has become a primary region for recruitment into IS. Local respondents describe attempts by Salafi followers from DRS, including Vahdat, and Dushanbe, to radicalize and recruit young, poor, and relatively uneducated youth from Khatlon. According to community leaders and local respondents, outsiders from other communities or from Afghanistan visit the region's

mosques and markets in search of potential recruits, engaging with them personally and maintaining contact with them through text messaging.²⁸

75. Many respondents expressed concern that areas bordering Afghanistan are especially vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment efforts. Respondents from Khatlon and GBAO as well as other regions of Tajikistan raised this concern. Community leaders and focus groups participants alike reported that recruiters from Afghanistan—“where life is harder”—easily cross the border. The most at-risk districts are Farkhor, Hamadoni, Kubodiyon, Kulob, Shartuz, Shurobod, and Panj (all in Khatlon). One participant from Shartuz explained: “I heard about people in Kubodiyon who crossed the border and left for Afghanistan, from where they went to Syria.” A vulnerable woman from Khorogh, GBAO, referring to the increasingly deteriorating security situation in Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, added: “Yes, sometimes we are afraid because Afghanistan is very close.” This reflects the relocation of some IS operatives to those areas (UN Security Council 2018).

76. Of the 122 identified cases of recruitment, respondents could specify in 92 of these cases whether the recruitment took place inside Tajikistan or outside the country—mainly in Russia (see Figure 6). In 66 of the 92 cases, they indicated recruitment took place in Tajikistan, while recruitment outside the country was mentioned in 26 cases. Sometimes the location was specified (i.e., Dushanbe, “our village,” “our market,” or Moscow and St Petersburg). In other cases, people just said recruited “here” or recruited in Russia. In 30 cases, respondents did not refer to any location.

Figure 6. Cases of Recruitment Inside or Outside of Tajikistan (122 cases)



77. Some recruiters offer employment in other countries, such as Syria, as well as financial support for families. Seeing no prospects for themselves in Tajikistan, some young people accept such offers. As one young man from a low-income background living in a cross-border area with Afghanistan explained:

They [recruiters] offer them US\$2,000. Parents also have an impact on children’s decisions, as they are telling their

²⁸ The use of text messaging may be due to the lower rates of Internet use in Khatlon compared with other regions. Former migrants and the household of migrants tend to use the Internet the most.

children to find a job. They get tired of being jobless and agree to join. Nobody respects those who do not have money.

Shartuz (rural), Khatlon, FGD with low-income young men

78. Discussions with a group of young men from an urban center in Khatlon indicated that they are aware of recruiter tactics. As described by one young man of middle income from a regional center:

So the guys [recruiters] who promised to help his family with the money, did not help at all, they disappeared. There was another case, a guy with his wife and kid were sent there [to Syria], also he was promised that his parents will be taken care of in here. He will go and work there; a round-trip ticket will be provided. They also went there and disappeared, did not come back.

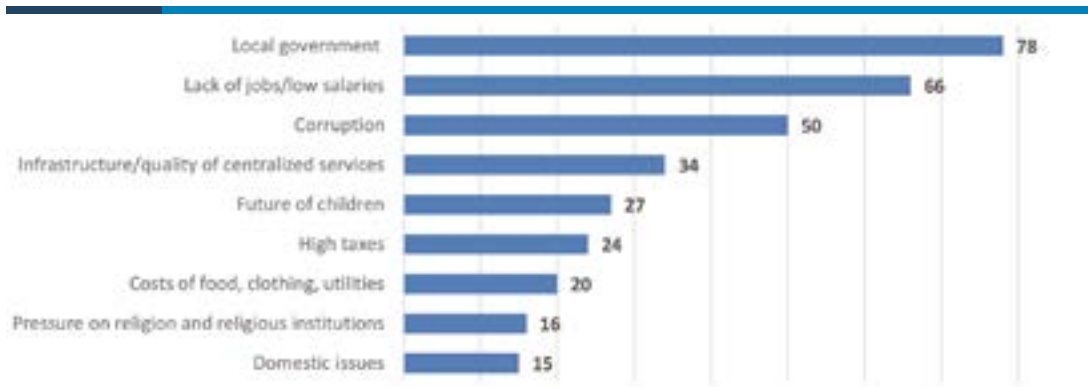
Kurgan-tube (urban), Khatlon, FGD with middle-income young men

4.4 Grievances and Perceptions of Exclusion

79. Socio-economic grievances and perceptions of exclusion can contribute to a persons' vulnerability to radicalization and VE recruitment but are not a main driver of the radicalization processes on their own. Figure 7 ranks various types of grievances as mentioned in respondents' narratives. They include dissatisfaction with local government, lack of jobs, corruption, quality of centralized services and infrastructure, and future of children. These categories are analyzed, building on the respondents' narratives.

Figure 7. Sources of Grievances and Perceptions of Exclusion (330 narratives)

Are there some people/groups of individuals that might feel that they have grievances against others? What causes the grievance?

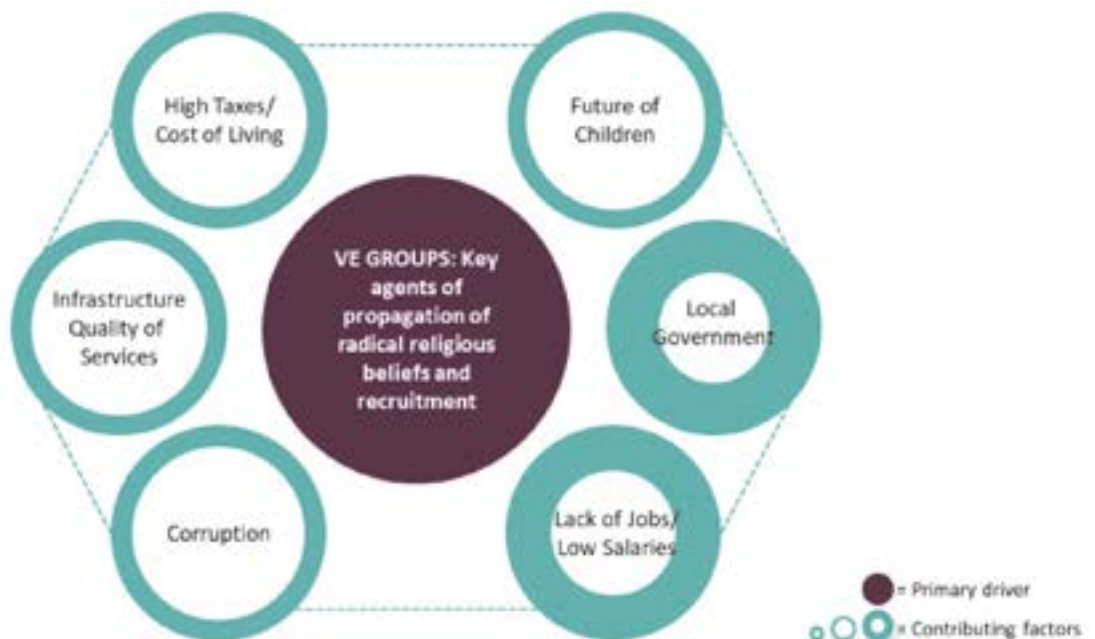


80. Grievances reflect the varying concerns expressed in each region. Respondents from GBAO expressed more concern about the local government than did those from Sughd, DRS, Khatlon, and Dushanbe. GBAO—where the internal situation has improved following changes to the regional leadership in September 2018—is the only region where study respondents referred to organized crime, including drug trafficking, banditry, and illegal possession and use of firearms. Respondents from Sughd were most concerned about corruption compared with respondents from other regions. Khatlon respondents were more concerned with the lack of jobs and the quality of local infrastructure; and DRS and Dushanbe respondents with restrictions on religious practices.

81. As illustrated earlier, respondents mentioned that they perceive VE groups as the main factor determining the process of radicalization of mindsets and recruitment. Contextual factors, such as dissatisfaction towards local governments, lack of jobs and low salaries, corruption, or lack of infrastructure and services, can increase the risks of radicalization and recruitment, but they are not identified as primary drivers. Most individuals and groups who are poor and/or unemployed, or who have other specific grievances, do not support violence or engage in it. On the other hand, the combined processes of propagating extremist narratives and recruiting local followers into VE groups seem to catalyze these vulnerabilities into support for violent extremism (see Figure 8).

82. Only seven narratives out of a total of 330 explicitly mention an association between people with grievances and recruitment into VE groups. For example, “people who are not satisfied with the local government” (community leader, rural area

Figure 8. Understanding Primary Vs. Contextual Drivers of Violent Extremism



of DRS bordering Kyrgyzstan), and “people who have difficulties in their families or that are not happy about the government and its structures” (deported migrant in a Khatlon urban center).

