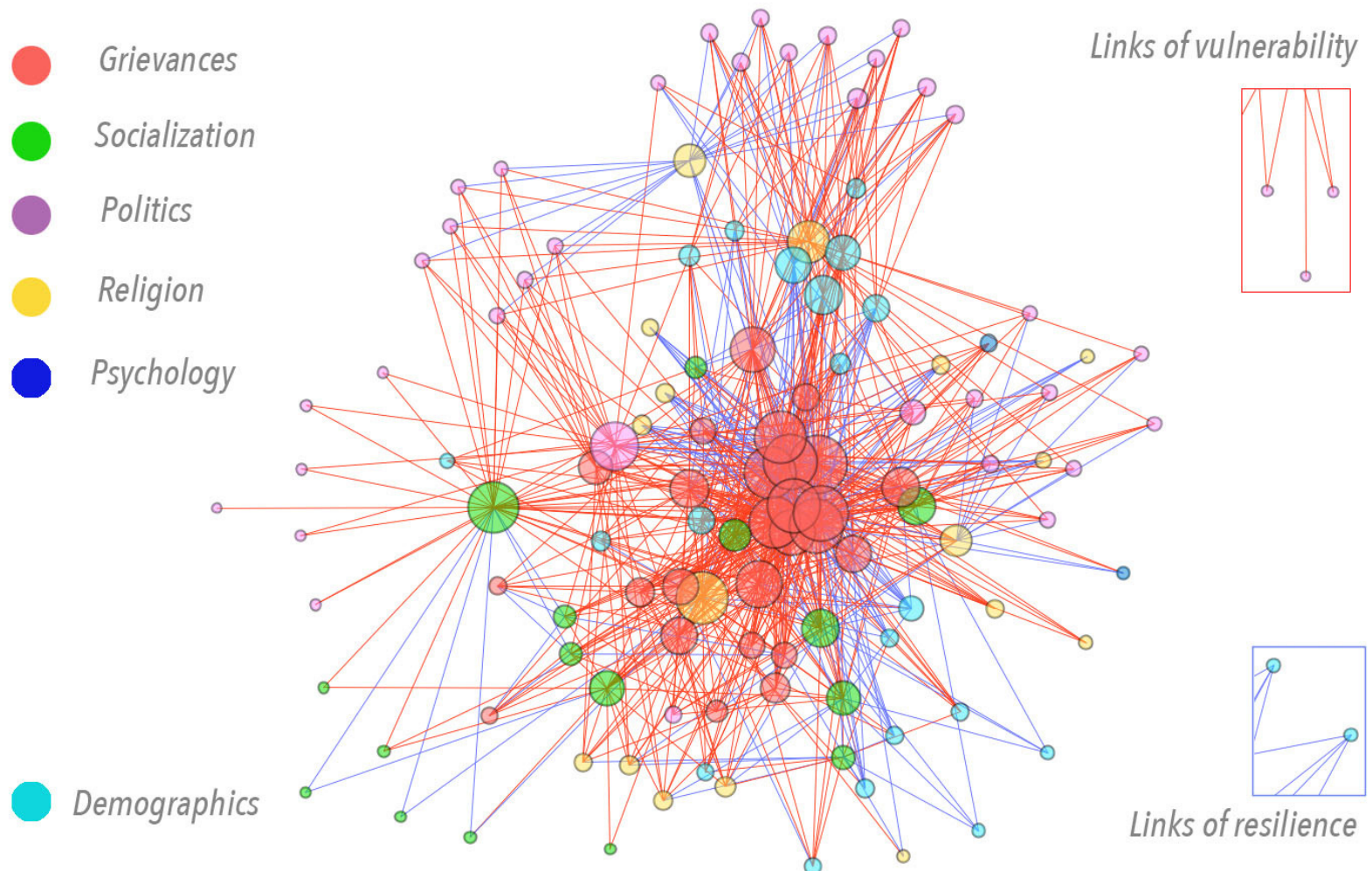


Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization, Violence and Extremism:

Analysis across Five Domains



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This nation-wide research project explored what makes young people in Kyrgyzstan more vulnerable or more resilient to radicalization. This was done using an extensive toolkit of research methods and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research tools. Analysis was conducted in five domains of young people's lives connected to radicalization: 1) grievances, 2) politics, 3) religion, 4) socialization, and 5) psychology. The results of our research show that radicalization in Kyrgyzstan is a very complex phenomenon connected to many aspects of young people's lives: each domain produces a unique connection to radicalization and there are many connections across domains. All chapters in this report—including the literature review, empirical analysis, conclusions, recommendations, and this executive summary—are structured around the discussion of these five domains.

Grievances

The most significant domain affecting young people's vulnerability to radicalization is grievances developed as a result of various kinds of discrimination. Young people who have experienced discrimination personally have the highest vulnerability scores, particularly if this discrimination emanates from state officials and police. Police discrimination is higher toward practicing Muslims. Young people in Kyrgyzstan grow up seeing a lot of social and state injustice and very high levels of corruption around them. Many see state institutions and actors as predatory agents who use their privileged positions to make money from the rest of society. The theme of corruption and state predation forms the core of many young people's radical ideas; members of radical organizations can exploit such perceptions to recruit young people by promising them the moral Islamic alternative. In addition, many young people experience a lot of discrimination and violence from peers (like school racket).

- There is a need for serious reform in the state apparatus and police to address issues of discrimination and corruption, which will otherwise continue to serve as the main basis for unrest and radicalization.
- Measures should be introduced to enable young people defend their rights in order to help them deal with various forms of abuse.
- The problems of peer discrimination and school racket must be addressed.

Politics

In the context of such state injustice, many young people believe that Kyrgyzstan's political system must change—and change radically. However, young people themselves have very limited opportunities to engage in formal politics because the latter are dominated by the elder generation. In the absence of such opportunities, young people's political views are increasingly connected to their religious views: nearly one-third of survey respondents would support a more religious candidate and even the introduction of sharia law to replace the constitution. Young people trust religious organizations more than state institutions or NGOs; they also see Sunni Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia and Turkey) and Russia more positively than they see the West (US and EU) and Shia Iran.

- It is important to strengthen the (currently ineffective) age quota system in party politics at all levels and in state offices to ensure the inclusion of youth in decision-making.
- More power should be given to existing informal youth groups and movements.

- Western countries might want to invest in improving their own image, which has been fading over the years under the strong influence of Russian propaganda.

Religion

An increasing number of young people in Kyrgyzstan practice religion. Most young people are not aligned with specific religious groups, but among those who are, young people who sympathize with the Salafis and Sulaimanchiler are the most vulnerable to radicalization, while those who sympathize with Nurjular, Khizmet, and Tablighi Jamaat are more resilient. Books, family members, religious scholars, and local imams are the most popular and safest sources of information about religion: they make young people more resilient to radicalization. By contrast, the Internet, as a more depersonalized source, makes people more vulnerable. Easily accessible from anywhere in Kyrgyzstan via mobile device, it was the main channel through which some of our more radically minded interlocutors obtained information that interested them.

- The positive contribution of Islamic groups that strengthen resilience to radicalization, should be acknowledged and supported. The situation with Sulaimanchiler and Salafis must be better researched. We recommend not that these two groups be banned, but that efforts be made to reduce their popularity and influence.
- The positive role of local religious scholars and imams must also be acknowledged; collaboration with them is crucial to the success of the anti-radicalization campaign. We also recommend introducing subjects to the madrasas that would aid future imams in identifying radical narratives and help them construct legitimate counter-narratives.
- A special section should be developed for inclusion in the History of World Religions school course syllabus to help students learn how to identify radical messages in the religious materials they come across. In addition, a course on internet safety should be included into the school curriculum to counter the influence of radical media messaging.

Socialization

Young people who are more likely to feel lonely/isolated, have fewer friends, and are engaged in more conflicts are more vulnerable to radicalization. In the past, the Soviet administration paid special attention to building both physical and social infrastructure to enable young people to use their free time in a meaningful and productive way. Today, with the exception of in larger cities, most of that infrastructure has collapsed or deteriorated and children are left to themselves and to the streets, where they are more readily influenced by criminal groups. Young people connected to criminal networks score higher on vulnerability to radicalization.

- The government must pay serious attention to creating infrastructure and opportunities for young people to spend their time meaningfully and in a way that supports their personal development, particularly in remote areas of Kyrgyzstan.
- Policies and mechanisms are needed to prevent the influence of criminal groups.

Psychology

Young people who score low on life satisfaction and high on aggression are more vulnerable to radicalization. Many experts and stakeholders mentioned psychological complications and an unhealthy family atmosphere as causes of vulnerability. The families in which our informants with radical experience grew up can also be seen as somewhat dysfunctional.

- There is a stigma attached to seeking psychological help in Central Asia. Efforts must be made to normalize psychological help and health in communities. Furthermore, children of migrants, children in single-parent households, and children who have experienced discrimination might benefit from professional help through individual or group therapy.

Our research did not reveal a direct correlation between the socio-economic status of families of young people and their vulnerability/resilience to radicalization. What makes young people more vulnerable is labor migration, which can contribute to radicalization in both direct and indirect ways: some young people are exposed to more radical views during their experience as labor migrants in Russia, while others are affected by the absence of their parents who are labor migrants in Russia.

Finally, a note must be made about regional and ethnic differences. Our research reveals that Southern regions in general, and Batken oblast and Osh city in particular, are more vulnerable to radicalization than Northern regions and Naryn. This confirms the statistics of Kyrgyz security services. However, the security services claim that 90% of those who radicalize are ethnic Uzbeks from Southern Kyrgyzstan. Our research results do not support such claims: on the contrary, ethnic minorities in general and ethnic Uzbeks in particular scored higher on resilience to radicalization than did ethnic Kyrgyz.

INTRODUCTION

Youth occupies a special place in radicalization processes. This is even reflected in the names of some terrorist groups: *Taliban* means “students” and *Al-Shabab* means “young men” (36). In Central Asia, as in many other places around the world, today’s young people are politically and economically disenfranchised: the older generation holds all major positions of power, while young people lack the ability to participate in decision-making, have little trust in state institutions, and struggle to find jobs and obtain quality education (35). Feeling excluded, some young people become more open to radical ways of struggling against established institutions (6). Young people represent the social group with the highest protest potential. For example, students were historically the most active protesters across the globe (10). In addition, at this stage in life, young people are asking themselves questions about their personal and moral identity, and their “cognitive and moral openings” are potential channels for absorbing radical ideas (6). All these factors explain why young people are among the most vulnerable to engagement with various radical, extremist, and terrorist organizations.

Radicalism often affects unstable societies in transition, like Kyrgyzstan, and leads to their further destabilization. If the government fails to neutralize it, radicalism may evolve into extremism and terrorism. Yet the question of youth radicalization remains significantly understudied. This project aims to fill in the existing knowledge gaps and produce evidence-based policy recommendations for the government and other stakeholders involved with youth issues. This research action explores vulnerability and resilience factors through a nation-wide study that covers all seven oblasts (regions) of the country using the extensive toolkit of research methods and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative tools.

CHAPTER 1: Literature Review

Although Islamic radicalization is a relatively recent phenomenon, quite a lot has been written on this subject. This research sought to make the most of existing academic and policy publications. A literature review helped us define what we intended to study, design our research methodology, interpret the results, and connect our findings from Kyrgyzstan to findings from other contexts.

Definitions

We define **radicalization** as a process leading to certain changes: in worldview, in behavior, in socialization, etc. It is a movement from moderate mainstream beliefs toward more extreme views (34) and extreme commitment (20). In itself, radicalization is not negative. In this research, we perceive it negatively when radicalization leads to indoctrination that supports and validates violence and terrorism (37). **Extremism** means prioritizing ideological goals over all other considerations. An extremist position is not problematic for society if it respects the “life and rights of others” (13); it becomes negative if it justifies violence. This is when it becomes **violent extremism**, which endorses violence and oppression to achieve extreme political or ideological goals (17). Thus, in our research we focus specifically on young people’s vulnerability and resilience to accepting radical and extremist ideology, which justifies violence.