Local governments

83. The most commonly expressed grievance concerned local governments at the district and sub-district levels. The main complaints were: (i) respondents claimed their complaints and requests are not addressed, that local government takes too long to make decisions, and that decisions tend to favor well-off members of the community; (ii) the social support distribution mechanism is seen as uneven or corrupt; and (iii) respondents objected to the harsh behavior of local government employees. It was predominantly women and representatives of low-income households who made such claims. Many believe that the institutions meant to protect them have turned on them.

Now if you ask anybody, he says until you have somebody working inside the institution and s/he helps to process your letter further, your letter will never reach the relevant instance [...] Your case will be unresolved, papers are on hold.

Dushanbe, FGD with vulnerable women

The head of Jamoat [sub-district] instructed his assistant to review our case. It all got quiet now and we do not know what we shall do about it.

Panj (rural), Khatlon, FGD with low-income young women

They [district and sub-district administrations] work for themselves, put all the money in their own pockets, support their families and relatives, and poor people are suffering.

Khorog (urban, regional center), GBAO, FGD middle-income young women

84. As illustrated in Box 5, the lack of a clear mechanism for land distribution is a significant grievance against state officials and prosperous households, particularly among young men from low-income households in rural areas across the country.

Lack of jobs and low salaries

85. The lack of jobs and educational opportunities outside of basic education result in a significant number of young men spending their free time in idleness. Respondents indicated that such young NEETs can feel angry, frustrated, depressed, and hopeless.

They face many problems. They steal; they are frustrated because there are no jobs.

Vahdat (urban), DRS, FGD with migrants

Box 5. Land Issues

Despite the Agrarian Reform Program of the government of Tajikistan 2009–12 and amended Land Code from 2012—which in principle allow women to own land—small landholders have been squeezed onto minuscule parcels as small as 0.01 hectares. Respondents reported that, due to the limited land availability, it is common for three to five families to share a single house, with conflicts frequently ensuing among the extended household members. The lack of land for cultivation or housing is a common reason for young men to migrate to Russia or another country in the hope of earning enough money to buy a plot. But only a few succeed.

“Young people travel as labor migrants three or four times, and then they can buy a plot of land or a house. This takes several years.”

Vahdat, DRS, FGD with returning migrants

“They come back and if they have a plot of land, they engage in agriculture. Those making money in the trade eventually open their own business. However, if there is no work, people start stealing. What else can they do if there is no work and their families are hungry? They begin to engage in thefts and robbery.”

Rasht, DRS, inter-view with returning migrant

Respondents underscored the frequency of fraud cases, when one piece of land is sold to several people, or land is sold using false documents. People who have saved money for years or who take on debt to purchase land can discover that documents are false or that the land has already been sold multiple times. Filing a complaint with the court to remedy such matters takes considerable time and effort. Young men from low-income households complain that the land belongs to the rich, and they see no legal avenue for obtaining it for small-scale farming or to build a house to start a family.

“I had a great deal of difficulty in obtaining a land title certificate and was about to start construction of a house, but I got to know [yesterday] that a public official’s son wants to build something close to my land site and will own the major part of my site. I complained to the prosecutor’s office, but they haven’t considered my case yet.”

Shartuz, Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

“Some people received large areas of land, others do not even have 10 acres. Local authorities have to allocate land equally among people.”

Lakhsh, DRS, FGD with returning migrants

86. Young people are under constant pressure from their parents and other household members to find a job and earn an income. Young, recently married men with small children can feel particularly pressured as they are expected to support their parents as well as their new families; so can banned and otherwise returning migrants from Russia, as well as young men living in urban areas. With the available local jobs so limited, many will accept any job they can get, regardless of the salary.

87. Those who manage to find full-time jobs complain that they only earn enough money to feed their family. They do not make enough to buy clothes, cover utility bills, or pay for health care.

I, for example, get 400 somoni per month and I can't provide for my family with this amount. The flour sack costs 150 somoni, this is half of my money, I can provide my family with food only. The possibility of getting a job is very low.

Shartuz (rural area bordering Afghanistan),
Khatlon, interview with deported migrant

The issue is critical for a woman head of household. The kind of job she is likely to get will usually pay less than average, and her salary usually represents her primary or only source of income.

Nowadays many women are engaged in trade, because the men are absent. Because they cannot do it. They are in migration. And men do not agree to work for low wages/income. And for women it is easier to cross borders to go to other markets (purchasing goods) compared to the men.

Khujand, Sughd, FGD with middle income women

88. People feel frustrated that even families that have jobs cannot afford to cover all their basic needs. The grievances about the lack of jobs and low salaries are often captured in the same narratives of anger and uncertainty regarding the future of their children in the country. Low-income vulnerable women explained that they often worry when they do not know if they will be able to feed or provide clothing for their children.

My children ask me, what we are going to buy them next time when father sends us money—clothes or something to eat? Shartuz (rural area bordering Afghanistan),

Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

89. Seven narratives from study respondents mostly in Khatlon region, GBAO and DRS, which have the country's highest poverty rates, cited a direct link between high unemployment and youth vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups.

Mainly young men are attracted to such things. The first reason is the unemployment in Tajikistan, young people do not have places to work. They are offered money that can help them to solve their problems and that is why they agree. Many guys left for Syria and we found out that they were killed. The reasons are: unemployment, small salaries, unoccupied population.

Kulob (urban), Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

A rich man has wealth and is not hungry; a poor man does not have anything and is willing to go for the sake of his kids and family [...] They choose their targets, how to approach them, those who have hard living conditions, they assess their situation and select them as their targets and recruit them.

Kurgan-tube (urban), Khatlon, FGD with middle-income young men

Corruption

90. Among all groups participating in the study, corruption was the third most common type of grievance cited. Participants condemned the common practice of having to pay a bribe or have a friend or relative in a given enterprise or state organization to get a full-time job. Respondents claimed that a bribe is solicited for well-paying and prestigious positions as well as for low-skilled and low-status jobs such as guards and janitors. Bribes can run as high as several months' pay. Middle-income educated young men and single women mentioned this issue the most frequently than other respondents. In addition, middle-income young men and their parents felt powerless when, after they had invested significant resources and effort to get a good education, they were still asked to pay a bribe to get a job.

My neighbor got a job of the medical order and she paid 1,200 somoni for this, now she gets a salary in the amount of 200–300 somoni.

Kulob, Khatlon, urban (regional center), FGD with vulnerable women

Where should poor people get money if they look for a job? They demand 2,000–3,000 somoni. If we had this money we would not have searched for a job [...] Everywhere money is requested, and in state organizations as well.

Kulob (urban, regional center), Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

91. Middle-income and urban respondents criticized the corruption of the state agencies that control local businesses.

Several former entrepreneurs explained that when they established a business, local agencies demanded a bribe. Narratives also included numerous anecdotes about corrupt behavior among local-level police officers, including soliciting bribes from business owners and female vendors at markets and imposing disproportionate fines on taxi drivers.

92. Respondents cited high levels of corruption and high taxes as reasons why many businesses fail or go bankrupt.

Bankrupt entrepreneurs feel resentful and discouraged from starting new businesses in their communities.

As soon as the shop starts functioning, the inspection bodies, such as the tax committee, fire-fighting structures, and others, immediately appear, and the entrepreneur cannot cover the amounts spent on the equipment purchased [...] Entrepreneurs prepare all necessary documents, including a patent, but the inspection bodies can come at any time, find faults and demand additional payments.

Isfara (rural), Sughd, interview with a community leader

93. Even among former migrants, business constraints related to corruption and excessive inspections by local control agencies can spur them to return to Russia, in search of better business opportunities.

If he can't receive credit, he rents a premise using funds earned in Russia. Later the inspections will start. As soon as those agencies see that he has good sales, they start their inspections. As a result, he quits and returns to Russia.

Dushanbe, FGD with migrants

94. Young men from low-income and middle-income households and rural areas also criticized the high corruption in educational institutions. To get an education, children are expected to pay teachers for passing exams. In general, study participants noted that all types of corruption have increased in the last five-to-10 years.

Higher education is extremely unpopular with the boys because of the high level of corruption at the universities. All students, regardless of the level of knowledge, should pay some money to teachers during the exams, otherwise they risk being kicked out of the university.

Dushanbe, interview with entrepreneur

95. Low-income men and women and vulnerable women criticized the widespread corruption in state institutions and courts. According to the respondents, people are expected to pay a bribe to win a court case. Low-income households feel powerless and angry that they cannot appeal to the state agencies and cannot win a case in court because they lack money to pay a bribe. Many feel afraid or discouraged from appealing their cases in court or to state institutions because they cannot afford the bribe.

My ex-husband is quite well off, but he does not help me or my child. I asked him for a land site, where my father would build a house for me, but he refused. I took the case to court and hired a lawyer. Now he pays child support, 200–300 somoni. I have a right to live with my disabled child in my ex-husband's house and occupy one room and I have come to the court again, but the court did not uphold my claim. Because I am from a poor family. My ex-husband would pay to the judge and he would rule in his favor.

Shartuz (rural area bordering Afghanistan), Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

Infrastructure and quality of services

96. Study respondents shared multiple grievances regarding the quality of basic infrastructure and services. Their top issues were access to and quality of drinking water, quality of electricity service, frequency of waste removal services, quality of roads, access to local public transportation, and availability of local, sports-related infrastructure to serve children and youth.

97. Some stressed that current infrastructure and service-related shortcomings can create health problems in adults and children, citing poor water quality and waste on city and

village streets. Respondents also noted that the poor quality of infrastructure and services—inadequate access to and supply of electricity, poor road quality, and lack of available childcare facilities or public transportation—impedes the establishment of businesses and therefore hampers access to jobs, and greatly burdens households financially, especially those of low income, due to the high cost of available alternatives.

Some areas have a transport once a day and people suffer. Also, one can observe lack of transport to all areas in Khujand.

Khujand (urban, regional center), Sughd, FGD with migrants

This is the problem of the whole mahalla [...] We must spend 30 minutes to get home because there is no bridge [...] It is especially difficult for small children and grown-ups to walk in winter when it is very cold and in summer when it is very hot.”

Rural area, Khatlon, FGD with vulnerable women

The enterprise responsible for waste collection charges 18 somoni every month, but the enterprise neglects its responsibilities and does not collect waste regularly. Kurgan-tube (urban, regional center), Khatlon, FGD with middle-income young men

98. Young male respondents and single mothers were especially concerned by the lack of infrastructure and services for children and youth, particularly sports facilities.

Most young people play football and volleyball, but we do not have any stadium for them to play. In the village, it is impossible to build a stadium for technical reasons, but a bit further there is a suitable place for a playground, but local authorities do not allow any construction because this land belongs to the collective farm and youth have nowhere to play sports.

Khujand (suburban area), Sughd, interview with deported migrant

Pressure on religion and religious institutions

99. A small number of narratives (16 out of 330) lamented the high level of state pressure on religious institutions and practices. Such grievances were concentrated among respondents in Dushanbe; in Vahdat and Rasht, in the DRS; and in Khujand, in Sughd. Specific examples included the shutting down of mosques, especially in rural communities; imams adopting the state agenda in their speeches, and women being prohibited to cover their heads in public places. Narratives also referred to religious events and celebrations—such as weddings, funerals, and the end of fasting—being regulated by the state, and relatives of prosecuted individuals being targeted by law enforcement agencies.

We heard at the bazaars that they ban wearing veils and black hijabs. I told them if they stop me for wearing hijab, I would tell them first to ban the drinking houses, so we live in safe environment, only then I will take off my scarf.

Dushanbe, FGD with vulnerable women

Now even mullahs are fined for their religious teaching to the children. There are more crimes because children are left unattended. Those who used to learn religious principles became afraid of God, today there is no Islam in the hearts of people. Currently, young people watch movies, listen to music, and go to clubs.

Vahdat (urban), DRS, FGD with migrants

It is forbidden now for the youth to go to mosque. If they were to be allowed in, the mosques would get overcrowded. Even the 35-year-olds or older would not find room in the mosques. Every Friday in schools they put classes until 3–4 pm so that the students do not go to mosque to Juma prayers. The law enforcement officers stay in front of the mosques and they don't allow them to enter. Currently they are applying pressure this way.

Khujand, Sughd, FGD with migrants

100. Respondents also noted that police have increased their control over mosques and religious people, especially young people in urban areas of DRS and rural areas of Khatlon that border Afghanistan (Shartuz and Panj). Police or representatives of law enforcement agencies are present inside mosques during prayer sessions, looking for individuals or behavior that appear to be suspicious. People in contact with religious individuals or young people with beards can be brought to the police station for questioning. Study respondents also explained that the police use physical force to shave beards.

If you have a beard, the first time you should at least get a warning, by saying: 'Friend, you have a long beard, shave it or make it shorter.' Instead, some people were taken to the police station and policemen shaved their beards with scissors or an electric shaver without notice. Some of them grow a beard because they can have skin diseases or have an allergic reaction to shaving. The police are unfair towards them.

Vahdat (urban), DRS, FGD with migrants

101. Ultimately, as noted by a community leader, youth have decreased their engagement in religious activities within the community:

The youth is a bit afraid of this control and pressure and attend less of those meetings [prayers in the mosque] [...] there are other people who can attend: older people and students, public servants, well, almost all social groups may attend.

Dushanbe, interview with community leader

Box 6. Perceptions of State Pressure on Religious Practices and Violent Extremism

The state pressure on non-Hanafi religious symbols and practices can be exploited by VE groups, as indicated in narratives from respondents from the DRS and Dushanbe.

“These groups may use the feelings and emotions of some people who are forbidden to visit a mosque (for example, teenagers) [...] they will be the first ones to approach. The state commits many mistakes, for example: coarse, violent implantation of their ideas, prohibitions.”

Rasht (rural), DRS, interview with local expert

Due to high pressure from the state institutions on religious leaders, young people cannot officially receive religious education in the community. People who demonstrate a keen interest in religion can be accused of supporting radical groups and consequently have problems with community members and/or law enforcement agencies. These people might have a grievance against the state or community that prohibits them from practicing their religion openly.

“Sometimes people just have religious views similar to the ones promoted by those [VE] groups. They may feel grievances against the government and government policy [...] They may believe that the government does not allow the religious people necessary freedom, they feel discriminated for their views.”

Dushanbe, FGD with migrants

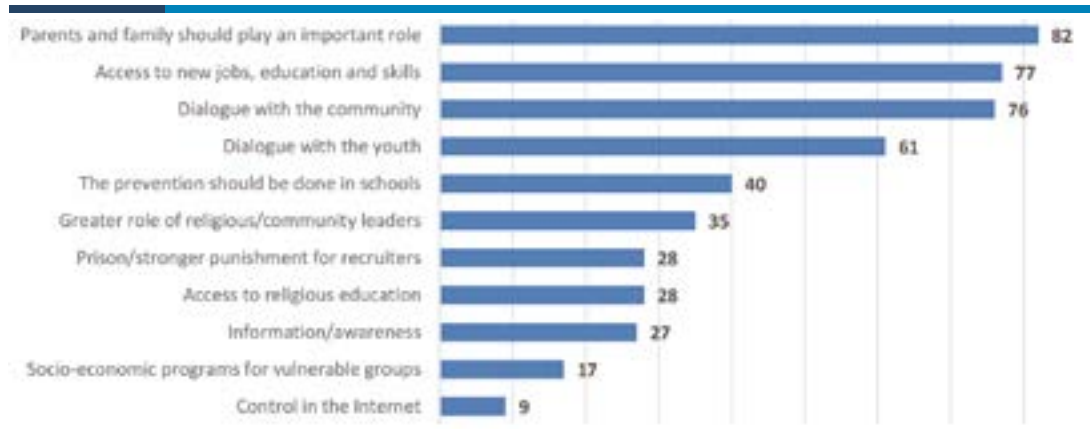
4.5 Respondents’ Proposals to Strengthen Youth Resilience to Radicalization and Violent Extremism

102. Participants in this study suggested several important measures to prevent violent extremism that are particularly focused on youth resilience to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups. An examination of 480 narratives revealed the following recurring themes: the importance of involving parents and family (82 narratives); access to jobs, education, and skills (77 narratives); dialogue with the community (76 narratives); dialogue with youth (61 narratives); and school-based prevention measures (40 narratives). Additional suggestions relate to religious training and education to ensure an accurate understanding of Islam, information and awareness campaigns, and legal approaches. Recommendations of respondents that focused on youth echo the emphasis of recent literature on youth in efforts to prevent violent extremism in the population group that is the primary recruitment target for VE groups (Sommers 2019).

103. Parents and women. Most respondents suggested that parents, especially women, can play a significant role as agents of prevention in their households because they can detect early signs of radicalization and dissuade family members from joining VE groups. A woman in an urban area in GBAO noted: “It’s the

Figure 9. Proposed Measures to Prevent Violent Extremism (480 narratives)

What measures should be implemented to help ensure that people from the community do not engage in radical activities or support such ideas or groups; that is, to prevent radicalization in the community?



parents' responsibility first. If all parents teach their children, the risk will be lower." A woman in Dushanbe added: "Family should form the vision and understanding on this subject." For the most part, female respondents were more willing to discuss radicalization activities and recruitment efforts than their male counterparts, which points to the importance of women's agency in community-level prevention efforts.

104. Critical thinking for secondary school students. Some respondents emphasized that education—school-based programs and extracurricular learning focused on violence-prevention—can play a crucial role in the prevention of violent extremism. For example, the development of critical thinking skills in young people can help them overcome or reject the simplistic narratives of extremist ideology that pit one group against another and spread intolerance and gender discrimination.