Today, radicalization is seen as a product of the post-9/11 era and is mostly associated with Islam (21). In Central Asia, too, the revival of Islam, intensified religious practices, and the emergence of Islamic political parties are often perceived as elements of radicalization (31). In this research, we clearly distinguish between religiosity and radicalization as two very different processes. Instead, we want to explore which religious practices—in combination with other political, social, and psychological factors—make young people more vulnerable or resilient to radicalization.

Reasons for Radicalization

Radicalization is a process of change and many studies identify various stages or phases in this process. Such explanations are called phase-based theories of radicalization and include the FBI, NYPD, “slippery slope,” and “staircase to terrorism” models (21, 32). The main idea that unites these models is that the process is gradual and incremental and that the earlier the issue is addressed, the easier it may be to stop it.

The radicalization process is complex, emergent, nonlinear, and dynamic (8). It is “complex” because no one single factor explains radicalization. It is “emergent” in that radicalization emerges from the combination of personal and contextual factors, often by chance, by accident, or due to an unpredictable situation. It is “non-linear” and “dynamic” because the steps involved in radicalization vary from case to case. Many scholars argue that it is impossible to identify a single cause of radicalization. The official narrative is often reductionist, and recent scholarship criticizes such a simplistic approach. Instead, scholars look for broader causal factors, especially hidden ones. We distinguish six main categories of factors: grievances, political, ideological, psychological, socio-economic, and social.

Grievances

Personal grievances can lead people to punish the perpetrators of injustice: “When someone wrongs us, we want justice” (27). The main driving emotion here is anger and a desire for vengeance. When one’s group is wronged, personal grievance becomes collective and an individual becomes radical out

of anger about injustice not against him/herself, but against others. Violent extremism is a reaction to social exclusion; extremist groups offer people a political answer to injustice (27). This feeling of injustice can emerge among people of all social groups and cultures. Perceived injustice can be related to personal experiences; general social, economic, and political conditions; and injustice experienced in interactions with the authorities. Racism, Islamophobia, suppression, and the banning of religious symbols and practices only increases the risk of radicalization (27, 37).

Politics

Western foreign policy in the Middle East, the perceived injustice of the West towards the Muslim world, and the “War on Terror”—often interpreted as a “War on Islam”—frequently become justifications for jihad (37). The West is often seen/portrayed as trying to dominate the Muslim world and control local governments (2). Various images from the war showing injustices, atrocities, and the destruction of Muslim societies are powerful motivators for radicals (12). Poorly designed global, regional, and national anti-radicalization policies also contribute to radicalization (38): strict laws, a discourse of Islam as dangerous, and punitive measures can be counterproductive (9), having the “inverse effect” (15) of making people more radical.

Another major political reason is local corruption, of which idealistic young people are particularly critical. Corruption destroys trust in the government and daily humiliation by corrupt officials makes youth vulnerable to radicalization (39). Political and social change is the main promise of extremist groups: the potential to create a novel, just social order ruled by sharia, an idealistic goal that connects Muslim societies to their glorious past and fosters hope for a just and prosperous future (18).

Religion

Some authors indicate that ideology justifies the use of violence by reducing moral inhibitions (3), that people radicalize by becoming hyper-religious as a reaction to modernization (37), and that Salafi Islamic ideology (44) has radical potential. Other authors, on the contrary, suggest that religion can prevent radicalization. Many studies emphasize the importance of religious education (32): when people lack religious knowledge, it makes them more susceptible to recruitment because they are more easily manipulated (9).

Socialization

People are usually pulled into radical groups through their social networks (2) and “known associates” (27). Personal social ties create a sense of familiarity and help young people overcome uncertainty about joining the group. Once inside the group, friendships become concentrated within it; the organization becomes like a family, distancing its members from outsiders using a discourse of “us versus them” (2). The radicalization process is discussed in relation to various places and ways of recruitment. **Colleges** and **universities** are often seen as hotbeds of social unrest, as young people start questioning various forms of local and global injustice (10) and become vulnerable to recruitment. Some scholars think that **mosques** play a role in radicalization, while others argue that mosques with traditional teachings prevent young people from becoming radicalized. **Prisons** are another frequently cited location of radicalization (19, 37): many criminals become religious while in prison and radicals recruit them to take advantage of their criminal potential. The **Internet** has become the main platform for fundraising, plotting, and recruiting and mobilizing people (34). It is easily accessible and facilitates connections with like-minded people across the world. It also acts as an “echo chamber,” confirming existing beliefs and thereby not only facilitating but also accelerating radicalization (5). Radical groups actively use new visual culture with traumatic images in recruitment

campaigns (44). Recruiters can also study the profiles of potential members and approach them accordingly (12). Facebook algorithms allow online extremist recruiters to easily identify potential targets. In Central Asia, the most popular platform for recruiting is Odnoklassniki (42). Young people are particularly vulnerable targets because they spend a lot of their free time on the Internet (44).

Psychology

Radical ideas often appeal to people with deep psychological traumas, war experience, or a self-isolationist mentality (44). Childhood psychological crises can be triggers for violence and interest in terrorism (45). Radicalization is also related to psychological feelings of uncertainty: people try to reduce the feeling of uncertainty by identifying with a group with clear and fixed identities, worldviews, and lifestyles (16). For young people, the sense of self-uncertainty is stronger than for adults because their identity is not yet fully formed (40). Many young people also radicalize simply because they are looking for an adventure (27).

Socio-Economic Reasons

Perspectives on the role of socio-economic conditions vary: some authors (7, 27, 29) argue that poverty, marginalization, and exclusion can lead to radicalization, while others (24, 34) show that many radicalized young people come from middle-class families and have high levels of education and professional careers. In the context of Central Asia, similarly, some authors (15, 41) think the poor are attracted to Syria by the promise of higher earnings and better living standards in a context of poverty, unemployment, and labor migration at home. They portray jihad as a form of labor migration with the main purpose of earning money (19). Other authors (11, 18) argue that economic motivations are significantly less important than other factors.

Radicalization of Youth in Kyrgyzstan

Post-Soviet chaos, unemployment, poverty, and the moral crisis of the 1990s were among the main reasons why people started turning to religion in search of stability, morality, and spiritual and social support (14). Islam played a particularly important role in helping people deal with the problems of alcoholism, drug addiction, etc. (22). These new forms of Islamic practice were far from radical or extremist; the majority of newly practicing Muslims in Kyrgyzstan strive for a balance (25). Kyrgyz Islam is very eclectic due to the mixture of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet influences (27). This diversity is seen as a positive phenomenon (4). In spite of major ideological differences, representatives of various groups within one community remain strongly connected by other, non-religious links, activities, and social networks (28).

For the purposes of our research, we distinguish between three main Islamic influences in Kyrgyzstan. The first includes the so-called “progressive” *jamaats* of Turkish origin: *Khizmet* (followers of Fethullah Gullen) and *Nurjuler* (followers of Sayeed Nursi). These groups are called “progressive” because they use more modern interpretations of Islam and do not adhere significantly to traditional Islamic dress. The second influence comes from India and Pakistan, in the form of *Tablighi Jamaat* or *Davatchiler*, as they are called locally. This group is often called “pacifist” because one of its main principles is not engaging in politics. The third main influence comes from Salafi groups. In Kyrgyzstan, Salafi ideas are often spread by the graduates of Islamic institutions in Saudi Arabia and Egypt (1). In addition, they come from the Northern Caucasus through Kazakhstan (43). Although the majority of Salafis remain apolitical, several jihadist and taqfirist Salafi groups are banned.

Kyrgyzstan's religious diversity sets it apart in Central Asia, where "blanket bans" are frequently used to shut down all groups, including the moderate, non-radical ones (23). Such measures aim at "political control, not national security" (23). This is counterproductive: it damages trust between state and society and can actually make people more receptive to radical ideas. Other counterproductive measures target the wider Muslim population, e.g., banning men's beards or women's hijabs. In addition, there are no legislative and managerial mechanisms regulating relations between the state and religion; this results in mutual distrust, with public figures openly disapproving of growing religious activity and diversity (30). The religious policies of Central Asian governments are also strongly affected by the policies of the Russian government. For example, Russia banned such groups as Nurjular and Tablighi Jamaat and recommended that all members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) do the same. Tajikistan and Kazakhstan followed these recommendations. As such, Kyrgyzstan is now the only country in the region where these groups are still legal. This research aims to explore whether the influence of these and other Islamic groups makes young people in Kyrgyzstan more vulnerable or more resilient to radicalization.

According to official statistics, more than 2,000 people are on the security watch list or have been arrested as members of various organizations listed as extremist or terrorist¹ or because they joined combatting forces in Syria. More than half of radicalized individuals are in the youth age category (43). Some experts point out the protest potential of youth in Kyrgyzstan, indicating that the driving force behind both revolutions in Kyrgyzstan was young people.² They see young people as a high-risk group and believe that social and material dissatisfaction, a lack of strong moral goals and principles, poverty, corruption, and injustice can easily push them toward radicalization. The phenomenon of youth radicalization in Kyrgyzstan has similarities with other countries in the region and around the world, but it also has lots of unique features, which this research aims to investigate.

In this chapter, we explored the various answers to the question "Why and how do young people become radicalized?" The reviewed literature shows that it is impossible to pinpoint one specific factor and that analysis must be conducted across various domains of young people's lives. We also see how reasons can overlap (e.g. grievances and political, or social and psychological). Similarly, the literature reveals a variety of paths toward radicalization. We therefore intend to employ a complex approach that looks not for a singular explanation of radicalization in Kyrgyzstan, but for the cumulative effect of various reasons across domains.

In addition, we introduced the case of Kyrgyzstan as a country with a relatively high degree of religious freedom and religious diversity. We intend to study how this affects young people's vulnerability and/or resilience to radicalization.

¹ Al-Qaeda, Taliban, East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Kurdistan People's Congress, East Turkestan Independence Movement, Hizb Ut-Tahrir, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (Islamic Jihad Union), Islamic Movement of Turkestan (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), Church of Moon, Zhajshul-Makhdi, Dzhund-Al-Halifat, Ansarulloh, At-Takfir-Val-Hidzhra, Akromiya, ISIL, Jabhat an-Nusrah, Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari, Jannat Oshkarlari, Jamaat at-Tauhis val-Jihad, Yakyn Inkar. (State Committee on Religious Affairs under the President of Kyrgyz Republic, last accessed at http://religion.gov.kg/ru/religion_organization/тыюу-салынган-диний-бирикмелер/ on 29.08.2018)

² A. Karashev. 25-year fight against terrorism in Kyrgyzstan: victories and defeats, plans and forecasts. //New faces. - 2016. - 07 September:

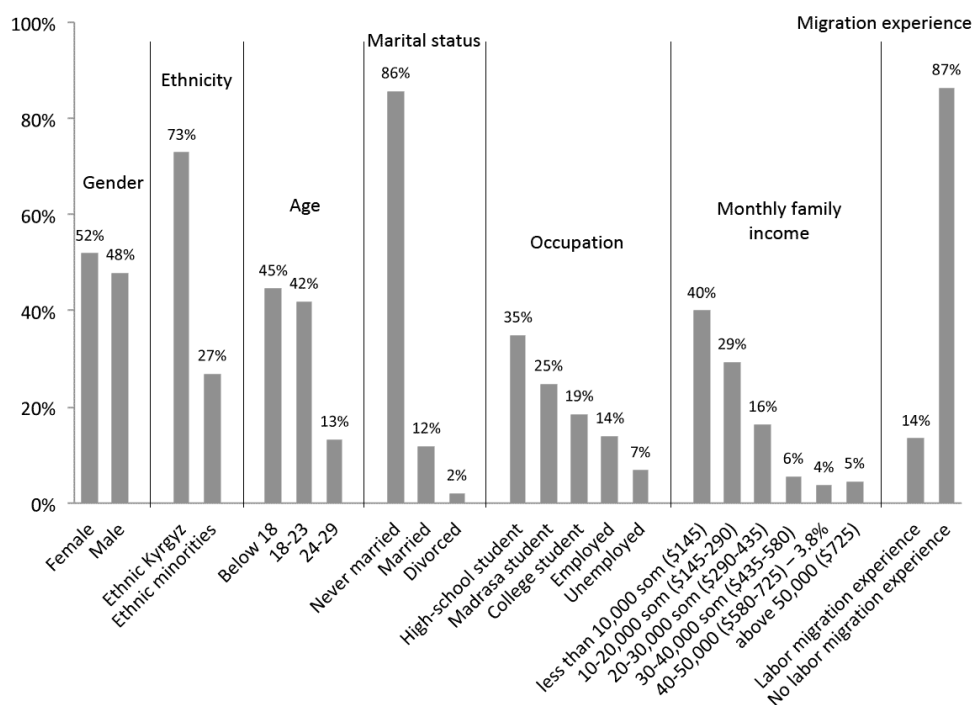
CHAPTER 2: Research Methodology

The research was designed in several sequential steps, each producing a unique form of data addressing specific research objectives and serving as the basis for a more informed approach to the following stage. Four main methods/steps were used: 1) questionnaire survey; 2) in-depth interviews with young people, stakeholders, and experts; 3) focus group discussions; and 4) case studies. The following sections describe each of these methods/steps in more detail.