105. Job opportunities for youth. Respondents highlighted the importance of providing youth with access to local economic opportunities as a way of preventing them from joining VE groups. Education and training should be affordable and should be linked to job opportunities. A young man in an urban area in GBAO noted the connection between jobs and the prevention of violent extremism:

Young people themselves, if they think thoroughly, we can solve all the problems peacefully. We don't have sources of income, if we earned at least 30 or 20 somoni a day, this would be enough for us. And so we would not engage in any groups, and should not even be interested."

Vahdat, DRS, FGD with migrants

106. Support to vulnerable young women. Suggested interventions for young women include: conducting awareness campaigns about the importance of female education, supplying small amounts of capital to support female employment and entrepreneurship, providing childcare facilities for single mothers, offering vocational training focusing on skills development for available²⁹ and future jobs, and providing information on family and civil law. Because many vulnerable women have experienced psychological trauma, their access to psychological assistance is critical. Crisis centers and psychological hotlines should be established in rural and urban areas to provide gender-sensitive care and prevent stigma.

107. Dialogue with the community and with youth. A significant number of respondents think that prevention measures should include building or strengthening dialogue among local community members (76 narratives) and with youth (61 narratives). Respondents believe that both groups should participate in decision-making processes and that they should be involved in the collaborative implementation of prevention measures. A middle-income young woman in an urban area in Sughd suggested:

There needs to be more discussions to understand the views of everyone and help those who are in need to the extent possible so that they do not join such groups, so that they do not put their lives in danger, because there is always a way out from any problem.

Khujand, Sughd, FGD with middle-income young women

108. Prevention in schools. Teachers and principals are among the most respected members of society; hence, respondents believe they can exert great influence over parents and students. However, their capacities need strengthening to allow them to implement effective school-based prevention programs. A male respondent in an urban area of DRS, noting the urgency of making proper investments in young people, claimed,

“It is not simply about building schools and providing equipment and supplies. Education is about more than the physical structure of classrooms and student-teacher ratios. It is about instilling values and self-worth in youth.”

²⁹ Respondents referred to baking, cooking and nursing as available jobs for women requiring vocational training.

5. Development Approaches to Strengthen Youth Inclusion and Resilience to Radicalization and Violent Extremism

109. The findings of this study highlight the pressing risks among young Tajiks and their communities relating to radicalization and violent extremism. These risks can and should be mitigated with tailored development interventions, further presented in section 5.2 as primary and secondary prevention measures.

110. The narratives consistently pointed to linkages between the process of radicalization and recruitment of labor migrants abroad under the influence of Tajik radical preachers who left the country, and the domestic process that is influenced by returning migrants. This illustrates the need to introduce prevention approaches that will increase the resilience³⁰ of at-risk youth, including future migrants, in terms of their mindset, making them less susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism. Internally, although every region of the country has experienced some degree of radicalization and recruitment in specific districts (see table 1), the most populous Khatlon region ranks first, followed by DRS. Respondents highlighted that Khatlon's vulnerability stems from districts situated along the border with Afghanistan's Kunduz province.

111. The study's findings also suggest that policy makers and development partners should consider a wider range of development policies and programs for young people who have not yet been radicalized and their communities. Such an approach would require addressing the grievances and perceptions of exclusion related to poor local governance by district and sub-district administrations, and lack of affordable access to services and economic opportunities. As explained in Chapter 4, such grievances may contribute to vulnerability among youth and other population segments to violent extremism.³¹ Hence, carefully designed and inclusive policies and programs aimed at improving perceptions of fairness in decision-making

³⁰ As indicated in the introduction, the term resilience refers to the capacity of a person or community to positively resist, withstand or recover from the exposure to various shocks, threats, and stressors, such as adverse processes and disturbing events that might lead to radical and violent cognitive beliefs and or behavioral radicalization.

³¹ For a review of the consequences of group-based grievances on fragility, conflict, and violence risks, see World Bank and UN 2018.

and access to economic opportunities and services could help prevent fragility and violent extremism. Such policies and programs should be complemented by efforts to reform the justice and security sectors, also critical to countering violent extremism.

112. Building on these considerations, the study emphasizes the nexus between PVE and youth development as research findings show that youth, particularly but not exclusively young males, are a primary target of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. At the same time, the development approaches and prevention measures further discussed in the report are more comprehensive than conventional youth employment measures that donors and international financial institutions tend to prioritize. This more comprehensive approach reflects a growing consensus that the motivations driving people to voluntarily join VE groups are more complex than youth unemployment or poverty, and therefore require more comprehensive solutions to increase resilience to cognitive or behavioral radicalization.

113. Several areas deserve to be further explored by future research. These include: resilience factors for at-risk groups and communities identified in this study; regional and local specificities in the processes of radicalization and recruitment into VE groups, with particular attention to border areas with Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; and use of quantitative survey and mixed methods to further probe the findings presented in this study in a statistically representative manner.

5.1. Government Policy and Programs

114. The government of Tajikistan has already introduced measures to address identified risks. These include the Youth Development Strategy for 2020 and the related agenda promoted under the 2017 Year of Youth, which emphasizes youth participation, cultural and social inclusion, and empowerment as measures to prevent violent extremism. The government also prioritizes: the promotion of balanced regional development, including support for local development and fiscal and administrative decentralization; measures to reduce unemployment among youth and women, including the promotion of entrepreneurship; and reforms geared toward reducing the tax burden, especially on micro, small, and medium enterprises. In addition, job creation efforts have been undertaken by the Ministry of Labor, mostly for temporary and public jobs, including in rural areas, and for returning migrants banned from reentry in Russia (World Bank 2019). Returning migrants also benefited from information and awareness-raising to prevent the involvement of migrant workers in extremist movements, infectious diseases, and drug addiction.

115. The National Strategy on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2016-20 and its subsequent Action Plan (2018) underlined several priorities. These include the need for an analysis of the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism (GoT 2018a), the prevention of extremism and radicalization among adolescents and youth, the participation of civil society and the private sector in countering extremism, the reduction of women's vulnerability to extremist propaganda, the full participation of women in the development and implementation of related policies, and the reduction of vulnerability among labor migrants to the recruitment efforts of extremist groups.

116. The government of Tajikistan considers women to be potential actors in the prevention of violent extremism and as participants in early warning systems in their communities (GoT 2016). The action plan in the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism for 2016–20 promotes the role of women in preventing extremism through awareness-raising activities regarding risks, and by increasing women's engagement in local councils and in law enforcement agencies. There are currently 110 district women's committees in Tajikistan where women can receive training on the early detection of extremism in their families. The State Committee on Women and Family Affairs and local women's committees provide support to women who report extremist views (Matveeva and Faizullaev 2017).

117. Initiatives funded by development partners have shown promising results in Tajikistan and can be replicated and scaled up.³² The UNICEF-led UPSHIFT program, a youth initiative focused on problem-solving, engagement, and social innovation, offers skills and opportunities to disadvantaged youth in isolated rural districts at the Centers of Additional Education under the Ministry of Education. The program combines social innovation workshops, mentorship, incubation, and seed funding to equip young people with the skills and resources they need to address the problems in their communities. The European Commission's STRIVE program is supporting the development of critical thinking curricula to prevent violent extremism, adapted to local context by organizations such as the Eurasia Foundation for Central Asia. The Mountain Societies Development Support Program (MSDSP) implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation umbrella has showed proof-of-concept of livelihood activities for vulnerable

³² In the second year of the Economic and Social Connections: A Multi-Input Area Development Financing Facility for Tajikistan project, financed by the United States Agency for International Development, the Mountain Societies Development Support Program created eight common interest groups with 108 members (79 women) and projected annual profits of US\$15,200 across Hamadoni, Farkhor, Panj, and Jaihun districts of southern Khatlon, and supported 12 existing groups with 178 members (134 women) and annual profits over US\$23,000 in Eastern Khatlon and GBAO.

young men and women, especially in GBAO and Khatlon, among other interventions. The World Bank, through the IDA18 RMR-funded Resilience Strengthening Program, works to strengthen the resilience of young men and women at risk of radicalization through youth-inclusive services and livelihoods and through community-based investments as prioritized by communities in selected districts of Khatlon and GBAO. Saferworld has been supporting community policing in pilot districts in Khatlon and GBAO to build local trust in authorities and institute prevention approaches along the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border.³³ Other development partners are also collaborating with the government of Tajikistan on the security and justice sectors.

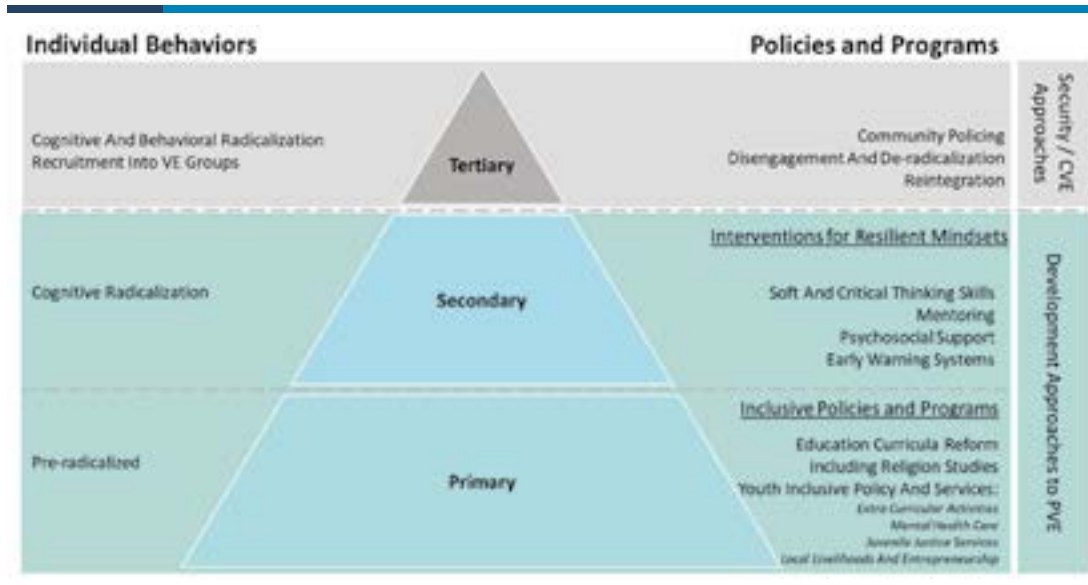
5.2. Development Approaches to Further Strengthen Youth Resilience to Radicalization and Violent Extremism

118. Recent international guidelines for establishing programming to prevent and counter violent extremism emphasize three levels of prevention. Primary prevention refers to inclusive policies and programs that address vulnerable individuals who are not yet radicalized, but who are exposed to radical influences, such as VE messaging. The objective is to mitigate existing risks while putting in place protective measures at the community and individual level. Secondary prevention refers to measures that target individuals who are at high risk of radicalization of mindsets or who have already been radicalized due to proximity to radical and recruiting networks. Tertiary prevention refers to measures directed at radicalized individuals who are connected with VE groups, although they may not have committed any violent attacks yet. While primary and secondary prevention measures address risk factors through development approaches (preventing violent extremism), tertiary prevention focuses on delivering targeted security and judicial measures (countering violent extremism), such as community policing, de-radicalization, and reintegration of specific individuals.

119. From a development perspective, youth inclusion and resilience to radicalization and violent extremism in Tajikistan requires greater attention to primary and secondary prevention (see Figure 10). Primary prevention would entail further developing inclusive policies and programs, which would then lead to increased individual and community resilience, reduced perceptions of exclusion, and increased local economic opportunities.

³³ It is critical to ensure the protection of human subjects in the context of development interventions aimed at raising awareness of risks and violence prevention, including gender-based efforts.

Figure 10. Levels of Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism



Proposed primary prevention policies and programs combine two types of interventions: (i) interventions for adolescents and young men and women exposed to VE messaging in districts and communities experiencing a lack of trust of local authorities due to perceptions of injustice and socio-economic exclusion, and (ii) systemic policies and reforms to ensure inclusive service delivery that mitigates the risks of radicalization and violent extremism over the medium term.

120. Interventions for adolescents and young men and women entail the development of content and inclusive access to youth services, such as: (1) soft skills and other extracurricular activities that encourage a shift in mindset in order to increase youth resilience to the risks of disaffection and violence, delivered in secondary schools as well as in existing Centers for Additional Education or youth centers; (2) soft, livelihood, and entrepreneurship skills to be delivered in the Centers for Adult Education or Migration Centers under the Ministry of Labor for older, inactive young men and migrants; and (3) support services for young women delivered through local nongovernmental organizations, crisis centers, Women’s Committee centers, and other available spaces. The scope of these programs is described in more detail below.

1. Soft skills and extracurricular activities

- *Raising awareness about violent extremism and building resilience to prevent radicalization through soft-skills training.* These skills, including teamwork, problem

solving, critical thinking, and confidence building have a demonstrated impact on educational attainment, social and peer-to-peer interactions, and violence prevention.³⁴

- *Offer psychology-based cognitive training.* Such efforts have improved individual resilience against the tunnel vision that can lead to violent behaviors (Liht and Savage 2013; Savage, Khan, and Liht 2014).³⁵ Properly trained teachers, other educators, and facilitators from nongovernmental organizations, peer groups, and other community-based entities should conduct these training sessions that would complement school-based learning in secondary schools, at universities, and in dedicated spaces for extracurricular activities. In addition, psycho-social support services should be available for youths with special mental health needs.
- *Introduce social entrepreneurship and digital skills.* Social entrepreneurship and digital skills development would provide young people with the skills they need to fund, develop, and implement innovative solutions to community challenges.
- *Offer entrepreneurship and livelihood development opportunities, including awareness-raising, and training on soft skills and critical thinking skills training to strengthen resilience to radicalization and violent extremism.* Training sessions should focus on fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among male and female youth and should offer them opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial potential, follow-up mentoring, and other support services. It would also be beneficial to provide youth with affordable access to capital for individual and group-based entrepreneurship and livelihoods, as evidence shows that comprehensive support for youth entrepreneurship is more successful than programs focused only on training or access to finance.³⁶ Support

2. Livelihood and entrepreneurship development

³⁴ A recent impact evaluation in Kenya found that bringing young men and women of different backgrounds together as youth groups and providing them with a combination of soft skills, leadership training, community service and the arts, led to improvements in their self-esteem, and in relationships with their communities. These efforts also contributed to a reduction in post-election violence and protests.

³⁵ Evidence from randomized control trials suggests that behavioral programs that emphasize social, emotional and planning related soft skills act effectively against violence and may be a powerful violence-reduction tool as recent behavioral programs have shown positive results (Blattman and Ralston 2015; Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez 2014).

³⁶ Youth entrepreneurship support is recommended for fragile states and areas with limited job creation. A randomized control trial demonstrated that training focused on developing proactive and entrepreneurial mindsets leads to better outcomes among self-employed and small entrepreneurs in low-income countries, including higher earnings compared with traditional business training (Campos et al. 2017). In

services should ensure tax breaks and administrative simplification processes to provide incentives for the formal registration of small businesses.

- *Provide cognitive behavioral therapy.* Such techniques and adaptive leadership framework can help entrepreneurs with stress management, behavioral activation, social network mobilization, and problem management. This approach, which is offering promising results in fragile areas of Pakistan, would be an important complement to entrepreneurship and livelihood support in Tajikistan.³⁷
- *Provide digital skills and innovation startup training.* Basic digital skills and more advanced training for programming and graphic design could include digital entrepreneurship; development of mobile apps and content in the Tajik language, including for agricultural innovation and marketing; and matching grants for start-ups and mobile app development. Digital skills would also enable micro-work or online freelance work opportunities.
- *Support micro-work, especially for young female NEET.* Micro-work or micro-tasking involving simple tasks conducted through online outsourcing is particularly relevant for Tajikistan, as it overcomes geographic boundaries to provide livelihood opportunities for low-skilled young people and access to relatively basic digital infrastructure. However, one important skill that is required is the knowledge of the Russian language to ensure access to emerging markets in post-Soviet states.
- *Offer victims of violence and trauma, including gender-based violence, access to psycho-social support services at the community level.* Although women are not the only people in need of psycho-social support in coping with trauma, they tend to be more accessible and open to talk about sensitive issues that are affecting them, their families, and their communities. In this context, women can be part of a broader referral system for gender-based violence³⁸ and violence prevention that also reaches out to affected young men and minors. Because the number of trained and licensed psychologists is very limited, especially in lagging areas of Tajikistan, local psychologists can provide train-ing of trainers for educators and facilitators, who

3. Support services for young women

addition, capital injections—cash and capital goods—can stimulate employment and raise their long-term earning potential (Blattman and Ralston 2015; Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez 2014).

³⁷ For an analysis of evaluation results, see World Bank, Improving SME Entrepreneur Mental Health, Wellbeing and Business Outcomes through Cognitive Behavioral Interventions in FCV Contexts, Working Paper, May 15, 2019.

³⁸ Gender-based violence may include intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and abuse.

can in turn offer psycho-social support to vulnerable individuals. Other important areas to be tackled include the prevention of violence perpetrated by teachers on students in rural schools and peer-to-peer violence, especially in Khatlon and GBAO.

- *Women should benefit from soft skills and entrepreneurship and livelihood development support.* However, safe dedicated venues for women are more desirable, particularly in more traditional rural districts.