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire for young people included approximately 50 questions structured around seven main blocks: socialization, religion, identity, justice, politics, psychology, and demography. The research sample included 1,054 respondents, more or less equally divided between 16 locations: one urban and one rural location in each of seven oblasts, as well as two large cities (Bishkek and Osh). Convenience sampling was used because research was conducted during the summer and many students were on their summer breaks. This makes the sample non-representative. **Figure 1** depicts the main demographic characteristics of our sample.

FIGURE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS:
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, STAKEHOLDERS, AND EXPERTS



Interviews were conducted with three main categories of informants:

- 1) 65 interviews with young people aged 14-28:
 - a. Young people from the local law enforcement “extremist watch list”³;

³ Every police precinct in a city, town, or village has such a list.

- b. Young people categorized by the research team as potentially “vulnerable” on the basis of their legal, social, and/or economic situation;
 - c. Young practicing Muslims of Kyrgyz ethnic group;
 - d. Young practicing Muslims representing ethnic minorities;
 - e. Youth leaders; young people active at grassroots levels; or representatives of youth NGOs.
- 2) 69 interviews with various stakeholders:
- a. Representatives of *ayil okmotu* (local self-government);
 - b. Local law-enforcement agents;
 - c. State authorities on youth affairs;
 - d. Imams and teachers in madrasas;
 - e. Mentors in youth organizations.
- 3) 14 interviews with experts: scholars, researchers, and professionals in the sphere of religion and security.

Like questionnaire respondents, interviewees were selected using convenience sampling.

Focus Group Discussions

A total of 18 focus group discussions were conducted with young people: one in each urban and rural location under study within each oblast and two each in the two cities (Bishkek and Osh). Each focus group included 7-8 people. We tried to compose groups in such a way as to create enough diversity to foster a constructive debate. We did this by bringing in young people who knew each other but who had different religious practices.

Case Studies

The research also produced three case studies that illustrate different radicalization scenarios and the “push” and “pull” factors of radicalization. Each case study provides a very detailed account of how one young person became radicalized and how events evolved in his/her life after that. It was important for us to have stories that illustrated the variety of possible scenarios with different family/community dramas and different core problems leading to engagement with radical groups/ideology. The case studies help illustrate the role of specific contexts, family circumstances, and various actors (recruiters, imams, parents, teachers, police officers, friends, etc.) in the radicalization and de-radicalization processes.

It is very important for us to acknowledge that although this research did study several radicalized individuals, the vast majority of respondents were not radical, so our main focus is not on these young people’s experience of radicalization, but their potential vulnerability and resilience to it.

CHAPTER 3: Analysis of Five Domains of Young People's Lives

The empirical material in this chapter is structured around the analysis of five domains of young people's lives: grievances, religion, politics, socialization, and psychology. We did not include the socio-economic domain because the analysis of survey results did not produce significant correlations between family income and vulnerability/resilience to radicalization. This chapter starts with what research shows to be the most important set of factors: those related to grievances and perception of justice.

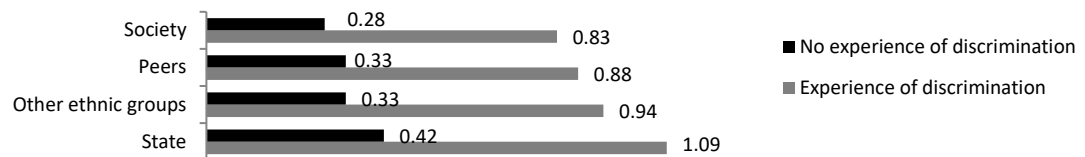
Grievances and Perception of Justice

In this section, we first look at how grievances (measured as experience of discrimination) correlate with vulnerability to radicalization. We then explore which groups of young people have the most grievances. Finally, we connect this discussion to the overall evaluation of state justice, freedom of religion, and justice toward Muslims.

Grievances and Vulnerability to Radicalization

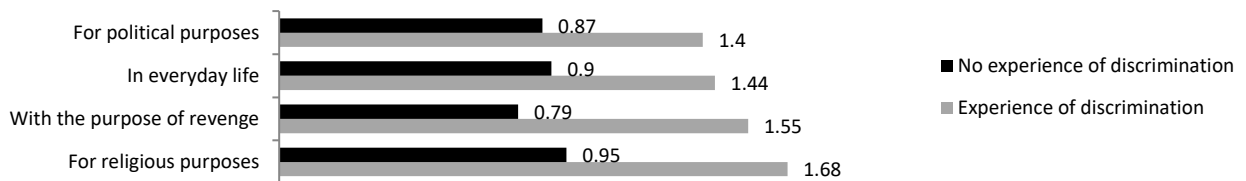
Our research reveals that young people who experienced discrimination and developed grievances are more vulnerable to radicalization. This is evident in the number of correlations. For example, young people with grievances have a significantly stronger desire to avenge others than do young people who did not experience discrimination (2.75 times higher on average) (**Figure 2**).

FIGURE 2: DESIRE TO AVENGE OTHERS (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)



Young people with grievances are also 1.75 times more likely (on average) to justify violence against others for various purposes, including religious ones (**Figure 3**).

FIGURE 3: JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)



Further exploration shows that young people with grievances are almost twice as likely to justify killing themselves and others for religious purposes (0.7 vs. 0.38 on a scale from 0 to 5).

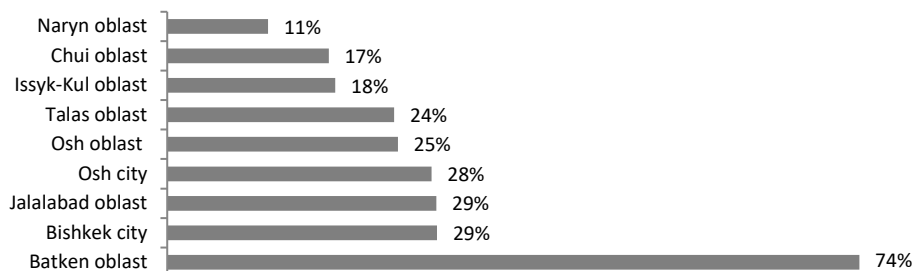
We can therefore see that grievances make people more vulnerable to radicalization. The next question is: Who is more likely to be discriminated against and develop grievances?

Experience of Discrimination

Approximately one-third of respondents (28%) had personal experience of discrimination. We will compare different groups of respondents with this average figure.

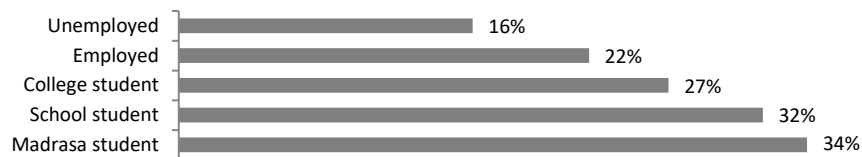
The highest level of discrimination is for residents of Batken oblast, at 74%. This is almost three times higher than the national average (28%) (**Figure 4**). Batken scores high on all evaluations of discrimination, particularly discrimination due to poverty and ethnic discrimination. This is because Batken is the poorest of all oblasts in the country and has very problematic interethnic relations. Naryn, Chui, and Issyk-Kul oblasts have the lowest scores, indicating that they are more resilient to radicalization from the grievances perspective.

FIGURE 4: EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION BY LOCATION



Another category with high experience of discrimination is the two youngest (and accordingly least protected) groups: madrasa and school students (**Figure 5**).

FIGURE 5: EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION BY STATUS



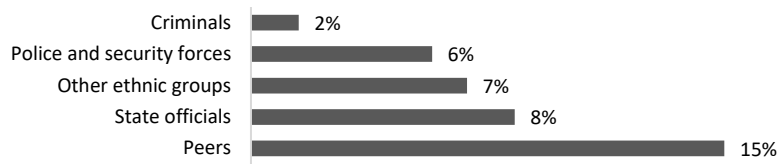
Madrasa students might also be experiencing more discrimination due to their religion: the survey reveals that young people who practice Islam are more likely to be discriminated against. This is particularly applicable to girls, since female Islamic attire (veil, long dress) is very noticeable and attracts attention and criticism from people on the streets. Many female participants in interviews and focus groups shared their negative experiences.

The survey shows that people with stronger religious practices also experience more discrimination from the police. Interviews and focus groups support these survey results: police and state security forces are often seen as the main institutions that treat religious Muslims unfairly. Several participants expressed the belief that security officials are driven by the desire to get promotions and that to that end, they arrest more people in order to artificially boost their numbers.

Several other correlations can be observed. Ethnic Kyrgyz experience more discrimination due to poverty, while ethnic minority groups encounter more discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity. Migrants are more exposed to discrimination in their destination countries, where they themselves become ethnic and religious minorities. Families of migrants experience more discrimination due to poverty, which can be seen as a push factor for migration in the first place.

Young people spend most of their time with young people like themselves. Socialization at a young age (particularly in schools and madrasas; not so much in colleges) is often hierarchically structured and one's position in the hierarchy is established through physical violence and fights. Thus, it is no surprise that the main agents of discrimination against our respondents were their peers (15%) (**Figure 6**). As young people mature and marry, they became more independent of their circles and peer discrimination decreases.

FIGURE 6: WHO DID YOU EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION FROM?



The high figures for discrimination perpetrated by state officials invite further discussion on overall perceptions of justice in the country.

Evaluation of Social and State Justice

To the question “Do you see our state as just?” 56% answered in the negative. Respondents provided various explanations for this, which we coded and summarized in **Table 1**. We can see that corruption is the single most important explanation: as young people mature and get more life experience, they become more critical.

TABLE 1: REASONS FOR SEEING THE STATE AS UNJUST

Corruption	87	Bureaucracy	2	They hire only their people	1
Bribery	18	They are not afraid of Allah	2	They don't serve people	1
Think only of themselves	15	They only help their own people	2	The do not pay attention	1
Law does not work	11	There is no development	2	Do not support believers	1
Money solves everything	10	They are irresponsible	1	They are biased	1
Do not keep promises	8	Parliament is not honest	1	The system is rotten	1
Lie	7	Only the rich are in power	1	Police is not good	1
Do not work well	6	Jealousy	1	Tribalism	1
Not united	4	There is no truth	1	These are all stereotypes	1

The average evaluation of social justice was 2.71—slightly above the midpoint. Groups of respondents who perceive society as less just include: Salafi and Sulaimanchiler sympathizers; those who learn about religion from the Internet; respondents from Osh city (most likely due to their experience of the 2010 ethnic conflict and its aftermath); and young people who have experienced discrimination. By contrast, sympathizers with Tablighi Jamaat and madrasa students perceive society as more just.

Evaluation of Freedom of Religion and Perception of Muslims' Conditions

Another question asked how our respondents perceive the conditions of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan and some other contexts. **Figure 7** shows that treatment of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan is perceived as fairly just, but it is considered less so in Central Asia as a whole, Russia, and the Middle East.

FIGURE 7: ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5, HOW JUSTLY ARE MUSLIMS TREATED IN THE FOLLOWING REGIONS/COUNTRIES?