121. As part of the primary prevention approaches, the government should also consider systemic policy measures and reforms to ensure that interventions for adolescents and young men and women are scalable and sustained over time.

Key measures include:

- *Ensure improved local governance and service delivery.* The Local Development and Self Government Committee, which is currently limited to a legislative and regulatory role and expected to take greater direct responsibility for local service delivery, should ensure greater accountability and transparency in decisions by district and sub-district administrations that affect local populations. Professionalizing the civil service and greater participatory planning and oversight could also contribute to reduce grievances around perceptions of injustice. Although not formally part of the government, mahallas represent communities directly and enjoy a relatively high level of trust among Tajik citizens (World Bank 2017b). They are therefore well-placed to participate in local service delivery and facilitate the provision of interventions for adolescents and young men and women in close collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations, parents, teachers, and peers.
- *Facilitate access to land by vulnerable rural families and youth to improve local livelihood opportunities.* Barriers preventing transparent access to land—e.g., the lack of property rights and leasing arrangements—are a source of socio-economic exclusion and grievance against state authorities. Youth and other vulnerable groups should be supported as producers, agro-processing groups, or cooperatives.
- *Reform educational curriculum across several fields.* Aside from emphasizing market skills, such reform should target cultural and religious studies while integrating soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, confidence-building, and communication skills into secondary education curricula with appropriate teacher training. Extracurricular activities, currently covering only about two percent of adolescents, should progressively increase to at least 50 percent, beginning with at-risk districts.

- *Strengthen the Ministry of Health's mental health care system to deliver a broader range of support services to adolescent youth.* These should include psychological counseling, gender-based violence prevention, and suicide prevention.
- *Encourage measures to reduce barriers to youth employment and entrepreneurship.* Efforts should include improved anti-corruption schemes and tax breaks favoring employers, especially young and female entrepreneurs, to provide incentives for the formal registration of their activities.
- *Clarify legislative norms regarding the law on criminal procedures to ensure that minors are kept apart from adult inmates, and to avoid negative psychological repercussions and influences on minors (UNICEF 2018).* In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, alternatives to detention should be available to minors in conflict with the law. Juvenile support services, provided in Centers for Additional Education under the Ministry of Education for minors in conflict with the law, should be strengthened and expanded to ensure the social reintegration of all minors, without detention.

122. Secondary prevention includes more narrowly targeted interventions aimed at young men and women who have been identified as being at high risk of radicalization of mindsets or as having already been radicalized. Bearing in mind the need to consider local specificities, the key high-risk groups identified in the study include: male and female youth in rural and urban areas, aged 14–18 and 18–30 who are NEET and who may be in conflict with the law; secondary school students and graduates in rural areas who lack further educational or employment prospects; returning migrants, including vulnerable young men who have been deported or are banned from re-entering Russia; and vulnerable, abandoned women with children, such as wives of labor migrants.

123. Secondary prevention aims to shift mindsets away from radicalization of mindsets, while promoting a more positive outlook on life opportunities. The interventions for resilient mindsets include curricula of soft and critical thinking skills and mentoring tailored at preventing violent extremism, with greater intensity and duration than those offered under primary prevention. Interventions include psycho-social support for vulnerable returning migrants who are facing barriers to reintegration into their families and communities. Younger participants may then take part in youth-led community engagement projects and participate in innovation labs with seed funding to implement initiatives that could result in community improvements. Others may be directly referred to livelihood or other income-generation activities. Interventions for resilient mindsets should carefully target the most vulnerable districts, communities, and individuals

Box 7. Examples of Secondary Prevention Measures

Recent assessments of integrative complexity training in the United Kingdom and Kenya demonstrate that improving critical thinking skills can be an effective tool against radicalization. Extremist narratives characterized by their simplicity and low linguistic and cognitive complexity can be countered by improving critical thinking skills and cognitive complexity among vulnerable youth. Analyses of integrative complexity training in Kenya (24 participants) and Britain (81 participants) show that after the training, the participants' cognitive complexity increased the likelihood of rejecting world views of “us versus them” and, in turn, increased the level of acceptance toward values promoting tolerance. Participants in both interventions had a statistically significant increase in integrative complexity on views regarding their own in-group, as well as out-groups (the community or group opposed to their group). In Kenya, on a scale from one to seven, the pre-test integrative complexity level was 1.43 and the post-test was 2.29, meaning that after the training participants were better able to see multiple dimensions of an issue and were more likely to accept other's viewpoints and ambiguity. This approach is promising for reducing the effects of extremist narratives, which exploit vulnerable youth's feeling of exclusion and marginalization.

Sources: Liht and Savage 2013; Savage, Khan, and Liht 2014.

with the cooperation and support of mahallas, secondary schools, families, and peers. Engaging civil society organizations is crucial as government-led programming might not attract the groups most at-risk because they fear being stigmatized or referred to security bodies. An example of secondary prevention is presented in Box 7.

124. Effective secondary prevention measures depend on the recognition of early signs of radicalization. Global literature suggests that efforts should involve stakeholders from different sectors—including law enforcement, community and local stakeholders,³⁹ women (mothers, sisters and wives)—and include a rigorous data collection system to monitor the socio-economic factors that increase vulnerability to violent extremism and radicalization at the local level. The use of a rigorous, integrated mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection would enable a more comprehensive diagnostic of the socio-economic conditions leading to radicalization (World Bank and UN 2018). Early warning systems in Tajikistan should be established in border areas with Afghanistan, poor urban neighborhoods, and locations at high risk of radicalization (i.e., areas with previous incidents of violent extremism).

125. Recent international guidelines describe the standards for establishing a referral system that supports and protects identified individuals, so they can be involved in secondary (and tertiary) prevention programming (OSCE 2019b). These

³⁹ In Tajikistan, community and local stakeholders would include mahallas, school teachers, educators in Centers for Additional Education, staff in Centers for Adult Education and migration centers, as well as local NGOs.

guidelines include: modalities to encourage practitioners and their families to make referrals; a non-discrimination framework to be pursued by trained practitioners and other relevant local actors when evaluating individuals to be involved in the interventions; adoption of protocols for the protection of human subjects, including privacy rights; and ensuring that the individuals involved in prevention measures are subsequently referred to other existing support services for their socio-economic integration.

126. It is critical that security measures under tertiary prevention, such as community policing and de-radicalization, be compatible and reinforce development interventions focused on primary and secondary prevention. As an approach to counter violent extremism, community policing can effectively contribute to addressing local security issues, including support for violent extremism, by fostering cooperation between local government officials, community stakeholders, and the police. Community security assessments can provide valuable diagnostics and referrals to properly target at-risk areas and individuals. In Tajikistan, community policing supported by development partners such as the U.S. Agency for International Development has enabled the Tajik government to more effectively implement the national police reform strategy by cooperating with local government officials and community leaders to address a range of conflict and security issues, including the root causes underpinning support for violent groups. Overall, these approaches are well aligned with the World Bank and UN report *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, which emphasizes the added value of investing in prevention compared with the high cost of inaction, especially in countries where prevention is feasible (World Bank and UN 2018).

127. Tajikistan is at an important crossroads. If successful in strengthening youth, women and community resilience to radicalization and violent extremism, it can offer a model for other countries facing similar challenges. Moving forward, investing in the different dimensions of prevention will be key for Tajikistan, leveraging local resilience and comparative advantages of different actors. To maximize the impact of prevention programming, government actors, donor programs and civil society organizations should act in complementary ways, especially at local level, starting from the most vulnerable districts and communities. In so doing, it is critical to engage civil society organizations as government-led programming might not attract the groups most at-risk who may fear being stigmatized or being referred to security bodies. By adopting these approaches, Tajikistan can offer a much-needed model of resilience to its Central Asian neighbors, Afghanistan or other countries facing similar radicalization and violent extremism challenges.

Appendix A. Sampling Methodology for the Qualitative Research and Protocol for the Protection of Human Subjects

Sampling

The study was conducted across all regions of Tajikistan. At least one urban settlement and one rural settlement in each administrative region were included in the sampling. Particular districts and settlements were selected based on the existence of one or two stratification variables, such as place or location of origin and number of recruited individuals; multiethnic territory; proximity to borders; number of poor; crime rate, and number of recruits (see tables A.1 and A.2 for more details).