The majority of interview and focus group participants think that the level of religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan is quite high. However, interviewees who were arrested or were registered on the security watch-list stated that the accusations against them were unfair and that security agencies did not conduct proper and fair investigations. According to these informants, the police often creates cases without proper investigation. Those interlocutors who had gone to trial for alleged ties to extremism indicated that their civil rights had been violated; trials were conducted behind closed doors and investigations were not conducted in accordance with the law. Some informants mentioned restrictions on travel and the dissemination of the Islamic message, particularly concerning the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement in Kyrgyzstan. Some interviewed members of the movement see such constraints as being directed against religion. Finally, one interviewee who had returned from Syria stated that the returning foreign terrorist fighters from the Syrian conflict are seen as enemies by state and society alike.

The results of interviews and focus groups reveal that very few informants have a proper understanding of the situation of religious freedom in other parts of the world and of the conflict in the Middle East. Yet many believe that the source of conflict in this region is the geopolitical interests of Western powers, particularly the US.

Politics

This section of the report aims to explore the main political and geopolitical discourses seen by young people in Kyrgyzstan.

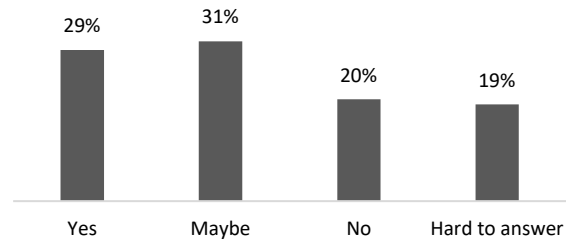
Interest in Politics and Political Participation

The average score for interest in politics is not very high—2.15 on a scale from 0 to 5. Participants in interviews and focus groups distinguished between two types of political participation: formal and informal. Several informants indicated that participation in formal political processes (e.g., becoming deputies in the Parliament or city councils) is relatively low: political parties use young people in their election campaign, but when it comes to the distribution of seats, positions are distributed among the more influential senior figures. Young people, meanwhile, are more actively engaged in the informal political arena, which includes various kinds of informal political movements, youth organizations, associations, community structures, etc.

Religious Perspectives on Politics

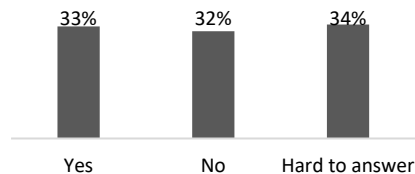
Our research reveals that religion is an increasingly important part of politics. For example, one-third of survey respondents would and another third might vote for a candidate with stronger religious views; only one-fifth would not (**Figure 8**). The percentages preferring religious candidates are higher for madrasa students, young people with stronger religious practices and a stronger religious identity, and young people influenced by religious leaders and religious friends.

FIGURE 8: IF A PERSON HAD MORE RELIGIOUS VIEWS, WOULD IT INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF VOTING FOR THEM?



One-third of respondents also support the introduction of sharia law in Kyrgyzstan⁴ (Figure 9). These figures are particularly high for respondents with stronger religious practices and/or who are influenced by religious leaders and religious friends.

FIGURE 9: DO YOU SUPPORT THE IDEA OF KYRGYZSTAN BECOMING A STATE GOVERNED BY SHARIA LAW?



In addition, young people trust religious organizations more than any other institution (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10: DEGREE OF TRUST IN VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)



Deeper analysis shows that religious participants are more likely to trust state institutions than less religious participants. This suggests that Kyrgyzstan's religious community is on the more conformist side of politics, while college and high school students have more trust in international organizations and NGOs.

Evaluation of Current Political Situation and Main Problems in Kyrgyzstan

Studying young people's attitude toward the political system in Kyrgyzstan, we see that the majority is either neutral (34%) or undecided (35%). There is little positivity (13%) or negativity (16%). The single most important factor making young people more critical of the political system is experience of discrimination. Young people with stronger religious practices and who are more influenced by religious scholars have a more positive view, confirming that the religious community is more politically conformist and suggesting that the types of religious knowledge and religious practices that are popular among young people in Kyrgyzstan do not breed anti-state sentiments.

While overall perceptions of the political system are more neutral, young people—particularly those who have started working—have few illusions about how corrupt the system is (Figure 11).

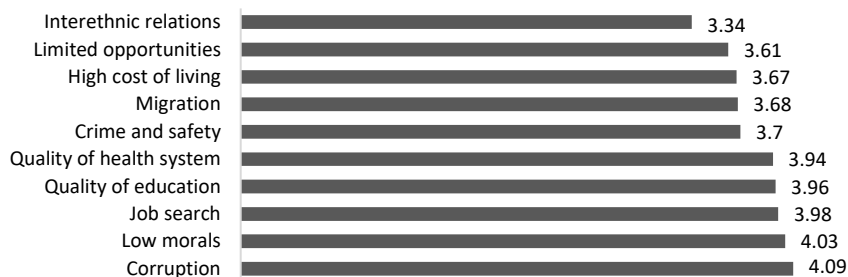
⁴ It is important to keep in mind that one-fourth of respondents are madrasa students, nearly half of whom (49.4%) gave a positive answer; this may have skewed the overall figures. However, even if we exclude madrasa students from the analysis, support for sharia law is still quite high (28%).

FIGURE 11: HOW HIGH IS THE LEVEL OF CORRUPTION IN KYRGYZSTAN?



Corruption is also seen as the biggest problem in the country, although it is not much more of a concern than other problems (**Figure 12**).

FIGURE 12: ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5, HOW PROBLEMATIC IS/ARE...?



According to experts and stakeholders, the youth is widely outclassed and unemployment prevents them from climbing the economic ladder. Society places high expectations on them and when young people cannot reach these communal “standards,” they may be stigmatized and set on a path toward radicalization. Labor migration to Russian Federation has become a common path for young people after completing secondary school. For many, migration provides the only opportunity to earn a decent income. However, there is a social cost to pay: traditional social structures in the villages are collapsing and children are left without parents, which affects their psychological well-being and makes them more vulnerable to radicalization. Education was also described as a problem and was criticized by respondents from across the country: a lack of teachers, low wages, and an old-fashioned curriculum weaken the system at all levels. Young people do not receive guidance about their future careers and often choose what their parents want them to study. Young people feel a strong degree of uncertainty about their future and the government does not provide any ideological, professional, or educational support to help address this. Radical groups can use this period of youth vulnerability to provide an alternative source of social and ideological support.

Survey results show that nine out of ten young people believe that the political system must change and one-third believe that the system should change completely (**Figure 13**). In spite of two revolutions and the fourth (at the time of research) change in president, people do not see the situation as improving.

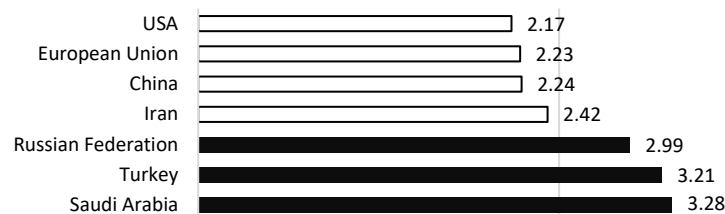
FIGURE 13: TO WHAT DEGREE SHOULD THE POLITICAL SYSTEM CHANGE?



Evaluation of External Political Actors

Analysis of young people's perceptions of international influences on the religious situation within Kyrgyzstan shows that two Sunni Muslim-majority countries (Saudi Arabia and Turkey) and Russia are perceived more positively than Iran, China, the European Union, and the US (**Figure 14**).

FIGURE 14: HOW POSITIVE IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOLLOWING STATES ON THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)?



Since events taking place in Syria and Iraq are strongly connected to radicalization discourses, it is interesting to understand how young people in Kyrgyzstan perceive the geopolitical influence of Middle Eastern states. The graph below shows that Russian influence is seen as the most positive, followed by Saudi and Turkish influence. China breaks the list at the midpoint of 2.5. The EU, Iran, the US, and Israel are perceived less positively (**Figure 15**).

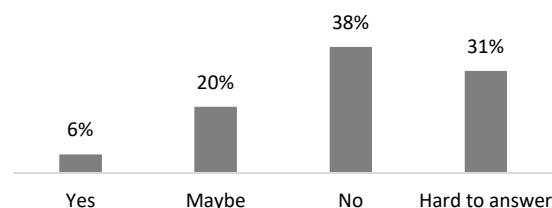
FIGURE 15: HOW POSITIVE IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)?



We also asked our respondents to evaluate how Muslims are treated in these countries. Here, there was no major difference from the previous graphs, except that China ranked lowest, likely due to the repression of Muslims in Xinjiang province.

Finally, very few young people believe that the West is trying to take over Muslim lands (**Figure 16**). Respondents who are more likely to believe such claims include Salafi sympathizers, lonely/isolated people, people with frequent conflicts, and people who have been discriminated against.

FIGURE 16: DO YOU BELIEVE THAT WESTERN COUNTRIES ARE TRYING TO TAKE OVER THE MUSLIM WORLD?



Religion

In this section, we will look at the main trends in religious practices and the link between religion and vulnerability/resilience to radicalization.

Religious Practice

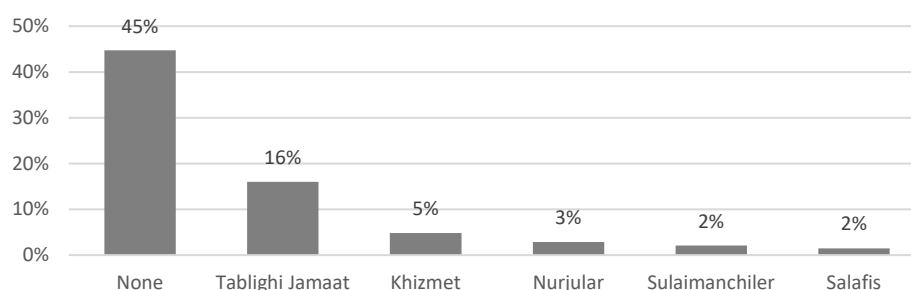
Overall, 97% of respondents identified themselves as Muslim, 2% as Christian, and only 1% as atheist. However, identifying oneself with a religion does not necessarily equate to being religious. The following graph shows young people's self-evaluation of their religious practices on a scale from 0 to 5 (**Figure 17**). Fasting appears to be the most popular practice, followed by prayer, attending religious classes, and attending mosque. The figure for attending mosque might be low because half of respondents were female and it is not common for women in Kyrgyzstan to attend mosques.

FIGURE 17: EVALUATE YOUR OWN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)



Almost half of survey respondents do not sympathize with any specific Islamic group (**Figure 18**). Among the rest, the most popular group is Tablighi Jamaat (16%); all other groups receive little sympathy (2-5%).

FIGURE 18: WITH WHICH MUSLIM GROUPS DO YOU SYMPATHIZE?

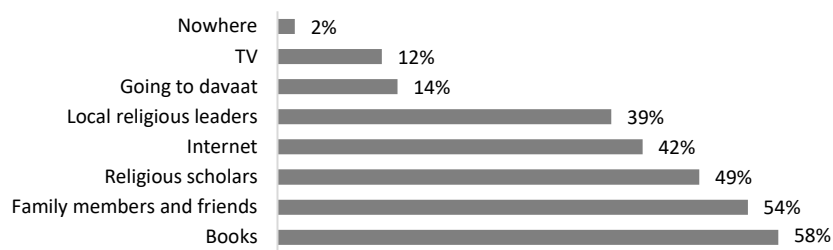


Interviews and focus groups show that many informants had very little information about radical religious groups in Kyrgyzstan; Hizb ut-Tahrir was the most frequently mentioned. Students of madrasas referred to Salafis, Wahhabis, Jaysh ul-Mahdi, Hezbollah, and Movement of Eastern Turkestan groups in Kyrgyzstan as extremist and radical. Some interlocutors mentioned ISIS and even Jehovah's Witnesses.

Sources of Information about Religion

For a significant majority (58%) of respondents, the main sources of information were books, family members, and friends. Local religious leaders, the Internet, and religious scholars were also important (**Figure 19**). Books are particularly popular among students of madrasas, who have access to a significantly larger collection of religious literature than their peers, including sources in Arabic language.