Table A1. Characteristics of the Selected Districts

Region	District/ City	Population (thousands) ^a	Population Density ^b	Poverty Rate (%) ^c	Number of Poor (Thousands)	Crime Rate ^d	Number of Recruits in Daesh Personnel Records ^e	Number of Recruits Government of Tajikistan ^f
Dushanbe and DRS	Dushanbe (city)	816.2	8162.0	35.6	290.60	0.006	21	239
	Lakhsh	62.6	13.6	39.2	24.50	0.002	1	-
	Rasht	119.5	26.0	44.1	52.70	0.002	1	-
	Tursunzade	280.0	233.3	12.7	35.60	0.002	2	39
	Vahdat	324.0	87.6	25.9	83.90	0.002	5	128
GBAO	Khorugh (city)	29.5	...	48.2	14.20	0.005	0	-
	Vanj	32.9	7.5	54.4	17.90	0.001	1	37
Khatlon	Kulob	204.8	682.7	61.7	126.40	0.003	3	99
	Qurghon- teppa (city)	107.5	4053.8	58.6	63.00	0.006	1	-
	Panj	111.1	123.4	46.4	51.60	0.002	0	-
	Shartuz	120.5	80.3	61.7	74.30	0.002	2	76
	Hamadoni	141.0	282.0	66.9	94.30	0.002	0	-
Sughd	Isfara	260.7	325.7	66.5	173.40	0.002	5	111
	Khujand (city)	178.1	4385.0	32.4	57.70	0.008	13	-

DRS = Districts of Republican Subordination; GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.

a. As at end 2016, TAJSTAT 2017b.

b. Number of people per square kilometer.

c. Poverty Map report, Using Census 2010 and World Bank 2009, TAJSTAT-MoEDT-World Bank.

d. Number of registered crimes per capita 1998–2017, TAJSTAT.

e. Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler 2016, based on 2013–14 Daesh Personnel Records.

f. Number of Recruits in VE groups, Government of Tajikistan 2018b

Table A2. Instrument Distribution for Qualitative Study by Region

Focus Group Discussions							
Region	District/City	Men (18–30)	Women (18–30)	Returning Migrants (18–35)	Vulnerable Women	Interviews	Total
Dushanbe	Dushanbe city	-	1 ^b	1	1	5	8
Sughd	Khujand (city and suburb)	-	1 ^b	1	2	4	8
	Isfara rural (pilot) ^c	2 ^a	-	-	-	1	3
Khatlon	Qurghonteppa (city)	1 ^b	1 ^a	-	1	3	6
	Kulob (city)	-	1 ^b	-	1	2	4
	Panj (rural)	-	1 ^a	1	-	1	3
	Shartuz (rural)	1 ^a	-	-	1	3	5
	Hamadoni	1 ^a	-	-	1	3	5
DRS	Vahdat (city)	1 ^b	-	1	1	1	4
	Rasht (rural)	1 ^b	-	-	1	3	5
	Lakhsh (rural)	-	1 ^a	1	-	2	4
	Tursunzade (city)	1 ^a	1 ^b	-	-	2	4
GBAO	Khorog (city)	1 ^a	1 ^b	-	1	3	6
	Vanj (rural)	-	-	1	1	2	4
Total		9	8	6	11	35	69

Note: The study consisted of 34 focus group discussions with 295 participants and 35 individual interviews, for a total of 330 respondents.

DRS = Districts of Republican Subordination; GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.

a. Low income.

b. Middle income.

c. During the study it was not possible to collect data in the rural areas of Sughd. Therefore, data collected in Isfara during the pilot is included instead.

Protocol for the Protection of Human Subjects

The research carried out under this study conformed to the relevant international standards with respect to protection of human subjects of research. The protocol was developed by an advisor to this study based on two international guidelines: Ethics for Researchers, published by the European Commission (EC 2013); and *International Ethical Guidelines for Health-Related Research Regarding Humans*, published by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences in collaboration with the World Health Organization (CIOMS 2016), which is also applicable to social research. These guidelines include stipulations regarding the protection of confidentiality and privacy; stressing that the rigor of research should be such that its scientific value outweighs any potential harm to the human subjects and that it should be conducted in an independent and neutral manner. To ensure that these guidelines are followed, the study advisor developed this protocol for protection of human subjects, including related materials, such as informed consent scripts, procedures for the transcription and translation of completed data collection instruments, and processes to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process through data collection and analysis. Researchers were trained on these policies and procedures.

Type of Research

This is a social-behavioral study.

Information for Protocol Review

Study Rationale and Justification

The study is motivated by the interlinkages between growing youth populations, issues of inclusion and exclusion, and concerns over security and radicalization.

World Bank research has shown that, compared with Eastern European and other countries of the former Soviet Union, the youth bulge of Central Asian countries is large, and Tajikistan has the largest bulge in Central Asia, with 63 percent of its population 30 years old or younger. The UN Population Division estimates that Central Asia will experience rising populations for the remainder of the 21st century, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; the latter is likely to double its population by 2100.

Violent extremism sets back many development gains; its prevention is therefore strategically important to the WBG (World Bank 2015). It is not a phenomenon confined to a specific region or culture; violent extremist (VE) groups are present in many societies and invoke myriad ideologies (World Bank 2015). Extremism can destabilize societies, has negative repercussions on armed conflicts, has considerable effects on humanitarian efforts, and has sustainable developmental aspects that disproportionately affect women and girls. Overall, the WBG is increasingly emphasizing the value of preventing violence and addressing risk factors (World Bank and United Nations 2018).

Governments in Central Asia are concerned about violent extremism. Tajikistan has adopted the National Strategy on Countering Extremism and Terrorism (2016–20) aimed at consolidating the efforts of state and local institutions, civil society, and international organizations to prevent the spread of extremist ideology and actions. The Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz

Republic on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2017–22 is similarly aimed at addressing social vulnerabilities caused by unemployment and inadequate education and limiting recruitment to extremist groups. These prevention measures complement security measures aimed at combating violent extremism, drug trafficking, and the financing of extremist activities.

Rigorous evidence on the drivers of violent extremism in Central Asia remain limited. Global research mainly focuses on Europe and, to some extent, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Research on Central Asia is scarce and often dates back to the 1990s or early 2000s.

This study informs WBG programming in Tajikistan for 2019–23, the period of the country partnership framework. The results of this pilot study will contribute to international efforts regarding youth inclusion and development in Tajikistan. The study's systematic research seeks to contribute to a global understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this study is to:

- Identify the reasons for social exclusion among youth and its implications on youth development;
- Provide evidence-based research on the drivers of violent extremism in Tajikistan, with specific reference to the youth, gender, and local dimensions;
- Define a development approach for prevention of violent extremism that can complement security approaches; and
- Identify possible development interventions to support client government efforts to ensure sustainable youth inclusion and development, prevent violent extremism, and address recruitment and reintegration.

Procedures for Data Collection

Prior to each individual interview, the researcher reads the informed consent script that describes the purpose of the study, the tasks that the respondent will perform (either participate in an individual interview or a focus group), the length of time that she or he will be involved in the study, and how the privacy of the individual and the confidentiality of the data will be maintained. Consent to participate is verbal; written consent by the respondent is not required. The researcher provides a copy of and reads the informed consent script to the respondent. Only those who consent can participate in the interview or focus group. The only individuals present at the individual interviews and the focus groups session are the human subject participating in the study and the research team member trained in the research methods and in the protection of human subjects.

The individual interviews and focus group discussions are conducted in the native or preferred language of the respondent. The interviews are recorded with the permission of the participant, using a digital audio recorder. Each team has at least four digital audio recorders. The team always uses two recorders for the interviews and focus groups in case one breaks, the memory is insufficient, or the battery runs out.

Translation of Audio Recording Transcriptions

The transcriptions of the audio recordings are translated into English. The translations are verbatim (that is, not summarized) and are completed according to a standard protocol by a translator who signs a confidentiality form.

Procedures for Analyzing Data

The procedures for the qualitative data analysis are based on the Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory method, specifically, the editing analysis style. There are three steps in the analysis process, after the translation of the transcripts into English:

1. Copying the open-ended responses into the structured form used for the analysis (e.g., Excel), with the complete, verbatim response of each respondent for each question copied.
2. Identifying key words, phrases, categories, and themes.
3. Using Dedoose to analyze data.

Procedures for the Selection of Human Subjects

Both convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit the respondents, including recommendations by local representatives and other key local liaisons, as appropriate. The sampling method may vary by region, based on advice by Tajik researchers who are familiar with the methods that are most successful there. If more than the requested number of individuals in a category are recruited (e.g., responds to notices or recommended), individuals are selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see below). The study will be open for accrual for three weeks in each of the five regions. A tracking form will be used to indicate the status of recruitment and selection of respondents.

Inclusion criteria are presented by respondent category:

- Heads of household: men and women, aged 18 and older;
- Women in the household: aged 18 and older;
- Youths in the household: male and female, aged 18–30; and
- Community leaders and representatives, including religious leaders: men and women, aged 18 and older.

The exclusion criteria are presented by respondent category:

- Heads of household: aged 17 and under;
- Women in the household: aged 17 and under;
- Youths in the household: aged 18–30; and
- Community leaders and representatives including, religious leaders: aged 17 and under.

Preventing Risks to Human Subjects and Protecting Privacy and Confidentiality

None of the standard categories of vulnerable populations (e.g., institutionalized populations and children) are purposively included in the study. It is possible that selected women may be pregnant, but there is no medical intervention involved in this sociobehavioral study. Pregnancy status is not an exclusion criterion. The only populations that are excluded are children. No individual less than 18 years of age is included in the study.

The only possible risks to the human subjects are the collection of personal or sensitive information through the interviews and focus groups.

Risks are minimized in the following ways:

- The data collection instruments include no names or unique identifying information. The focus group participants are assigned pseudonyms and asked to use pseudonyms for other individuals who they may mention during the discussions. If a participant inadvertently uses the name of an individual during the interview or discussion, it is deleted from the transcript. The transcription of individual interviews and focus groups are assigned a numeric code that is maintained by the principal investigator.
- The field team reports any adverse event (that is, unanticipated problems related to the protection of human subjects) to the principal investigator within 24 hours of the occurrence of the adverse event. In turn, the principal investigator is primarily responsible for addressing the adverse event.

Data Records

All data are stored in secure servers and on the Dedoose project server. Access is limited to the core team. No names or other uniquely identifiable information are recorded or made available in hard copy or electronically.

Appendix B. State of Research on Drivers of Violent Extremism

The World Bank/United Nations (2018) report *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* presents a comprehensive review of evidence and points to a multiplicity of motivations driving people to voluntarily join violent extremist (VE) groups.

Individuals who join these groups do not fit a single profile or follow a single trajectory; their motivations are complex and context-specific. Employment can, in some cases, help protect youth from being mobilized into violent extremism, but the motivations of recruits are not solely economic. Other key drivers, as noted in this study, include: (1) political grievances, including perceptions of injustice, persecution, and state repression; (2) the desire to follow a family member as a way of expressing common purpose and social belonging (this is also a key driver for women); (3) a dearth of religious literacy and critical thinking skills, which increases vulnerability to local recruitment efforts; (4) propagation of extremist ideologies, both online and at local level; (5) lack of economic mobility; and (6) criminal behavior among young men and vulnerability to recruitment in prisons.

The considerable research that has been conducted on violent extremism reveals a complex array of factors behind the phenomenon.

It is becoming increasingly clear that factors can be relevant in one context and not in another. Recent global research points to the importance of local specificities to understand the process of radicalization and recruitment. For example, a 2016 study examining the profile of Islamic State (IS) recruits by region highlights that, in Libya, recruits from the district of Derna had long experienced socio-economic exclusion. Most were employed as day laborers, often traveling to cross-border areas in Egypt and Tunisia. By contrast, fighters joining from Qassim province in Saudi Arabia shared a long history of religious conservatism; were well-educated—almost all with a university education; and held jobs as accountants, engineers, or government employees. The diversity among the profiles of fighters testifies to the importance of local dynamics (Rosenblatt 2016). While the study focused on the dynamics of Middle East and North Africa region rather than Central Asia, it makes the case for why local specificities should be considered when seeking to prevent violent extremism in the Tajik context.⁴⁰

An important strand in research stresses the importance of motivating factors, usually related to specific grievances of a political or socio-economic nature.

When individuals or communities feel repressed or excluded from political representation and voice, they can become alienated from the political system (Hafez 2003; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). Security failures can also push individuals toward VE groups that can offer them security in addition to other goods (Pierskalla and Sacks 2017). Research has emphasized that service provision by nonstate actors can increase the base of support for VE groups; some not only provide local services in lieu of local authorities but also reinforce local perceptions of injustice and disenfranchisement toward government institutions (Berman 2011). However, several studies question the direct link between political exclusion and violent extremism (Dalacoura 2006, 2011; Freeman 2008). Many theories speak of general political and socio-economic conditions,

⁴⁰ A recent study conducted by Saferworld (2018) in the districts of Bokhtar and Shamsiddin Shohin in Khatlon, as well as Vanj and Ishkoshim in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous (GBAO) finds mixed evidence for the role of religion as a driver but clear evidence that a trust deficit between society and authorities is a crucial driver of conflict and insecurity.

others stress group-specific ones—concrete grievances among an identifiable sub-group of a larger population has long been identified as a driver of violent extremism (Crenshaw 1981), including perceived or actual discrimination based on group identity (Wiktorowicz 2006; Piazza 2011). Some suggest that individual decisions to join a rebellion are influenced by feelings of mutual obligation and, consequently, collective action among group members.⁴¹

While grievances or social conditions may play a role in driving violent extremism, they cannot by themselves explain the phenomenon. Most individuals and groups with concrete grievances do not support or engage in violence. Much research therefore focuses on investigating other enabling factors, such as the propagation of extremist ideology by extremist groups, either online, via social media, or through informal and secret gatherings. Beliefs and ideologies can quickly spread through dense social networks. Evidence suggests that recruits to VE groups disproportionately originate from particularly tightknit communities (McCauley and Moskaleiko 2008). This is significant given the research that emphasizes the remarkable endurance of “devoted actors” motivated by “unconditional commitment” to a cause (Atran 2016). A recent study on radicalization and jihadist attacks in the West (Vidino, Marone and Entenmann 2017) points to the presence (or absence) of radicalization hubs, i.e. militant Salafist groups, radical mosques, charismatic personalities or tightknit communities, rather than socio-economic conditions as the main factor determining the higher or lower levels of radicalization and mobilization of a country or a town. Two studies measuring support for violent Islamic extremism in Italy find commitment to radical ideology to be the strongest explanatory factor. The same studies find no support for grievance-based approaches (Groppi 2017, 2018). Choksy and Choksy (2015) find a link between foreign-funded propagation of extremist religious ideologies and support for violent extremism. Becirević (2016) finds that most VE group recruitment efforts in Bosnia occur among Salafi community members who practice an ultra-Orthodox form of Islam that is promoted by actors who originate from Saudi Arabia or other Persian Gulf countries. The Internet, including social media, is a relatively more recent factor in radicalization (Ganor et al. 2007).

Considerable debate surrounds the role of economic factors in violent extremism. Previously influential theories postulated that grievances were related to exclusion from economic mobility and perceptions of injustice.⁴² More recent studies have questioned this assumption (Blair et al. 2013; Tessler and Robbins 2007; Akiner and Barnes 2001; Shafiq and Sinno 2010). Gambetta and Hertog (2016) observe that, in some contexts, individuals with higher-than-average levels of education and socio-economic status may be more likely than the poor to support VE groups.

There is also a suggested overlap between violent extremism and crime, including studies exploring the link between organized crime and VE group recruitment (Dishman 2001; Makarenko 2012). More recent research has pointed to the tendency of VE groups to focus recruitment efforts on youth with backgrounds in petty crime (Basra, Neumann, and Brunner

⁴¹ Individual-level identity and psychological factors have also received increasing emphasis in the literature. Qualitative research suggests that questions regarding self-identity or a crisis of identity can contribute to the appeal of radical ideology (Roy 2017; Arena and Arrigo 2006; Mazarr 2004; Murshed and Pavan 2011; Sambanis and Shayo 2013).

⁴² Esposito and Voll (1996) argue that poverty can leave the poor more vulnerable to the appeal of militants. Even individuals who are not themselves impoverished can be influenced by seeing its effects on family members, neighbors, or other members of their group, which can generate grievances and support for VE groups (Piazza 2011; Blair et al. 2013; Crenshaw 1981). Building on the “youth bulge” argument, other research postulates that a lack of access to education, jobs, and family creation—particularly among large youth cohorts—creates or exacerbates grievances and generates a pool of recruits for VE groups (Urdal 2006; World Bank 2011). Collier (2000) further argues that youth bulges create an abundant supply of “rebel labor” at a low opportunity cost. Ultimately, the research is inconclusive; one study (Fearon 2011) finds no evidence that population structure affects the onset of civil war.

2016; Beissembayev 2016; Cottee 2016). Considering age and gender dimensions, there is consensus on young men's vulnerability to violent extremism (Allan et al. 2015). Sommers (2019) suggests that government behavior—especially among repressive governments—can elicit stronger grievances among young men, who experience imprisonment and may join a VE group due to lack of socio-economic alternatives.

Until recently, many considered the role of women in the radicalization process to be marginal. However, recent research (d'Estaing 2017; UN Women 2017) finds that a woman can exercise agency as an effective mediator or as an extremist—some have traveled to Syria and Iraq with their families or, less frequently, alone. Global research on the prevention of violent extremism notes that, in her role as emotional leader, a woman can provide stability and support to her household and extended family, thereby influencing the process of radicalization as mediators. (d'Estaing 2017). The study emphasizes the importance of furthering women's agency in the struggle against violent extremism rather than relying on them only as intermediate actors (d'Estaing 2017). Zeuthen and Sahgal (2018) suggest that it is not unusual for a woman to involuntarily join an extremist group, lured by her husband or a member of her family. Expanding the role of women as mediators in the prevention of violent extremism could frustrate future recruitment efforts.

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