FIGURE 19: WHERE DO YOU RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT RELIGION?



Interviews and focus groups support the important role of family in young people's interest in religion. Female students of madrasas often indicated that they followed their parents' advice in obtaining religious education, while one male interlocutor started practicing Islam after deciding to marry a young woman who was already an adherent.

The most popular religious scholar is a former Mufti, Chubak Jalilov (98 mentions—9.3%), followed by a former rector of Kyrgyz Islamic University, Abdushukur Narmatov (59 mentions—5.6%), and current Mufti Maksat Toktomushev (7 mentions—0.7%). All three scholars are seen by the government and by religious experts as scholars preaching and defending traditional Islam approved by the authorities. Their lectures are widely circulated and easily available on TV channels, as CDs, and online.

Among young people, the most popular Internet source on Islam is *Nasaat Media*, a local Kyrgyz portal producing religious content. Other sites include *Islam.ru*, *Odnoklassniki.ru*, *Ummu.ru*, *WhatsApp*, *YouTube*, *Islamjolu.kg*, *Islam.kg*, *Islam_today.ru*, *Islam.uz*, and *Islam Nuru*. Salafi sympathizers are much more attached to the Internet as a source of information. This might be of concern because online information is the least controllable. The Internet, as a source of knowledge, is less popular in remote regions due to poor connectivity.

The role of local religious leaders and teachers is particularly strong in the Southern regions, where they are respected by society and have a high degree of social/community trust. In comparison to Northern regions, Islam has had a much more important role in the social life of communities in Southern Kyrgyzstan since pre-Soviet times, particularly among ethnic Uzbeks. Respondents from the Southern region mentioned several local religious leaders/scholars.⁵

Very few TV channels have religious programs—those that do include Osh TV, ELTR, Yntymak, Ayan TV, and Echo of Manas.

Religion and Appreciation of People Who Kill Themselves and Others for Religious Purposes

Violent religious extremism includes killing oneself or others for religious purposes. Appreciation of that act can therefore be seen as an indicator of vulnerability to radicalization (or even as a sign of radicalization). For the entire sample of respondents, the average score for appreciation of killing for religious purposes is relatively low—just 0.5 on a scale from 0 to 5.

Who is most likely to appreciate such killing? The strongest correlation is with social injustice: people who had more experience of discrimination and who have a stronger desire to avenge others are more

⁵ Zhigitali, Muhammaadil, Bakyt, Nematull, Muqaddas Haji, Kubanych domla (teacher), Muhammed Sadyk, Rashadhan, Aladdin Mansour, Bakhtiyar domla, Tilepaldi domla, Ahmat domla, Elmurat domla, and others.

likely to appreciate killing for religious purposes. Other young people who are more likely to appreciate such killing include:

- Male respondents (this seems to support gender-based stereotypes);
- Younger and unmarried respondents and school students (this confirms our original hypothesis about young people being more vulnerable to radicalization);
- Sulaimanchiler and Salafi sympathizers: Salafi ideology is known to provide a justification for *jihad* (holy war) for many radical groups; the higher rates of Sulaimanchiler on this question are more difficult to explain and require more investigation;
- Young people in Southern oblasts (this confirms the official view of the South as more vulnerable to radicalization);
- Lonely/isolated people and people with higher incidence of conflicts, who might be more resentful toward society and thus more supportive of religious violence;
- People influenced by criminal culture: criminal culture justifies violence and, as discussed in the literature review, many extremists have a criminal background (**Figure 20**).

FIGURE 20: DEGREE OF INFLUENCE BY CRIMINALS (Y-AXIS) AND APPRECIATION OF KILLING FOR RELIGIOUS PURPOSES (X-AXIS) (ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 5)



Socialization

How is socialization linked to radicalization? Research reveals that two groups of young people are more vulnerable: 1) those who have fewer friends and feel more lonely and isolated; and 2) those who have conflicts more frequently. Both groups call for more radical change to the political system, perceive their society as less just, and think of avenging others more often. Who is likely to be less sociable and more likely to have conflicts?

Number of Friends and Loneliness/Isolation

Research reveals two subcategories of young people who are more likely to feel lonely and have fewer friends: sympathizers with Salafi groups and young people from Osh. In part, this can be explained by the fact that Salafi Islamic practice is significantly more individualistic than that of other groups, while Osh is still experiencing the lingering effects of the 2010 ethnic bloodshed. Two categories with more friends are sympathizers with two Turkish groups (Khizmet and Nurjular, both of which have more group-oriented Islamic practices) and those who attend mosques and religious lessons (when religion becomes a social activity, it has a positive effect).

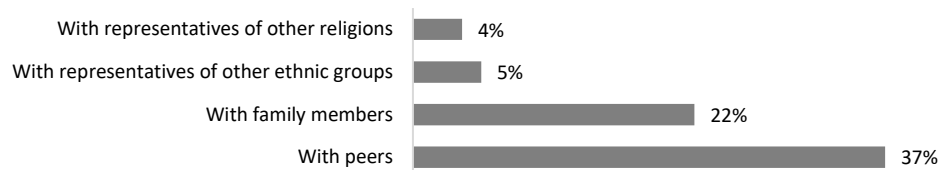
Unfortunately, young people with stronger religious practices are more likely to befriend only people of the same religion. This is not necessarily a sign of radicalization, but of a less cosmopolitan view of life.

Interviews and focus groups show the importance of infrastructure: young people from urban settlements have more places to socialize (cinemas, theaters, sport clubs, etc.), while young people in villages lack these.

Frequency and Types of Conflicts

The most frequent type of conflict is with peers (**Figure 21**). Young people from Batken oblast and Osh city have more conflicts. This is mostly due to tense ethnic relations: Batken is an ethnically complex border zone with difficult relations between Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, while Osh city experienced strong ethnic clashes in 2010 and relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks remain complicated. By contrast, young people in the much more ethnically homogenous region of Naryn have fewer conflicts.

FIGURE 21: WITH WHOM DO YOU HAVE CONFLICTS?



In addition, young people who fast and attend religious lessons and those who receive information from religious scholars and books have fewer conflicts. This may be because one of the main aims of fasting is to practice *sabr* (patience), which may help people become more tolerant of others (thereby reducing conflict), while proper Islamic knowledge teaches similar values: patience, tolerance, and peace.

Attitude toward People of Other Ethnic Groups, Other Religions, and Converts

If we think of radicalization as a lack of tolerance, exclusivity, and an unwillingness to accept differences, then a negative attitude toward “others” can be seen as vulnerability to radicalization. **Figure 22** shows that the degree of tolerance varies by point of difference: young respondents are quite positive toward other ethnic groups, less so toward representatives of other religions, and almost negative toward converts to other religions. Participants in interviews and focus groups also expressed a very negative attitude toward Christian missionaries and converts to Christianity.

FIGURE 22: ATTITUDE TOWARD... (0-5 SCALE)



Salafi sympathizers, young people from Southern Kyrgyzstan, and madrasa students are less tolerant. Sympathizers with Turkish groups, college students, and young people from the more diverse and modern city of Bishkek, meanwhile, are more cosmopolitan. It also seems that tolerance increases with age and marriage.

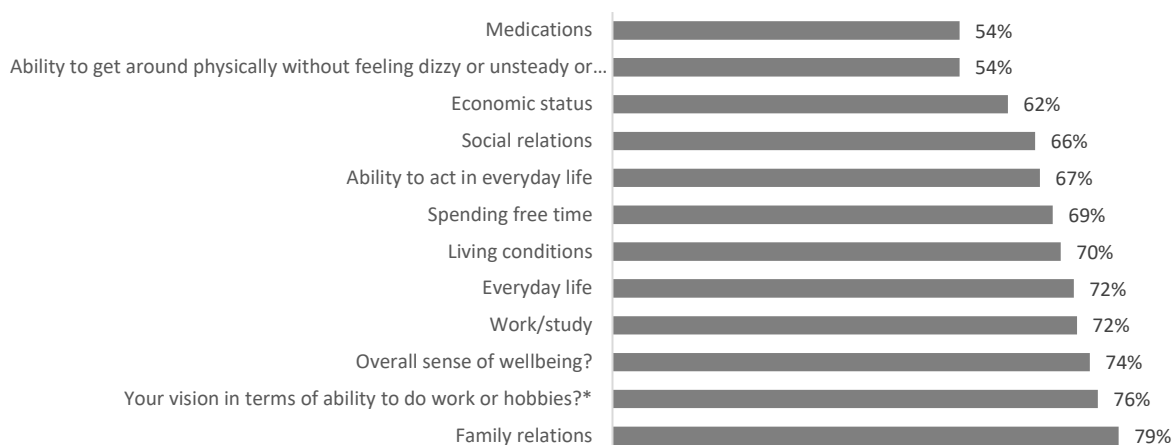
Psychology

Professional psychologists recommended that we use two standard psychological tests as indicators of vulnerability to radicalization: 1) Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Questionnaire; and 2) Beck's Aggression Test. The expectation was that people with lower scores on life satisfaction and higher scores on aggression would be more vulnerable, because radicalization is often seen as a response to certain life circumstances that make a person unhappy. In addition, since we are exploring radicalization that can lead to violent extremism, a high level of personal aggression can be seen as a contributing factor to vulnerability.

Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction

The average quality of life enjoyment and satisfaction score for all of our respondents is 68%. This is not extremely high, but nor is it very low. Interestingly, the highest score is on the question about satisfaction with family relations: the importance of family in Kyrgyz culture sets it apart from other contexts. A positive family environment can strengthen young people's resilience to radicalization. The lowest scores are on the two indicators related to health and economic status (**Figure 23**).

FIGURE 23: DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH...

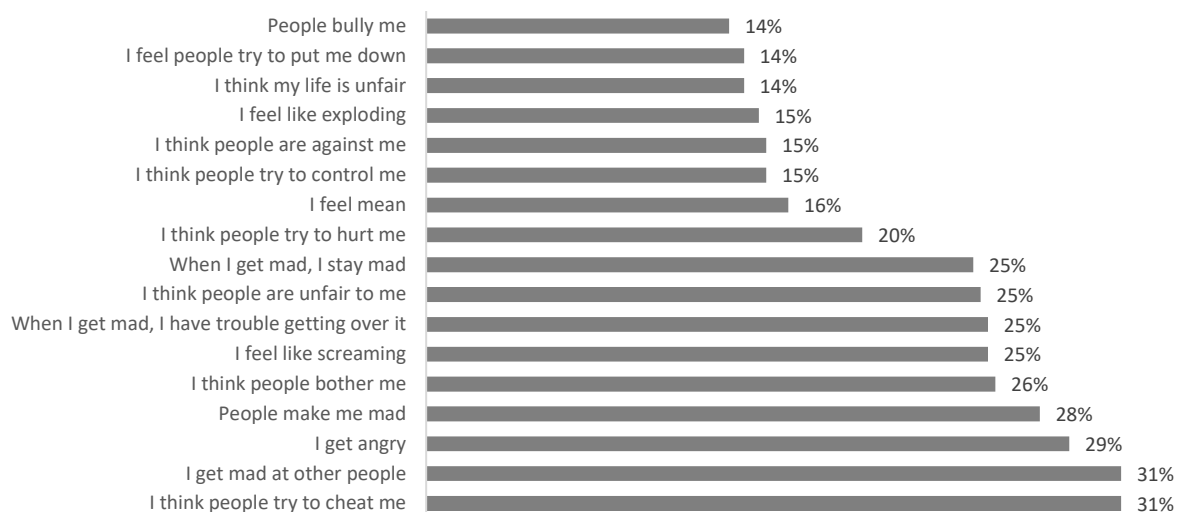


Who is less likely to feel satisfaction? Apparently, it is young people who have experienced discrimination and have conflicts more often. Salafi and Sulaimanchiler sympathizers are also less satisfied. Finally, there are several less satisfied respondents with certain demographic characteristics: boys, ethnic Kyrgyz, married, unemployed, and residents of Osh city. By contrast, girls, ethnic minorities, school students, bachelors, and sympathizers with Nurjular are more satisfied.

Beck's Youth Anger Test

The average score across 16 measurements of aggression for all respondents is only 22% and the range is not that large—14-31%. The following figure shows what makes people angry (**Figure 24**).

FIGURE 24: BECK'S AGGRESSION TEST



Summarizing Vulnerability/Resilience Factors across Domains

After completing analysis within each domain, we summarized our findings in the form of a table that brings together all indicators of vulnerability/resilience to radicalization. In this table, we identified two categories of indicators: primary and secondary. Primary indicators are those that we see as directly reflecting vulnerability/resilience to radicalization, while secondary indicators reflect the likelihood of contributing to one of the primary indicators—for example, feeling lonely (a secondary indicator) is correlated with justification of violence (a primary indicator). It is very important to emphasize that these are not indicators of radicalization; they are only indicators of *potential vulnerability/resilience* to radicalization. To take one example, someone who has a critical perspective on the political system in Kyrgyzstan is not necessarily radical, but someone who is radical is more likely to have such a critical view.

TABLE 2: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY INDICATORS OF VULNERABILITY/RESILIENCE TO RADICALIZATION ACROSS FIVE DOMAINS

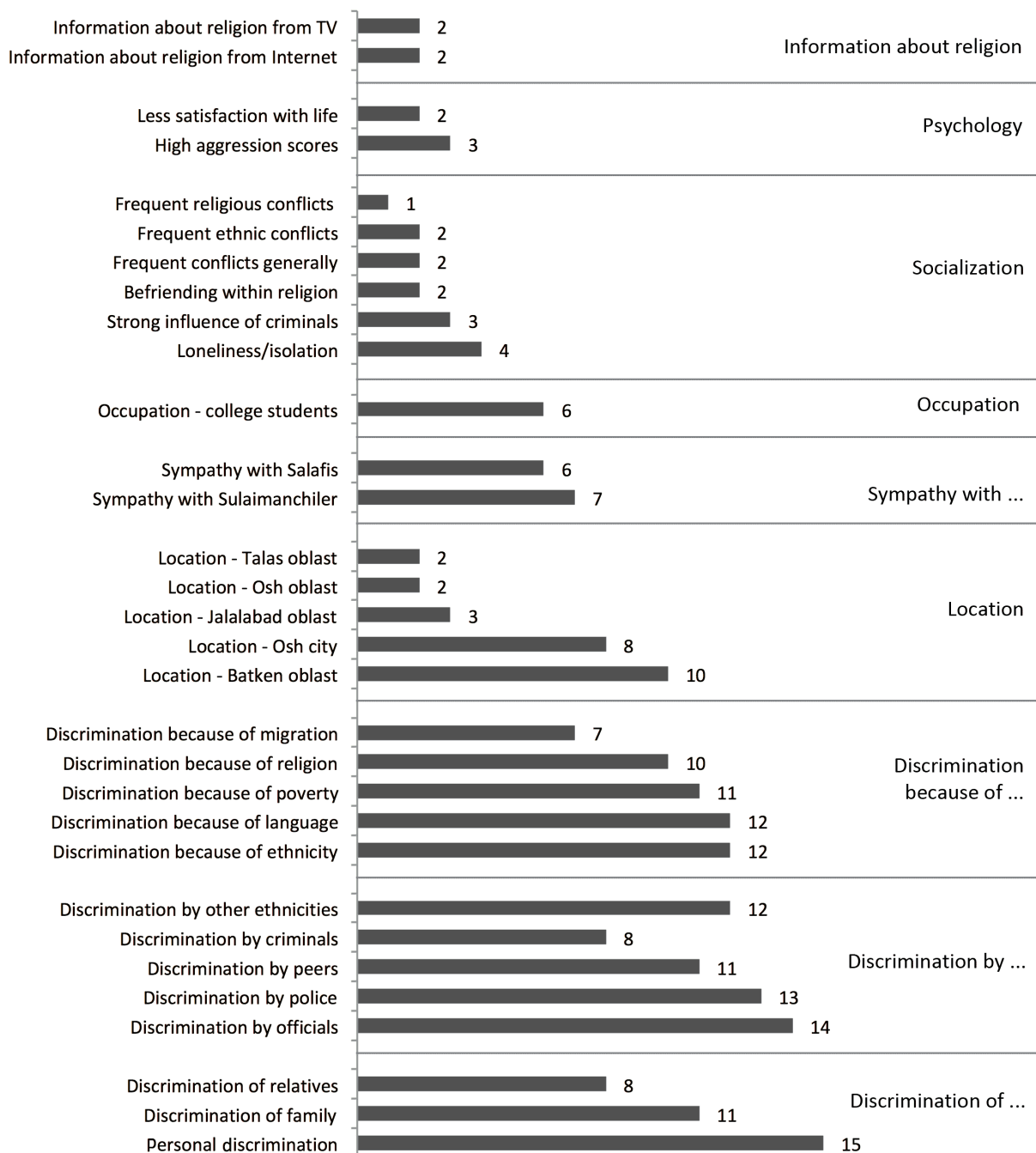
	Primary indicators	Secondary indicators
Grievances	Negative evaluation of social justice	Discrimination (personal, family, relatives)
	Negative evaluation of state justice	Discrimination (various kinds)
	Negative evaluation of the position of Muslims	Discrimination by various agencies
	Frequency of thinking about revenge	
	Justification of violence	
Religion	Killing others for religious purposes	
Politics	Negative evaluation of political system in KG	
	Critical view of various problems in Kyrgyzstan	
	Seeing the need for political change	
	Negative view of external influence	
	Belief in Western conspiracy	
Socialization	Befriending within religion	Feeling lonely/isolated
	Negative attitude toward “others”	Frequency of conflicts
Psychology	Aggression	Life satisfaction

The next step for us was to list all variables that have a positive or negative correlation with these indicators and count them, in order to identify the most frequently occurring correlations. This was an experiment and we have not seen such a methodology used in other research on radicalization. We understand that this approach has significant limitations (for instance, it does not weigh the significance of one variable against another), but even considering its shortcomings, we still believe that it provides a more or less solid basis for drawing larger conclusions about the significance of some factors compared to others. Having calculated all the correlations, we were able to identify three categories of independent variables linked to vulnerability/resilience to radicalization: 1) straightforward factors that increase vulnerability to radicalization; 2) straightforward factors that increase resilience to radicalization; and 3) less straightforward factors that to varying degrees contribute to both vulnerability and resilience. The categories are depicted and discussed below.

Straightforward Factors Increasing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Figure 25 depicts factors that increase vulnerability.

FIGURE 25: STRAIGHTFORWARD FACTORS OF VULNERABILITY



We can see that:

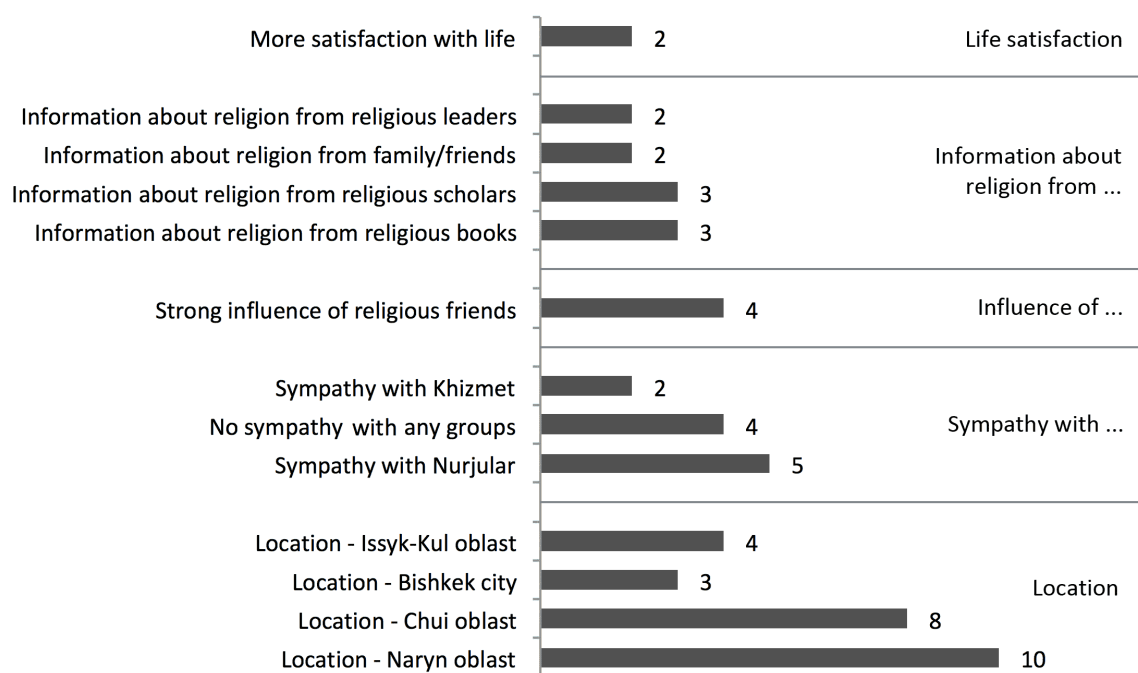
- Discrimination is the most influential factor of vulnerability (particularly personal discrimination, discrimination by state officials, and discrimination by police and security services).
- Location is the second most important factor—two locations are the most vulnerable: Batken oblast (due to the very complex border situation) and Osh city (due to the 2010 ethnic conflict).

- Sympathy with two Islamic groups—Sulaimanchiler and Salafis—is an influential factor. While Salafis are generally considered to have higher potential for radicalization, the high scores of Sulaimanchiler sympathizers are surprising and require deeper investigation.
- College students are among the most active and protest-minded population groups worldwide, and Kyrgyzstan is no exception.
- Socialization factors of vulnerability include loneliness/isolation, engagement with criminals, befriending people within one’s religion, and higher frequency of conflicts.
- High scores on aggression tests and lower life satisfaction are two indicators of a more complex psychological condition.
- Obtaining information about religion from depersonalized sources like the Internet and TV is a factor in vulnerability.

Straightforward Factors Increasing Resilience to Radicalization

Figure 26 shows young people’s resilience.

FIGURE 26: STRAIGHTFORWARD FACTORS OF RESILIENCE



Resilience factors include:

- Location: two regions of Kyrgyzstan (Naryn and Chui oblasts) seem to be the most resilient; Issyk-Kul oblast and Bishkek city also score high. All these locations represent Northern regions.
- Not sympathizing with any religious groups or sympathizing with Nurjular or Khizmet, two Turkish groups known to be more modernist.
- Stronger influence of religious friends.
- Obtaining information about religion from religious books, religious scholars, going to *davaat*, and local religious leaders—in Kyrgyzstan, all these sources reproduce the traditional peaceful Islamic message.
- Greater life satisfaction, which makes a person happier and less likely to search for radical solutions.

Less Straightforward Factors

There are several factors that in some correlations contribute to vulnerability to radicalization and in other cases to resilience:

- Migration experience contributes more to vulnerability (11 vs. 3 correlations). This is because migrants live in difficult circumstances, experience xenophobia, etc.
- Ethnicity: ethnic Kyrgyz score higher on vulnerability than ethnic minorities. This provides an alternative view to the official negative portrayal of ethnic minorities as more radical.
- Religious practices (praying, fasting, attending mosque, and attending religious classes) are almost equally likely to increase both vulnerability and resilience.
- Gender: male and female respondents score almost equally on vulnerability and resilience. This also deconstructs some stereotypes of male respondents being more radical.
- Age: younger people are more vulnerable on 6 correlations and resilient on 4.
- Marriage seems to make young people more resilient (4 vs. 2 correlations).

CHAPTER 4: Case Studies

This chapter includes the stories of three interlocutors who were on the security watch-list in their local police precincts. We have reconstructed their portraits around some basic concepts that emerged from interviews. All three are men and they represent three different ethnic groups: Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Uyghur.

Case 1: TA—Kyrgyz Supporter of Hizb ut-Tahrir

TA is a 47-year-old ethnic Kyrgyz from Northern Kyrgyzstan. We included his case because he became involved with Hizb ut-Tahrir (hereafter HT) in the mid-1990s, during his youth. TA lives with his wife and four little children in his mother-in-law's house. This is his second marriage; he also has a daughter from his first marriage. His family lives in very poor conditions and TA's health is poor; he suffered injuries in a car accident. Nonetheless, TA works in the fields. He lives by the principle of *shukr* (gratitude) in spite of economic difficulties in his life. He frequently says "alhamdulillah" (praise be to Allah) and says that every Muslim should be thankful. Sometimes his family does not have money to pay for utilities or to buy bread. His main sources of income are the field and the social welfare he gets for his five children. TA could not finish his undergraduate education in Russia, where he once studied veterinary science, yet he is very intelligent, confident in his thoughts, and tries to think globally. He is not a conflictual person.

His grandparents played an important role in introducing him to religion in the early 1990s. Since then, his Islamic practice has included praying five times a day, attending mosque, fasting, and following other basic Islamic rules. After he started practicing Islam more seriously, TA discovered a variety of Islamic movements, and after studying their programs found himself satisfied only with HT. In TA's view, only this movement was able to provide real sharia solutions to many social ills.

He was imprisoned once, but not because of his beliefs. Nevertheless, TA maintains that he is unjustly persecuted by the law-enforcement agencies because he supports the ideas of HT, although he claims he is not a member of it. He sees HT as a political or intellectual party/movement, and in his view it is unjustly labeled an extremist or even terrorist group.

TA criticizes the Kyrgyz state, security agencies, political system, and even religious institutions. He is completely against the current political system and wishes to replace it with an Islamic one. He supports traditional values and continuously displays a negative attitude toward Western norms. He argues that democracy as a system has failed and only Islam can rehabilitate people's lives. TA is a skilled conversationalist and refers frequently to the Qur'an. *"For me to reject this idea [of HT], I need to be offered a new and better thought, right? Does the state have anything to propose? No, nowadays, nobody trusts the state or the president."*

TA believes that the police planted the "extremist" literature that they found in his home in order to arrest him and have something to report. He claims that all accusations against him are false and unjust and that the police does not have the expertise to investigate his case. In addition, all state agencies, including law-enforcement, are corrupt, cannot be trusted, and thus cannot represent the law. Accordingly, he believes that there is no freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan and the way he and other Muslims are treated is a form of discrimination.

Despite all these accusations, TA assures us that he will keep contributing to the cause of introducing the Islamic system to Kyrgyzstan and that no one can force him to reject his ideas. Moreover, he does not seek any vengeance against security agencies and does not consider them his enemy. Instead, TA

stresses the need to forgive. Violence, in his view, can only be justified in the event of an attack on family members. He also disapproves of domestic violence against family members, particularly women. As for political violence, he thinks that it can be justified only when the Caliphate has been established and not before.

TA does not acknowledge the authority of a single Islamic scholar in Kyrgyzstan. He is even critical of Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani,⁶ the leader of HT. He is also critical of all Islamic movements in Kyrgyzstan other than HT, although he does not harbor negative feelings toward them. Nor does he harbor negative feelings toward representatives of other ethnic groups, representatives of other religions, or converts to Christianity:

"...from the Islamic perspective, bro, all of us, Christians, Muslims or gentiles, there is no difference between us. Allah gives life to all, so all of us have the same rights, no one is higher than another, neither due to money, nor to status and color; we are all human beings."

TA defines terrorism as a form of political action that emerges in response to pressure and rejects the connection of terrorism and extremism to Islam. He listed two prohibited extremist organizations in Kyrgyzstan: Jaysh-ul-Mahdi and Movement of Eastern Turkestan. He sees the current situation in Syria as the result of a Western conspiracy against Muslims. He named the US, the Russian Federation, France, the UK, and China as the main players in this game and explained that what is happening in Syria is simply a battle between Russia and the US. TA believes that ISIS is a tool of anti-Muslim propaganda. TA views jihad as a pious act that brings a person closer to Allah and Islam. He explained that in some cases jihad really means war and he approves of it only if it is carried out according to Islamic rules.

TA has a very unusual perspective on citizenship—he rejects it:

"To be a citizen of Kyrgyzstan is not important for me because according to Islam it is forbidden as a form of nationalism. Citizenship means that we are colonized; you can call it citizenship, but I perceive it as colonization."

At the same time, TA says that being Kyrgyz and being part of a particular region or tribe is important as long as it does not turn into nationalism or become a political instrument. Belonging to a specific ethnicity and practicing traditions is very natural, but abiding by Islamic rules is more important.

When it comes to law, norms, and values, TA does not accept rules that are created/established by men. Ethnic traditions can be observed as long as they do not contradict Islamic norms.

"In accordance with Islam, it is haram [illicit] to follow rules/laws created by men. It is wrong to take away the rule of God. It would mean that men consider themselves equal to God. So abiding by these rules would be like worshipping other human beings."

TA's interests in politics are closely related to his ideological views. He closely follows news about politics in Kyrgyzstan and expresses strong distrust in politicians. TA's political activism is relatively low: he does not participate in elections; he is particularly against parliamentary elections because parliament is a legislative unit. Nevertheless, he supports the idea of participation in presidential

⁶ Islamic scholar and the founder of Hizb-ut-Tahrir's ideology.

elections. Were a candidate to be religious and to have a program aligned with the Quran and Sunnah, he would vote for him. TA disapproves of secularism.

TA displays many features peculiar to an HT member/sympathizer. In our research, we came across several very intelligent members of HT, especially from the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan, who are willing to advocate for their own position through debates and discourses, not terrorist action. They want to be represented on various discussion platforms and try to change the system by offering their own alternative ideology.

Case 2: JA—Uzbek Syrian Fighter by Accident

JA works as a driver for a local ice-cream company. He has problems with his kidney and somewhat limited eyesight; he does not have the financial means to get treatment. JA is an ethnic Uzbek.

JA's interest in religion began within his family and environment. There was a mosque next to his house, his father used to practice Islam, and he was introduced to religion at an early age. Sadly, JA lost his parents very young, within a year of each other. After the tragedy, JA went to Moscow in hopes of finding employment. He eventually got married and kept traveling regularly to Moscow, where he mainly worked as an odd-job man. He maintained his religious practices while in Moscow, like stopping his work in order to pray, even when conditions made this very difficult.

JA was experiencing financial difficulties when he met BN in a mosque during Ramadan and shared his story. BN offered JA a job in Turkey, working as a driver and as a cattleman on a farm. He assured JA that everything was legal; he even bought JA a ticket to Istanbul and gave him some money to cover travel expenses. JA agreed. He and two other people flew from Bishkek to Istanbul and someone met them at the airport. They rode for 12-13 hours. JA kept thinking about work, but no one spoke to him about it, so he started becoming suspicious. When they had their first long stop, they still had no idea where they were being taken.

Prior to that day, he had not heard much about the war in Syria or about people who joined ISIS. Eventually, there were more than ten people in their group, most of whom were speaking Turkish and Arabic. When it got dark, they were brought to a field and told to cross it. From afar, they saw the headlights; two men with guns approached them and spoke in Uzbek. JA became scared: he knew something was wrong and thought that the men with guns were bandits. He said that he had come for a job, that he had left behind a family with two little children, and that he wanted to go back to Kyrgyzstan. These people offered to discuss the situation when they arrived at their destination. Not having much choice, JA got into the car with the others. This car eventually took them to Syria.

JA and the others were informed that they were now in Syria. JA imagined war fields from scenes in the movies and thoughts of death came to his mind. He tried to explain his situation again and again; he appealed to brotherhood, hoping to win their empathy. They said that JA should talk to their group leader and assured him that they would not keep him by force.

The leader was very calm during their conversation and understood that JA's family needed him, the only breadwinner. The only question he asked JA was: "Will you not regret leaving us? We cannot keep you here by force." JA admitted that he had been deceived by BN, who had not explained the real situation. During the day he spent in Syria, he did not witness any military actions; he saw five or six Uzbek men, who were staying in a house; there were no women, so men were responsible for their own meals. JA was so scared that he spent that day in one of the rooms; he could not talk to anyone out

of fear: *"It seemed to me that if I said something, they could do something to me or they would kill me. I was scared."*

The next day, JA was sent back to Istanbul. He did not want to return to Kyrgyzstan without money, so he decided to look for work in Istanbul and spent two weeks doing so, to no avail. Eventually, he contacted his brother, explained the situation, and told him that he wanted to return to Kyrgyzstan. His family did not have much money, so after two weeks in Kyrgyzstan he went back to Moscow with the help of his older brothers. After three years of working in Moscow, he was arrested upon his return to Kyrgyzstan. JA never thought that going to Syria was a crime and that he would be prosecuted. It turned out that the security forces had arrested and interrogated some of the other young men who went to Syria with JA and it was they who gave the police JA's name. JA was given a two-year suspended sentence.

JA points to two important reasons for his experience: first, the poor economic situation of his family, which pushed him to Turkey in search of work; and second, his lack of knowledge and information about the Syrian conflict. Now, his mind is occupied by thoughts of family: his first child has started elementary school and his second child is in kindergarten. His older siblings support his family, while JA is hoping to find a second job. He claims to remain quite uninformed about the situation in Syria: who is fighting whom and for what reasons. His knowledge of which extremist groups are prohibited in Kyrgyzstan is also very limited.

JA is deeply grateful to the state for giving him the chance to change his life for the better. JA did not have time to fully understand what happened to him and what one should do in such a situation. He also did not understand the intentions of BN, who sent him to Syria; he suspects it was about money. JA is not interested in politics; he refers to his lack of education to explain this.

JA claims that he now values his spouse and siblings more than he used to; his family, he says, is his main reason for living. While silent on politics, JA freely expresses his thoughts on economic issues: he wants Kyrgyzstan to become developed like European countries. Before his Syrian journey, JA had never violated the law and he has never had any friends who sympathized with radical or extremist groups. JA's case shows us that ordinary people can easily become victims of recruiters without themselves being sympathetic to any radical ideas.

Case 3: KK—The Syrian Story of a Uyghur Labor Migrant

KK is young Uyghur man in his early twenties from Southern Kyrgyzstan. He is married and has a daughter. KK's parents are in their fifties and he has an older brother. Few members of his family have higher education. When KK finished 9th grade, his mother asked if he wanted to go on to high school or work with other family members in Bishkek to help earn money to build a house. KK chose the second option and started helping his parents with their bakery in Bishkek. The family spent 3-4-years working in the capital and built a new house, while KK gained experience in cooking and baking.

However, after completing the house, the family needed money to decorate and furnish it. Their baking business in Bishkek was facing too much competition, so the family decided to send KK's father to Moscow. After some time, KK's father invited KK to join him in Moscow. KK was already 18. He started working in the same restaurant where his father was baking bread; he was responsible for preparing salads. Sometime later, his father sent KK to another branch of the same restaurant, located in a Moscow suburb.

KK claims everything started when he purchased his first smartphone, which gave him access to a whole new world of information and communication. He started actively using Odnoklassniki⁷ and YouTube. This was also the time when KK started showing an interest in religion and began to practice it. He started going to mosque, and there he made new friends from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan who were working in the cafes next to the mosque. KK suggests that Internet videos and these new friends had a strong influence on his religiosity. KK connected with these friends on Odnoklassniki, and through their accounts he found various online communities and groups, which contained a large number of different video clips about the Syrian conflict. These videos had a strong effect on him, so much so that KK eventually became interested in going to Syria and started inquiring among his friends about how this could be done. His friends gave him the login and password for a special online group where KK could discuss this in detail:

"Yeah, after watching those videos, they told me that Muslims are suffering, Muslims need help. They are suffering. How can you identify yourself as a Muslim? Why are you not helping them?"

The recruiter in the online group was aware of KK's skills and when KK asked how he could be helpful to Muslims in Syria, he said that KK could cook for them. KK thinks that the recruiter studied his profile on Odnoklassniki, where he had pictures from his workplace. It was August and tickets to Istanbul were cheap. When KK was buying his, he was thinking of the suffering children and women shown in the online videos.

He got some money from his employer and, without telling anyone, flew to Istanbul. A man from Uzbekistan, whose name was Hamza, met KK at the airport. The next morning, Hamza put KK on a bus and explained that someone would meet him at the other end of his bus journey. KK was instructed not to change his clothes. It took him about one day to reach his destination, where he was met by someone who spoke to him in Arabic. They went to a small house and rested. They then walked for about one kilometer and found themselves in Latakia, Syria (KK did not mention anything about crossing the border). There, KK met Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen. There was no military action in Latakia and the place was very close to Turkey. He was introduced to SA, who was from the same village as KK, but they had never met before.

"He talked about jihad and asked how old I was. I responded that I was still eighteen. He said: you are still young. What can you do? I answered that I was a cook. He told me to be a cook in that house. The militants were arriving; among them were those who had lost their hands and feet."

KK contacted his mother and told her that he was in Sochi. But his family learned that KK was somewhere on the Turkish border because his GSM was showing his Turkish location. KK promised his mother that he would return soon. However, he started thinking seriously about returning only after a military helicopter flew by and caused the windows to crack. After that, he became preoccupied with returning home. However, his passport had been taken and he could not retrieve it. One day, he heard that a Turkmen who was responsible for supplying goods was going to Turkey and KK asked him to help him escape, even without a passport. The Turkmen agreed and the next morning they crossed the border; the Turkmen guy gave KK some money and advised him to turn himself in to the Turkish police. KK followed the advice and was sent to Adana.⁸ KK spent one month there and the Turkish security agencies told him that he could contact his family members or other relatives. He called his mother; they tried to buy him a ticket using his national ID, but that did not work since this was an

⁷ Social network popular among the Russian-speaking segment of internet users.

⁸ A major city in Southern Turkey.

international flight. The Turkish police suggested that he request assistance from the embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic. He was taken to Istanbul with an escort so that the consulate could issue him a temporary passport. However, on the way, he received a call from Adana with the news that his passport had been found. KK suspects that the Turkish police collaborate with fighters in Syria and that is how they retrieved his passport.

KK landed in Kyrgyzstan and was arrested at the airport. He knew that the Kyrgyz consulate in Istanbul had informed Kyrgyzstani law enforcement about him. Thus, KK spent about two months in prison; he admitted his guilt and told all details of his story to the law-enforcement agencies. KK believes that the punishment was fair. After he was released, there were a lot of rumors in the community, and his family was afraid that he would not be able to find a bride. Nevertheless, he succeeded in marrying his cousin. Family and relatives did not judge him; they perceived everything as a mistake due to his young age. KK and his wife could not have children for three years after marriage and then they had a daughter. KK seems very happy to have his simple and peaceful life. He tries to pray on time, but at the moment he cannot attend mosque due to his health issues. KK acknowledges the errors in his religious knowledge—after what he experienced, he has sworn off the Internet and he is trying to learn more about religion from local religious leaders like Chubak aiy.

KK does not have any direct links to Islamic movements. He knows that followers of Tablighi Jamaat regularly visit their village; he has also heard about Hizb ut-Tahrir, Salafis, and Ahmadiyas. Recently, on TV news, he learned about the Gulen movement as well. He is willing to follow local imams. KK believes that there is more freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan if compared to other countries in Central Asia. His main source of information about religion today is local TV programs.

KK is rethinking some of the main religious concepts:

“I used to think that jihad meant killing people. You kill a man and then you go to heaven. But now our religious leaders say that jihad actually starts within our household. First of all, one should implement jihad toward one’s nafs [ego, desires]. Now I understand jihad as follows: first of all, I need to restrict my eyes, limit my tongue, change myself, and change my attitudes toward others and family.”

KK values various identities, like being a Kyrgyzstani citizen. He also shows strong knowledge of his family roots. Nevertheless, KK—just like JA—does not have any opinion on politics and such concepts as state and secularism. He repeats that his level of knowledge does not allow him to discuss such questions; accordingly, KK thinks that young people’s main problem is a lack of religious knowledge. KK repeats that he was introduced to the wrong interpretation of religion during migration. However, he has finally learned the right way of being a Muslim in Kyrgyzstan. At the moment, he is working in construction; however, without the support of his parents and relatives, his economic condition would be worse. KK says that the only thing he wishes for is peace.

KK’s experience is an example of radicalization among one of the vulnerable groups we identified: labor migrants in Russia. Furthermore, as KK explained, social media had a huge influence on his understanding of the Syrian conflict. His age and life experience allowed him to think that he could be helpful in Syria, where women and children were suffering.

These three different stories of involvement in extremist and radical ideologies and activities show us different scenarios of youth radicalization in Kyrgyzstan. In the first case, a Kyrgyz man consciously supports the ideas of Hizb ut-Tahrir and justifies his position by criticizing the current world system. The second case is that of a young Uzbek man who became a victim of his socio-economic circumstances, which made him vulnerable and accidentally landed him in Syria. JA blames his own poor

education and financial situation; he thinks the only way to live happily is to educate the next generation and try to find his own place in Kyrgyzstan. The third case—of a young Uyghur man who connected with radical and extremist groups during labor migration and found himself in the conflict zone—demonstrates other vulnerabilities of young people in Kyrgyzstan.

CONCLUSIONS

The best way to conclude is to follow the same structure that we established in the literature review and in the main empirical analysis: looking at vulnerability and resilience through individual domains.

Grievances

- Our research shows that grievances are the most important factor of vulnerability. Young people who experienced discrimination have the highest vulnerability scores. These scores are particularly high for young people who experienced discrimination perpetrated by state officials and police. Such young people are much more likely to have strong desires to avenge others and justify violence for various purposes, including religious ones.
- Young people in Kyrgyzstan grow up seeing a lot of social and state injustice and very high levels of corruption around them. They name corruption and low morals as the biggest problems facing Kyrgyz society. They see state institutions and actors as predatory agents who use their privileged positions to make money from the rest of society. The theme of corruption and state predation forms the core of many young people's radical ideas. Members of radical organizations can exploit such perceptions to recruit young people by promising them the just Islamic alternative.
- Young people report higher degree of injustice and discrimination against practicing Muslims, particularly from police. For young women, this is often related to their Islamic attire. Nonetheless, young people believe that religious freedom and the conditions of the Muslim population in Kyrgyzstan are better than they are in the neighboring Central Asian countries, Russia, Western countries, and China.

Politics

- Young people's interest in politics is very low. This is mostly because they have very limited opportunities to participate in formal politics. Instead, young people are active in more informal groups and movements.
- Young people's political views are becoming more and more connected to their religious views. Nearly one-third of survey respondents would support a more religious candidate and even the introduction of sharia law to replace the constitution. Young people also have a very high degree of trust in religious organizations, higher than in the state and international organizations.
- When young people evaluate the influence of major geopolitical actors on the situation in Kyrgyzstan and the Middle East, we observe a clear bifurcation: they have a positive view of Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and a negative view of USA, EU and Iran. China is usually in the middle, with one exception—it scores very low on the treatment of Muslims in its own territory.
- Very few young people believe in the conspiracy that the West seeks to dominate Muslim lands.

Religion

- An increasing number of young people practice religion.
- Most young people do not align themselves with any specific religious groups, but of those who do, the largest group sympathizes with Tablighi Jamaat. Three Turkish groups (Khizmet, Nurjular, and Sulaimanchiler) and Salafis are less popular. Young people who sympathize with Salafis and Sulaimanchiler are the most vulnerable to radicalization, while those who sympathize with Khizmet and Nurjular are the most resilient. Tablighi Jamaat sympathizers are in the middle.
- Books, family members, religious scholars, and local imams are the most popular sources of information about religion. They are also the safest—they make young people more resilient to radicalization. Young people want to learn more about religion and the most preferable way is through

live communication with religious specialists and scholars who can engage them in an open discussion. By contrast, more depersonalized sources, such as the Internet, make people more vulnerable. Easily accessible from anywhere in Kyrgyzstan via mobile devices, it was the main channel through which some of our more radically minded interlocutors obtained information that interested them. The case study of KK exemplifies that dynamic.

- The poor quality of both religious and secular education is a negative factor. Better educational opportunities, which contribute to stronger critical and analytical thinking abilities and to greater religious and ethnic tolerance, would strengthen young people's resilience to radical ideas.
- The degree of appreciation of killing oneself and others for religious purposes is very low.

Socialization

- Parents and family members are the main sources of authority for young people.
- Young people who are more likely to feel lonely/isolated, have fewer friends, and have more conflicts are more vulnerable to radicalization.
- In the past, the Soviet administration paid special attention to building physical and social infrastructure to enable young people to use their free time in a meaningful and productive manner. Sport clubs, interest-based clubs, "houses of culture", etc., were an important part of almost any settlement in the country. Schools engaged actively with students, offering them opportunities for learning and socializing outside class. Today, with the exception of some large cities, most of that infrastructure has collapsed or deteriorated and children are left to themselves and to the streets.
- Young people connected to criminal networks score higher on vulnerability. Belonging to a criminal group or engaging in petty criminal activity is seen as one of the easiest paths to radicalization and extremism, because it already implies violence. This is particularly common in Talas oblast, where criminal groups have more influence. Children can become radicalized not only as members, but also as victims of certain criminal activities. For example, many young people in urban locations are regularly exposed to extortion and racketeering by elder children, many of whom are connected to criminal groups. Young people who are regularly abused and beaten as a part of this money collection practice can be very vulnerable to engagement with criminal radical groups in search of social justice.
- Sadly, nearly one-third of young people believe that they should not make friends with representatives of other religions. The attitude to other faiths is quite positive, but the attitude toward people who convert from Islam to Christianity is negative.

Psychology

- The average level of life satisfaction is 68% and the average level of aggression is 22%. These figures are not seen as problematic.
- Young people who score low on life satisfaction and high on aggression are more vulnerable to radicalization.
- Many experts and stakeholders mentioned psychological complications and an unhealthy family atmosphere as causes of vulnerability. The families where informants with radical experience grew up can also be seen as somewhat dysfunctional.

Socio-Economic Conditions

- Income did not have any significant correlation with vulnerability in the survey. This might be because income is a sensitive question and not all participants answered honestly.
- More insights came from interviews and focus groups. Poverty and harsh economic conditions, where children grow up seeing the misery of such basic limitations as shortages of drinking water and of calories and vitamins for healthy physical development, make people more vulnerable.

- Over the quarter-century since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government has failed to provide employment opportunities, particularly in the more remote regions of Kyrgyzstan. Lack of employment also implies unhappiness and plenty of idle time; members of radical groups can successfully exploit both to recruit young people.

Demographics

- Location proves to be a very important factor. Generally speaking, young people in the Southern oblasts of the country are more vulnerable than young people in the North. The two most vulnerable locations are Batken oblast and Osh city. Both have very complex/problematic interethnic relations and a history of conflicts. Naryn and Issyk-Kul oblasts are two most resilient locations.
- Occupation is important only for one category—college students score high on vulnerability.
- Labor migration can contribute to radicalization in both direct and indirect ways: some young people can become more radical during their own labor migration experience in Russia (exemplified by the JA and KK case studies), while other children are affected by the absence of their parents who are labor migrants in Russia, with the lack of control, moral support, and guidance that this implies.
- Contrary to the claims of Kyrgyzstan's state security services, ethnic minorities are not more vulnerable than ethnic Kyrgyz, quite the contrary.

Looking at these factors of vulnerability and resilience to radicalization in various domains, we come to two final conclusions. First, we see that each domain produces its own unique connection to radicalization, and while some domains might be more important than others, none of these domains can be ignored. Second, while we look at all domains individually, we also see how several domains are interconnected. Thus, we cannot single out one or another domain; instead, we should see radicalization as a very complex phenomenon that is connected to many aspects of young people's lives.

Having summarized these key findings, let us turn to the main recommendations of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of our research findings, we have developed several recommendations, structured around the five main domains of young people's lives.

Justice

- In the context of widespread corruption, abuse of power, and discrimination perpetrated by the state and police, simple measures to improve the image of the state are not going to work. There is a need for serious reform of the state apparatus and police. Unless these issues are addressed, they will continue to serve as the main basis for unrest and radicalization.
- Measures to enable young people to defend their rights should be introduced to help them deal with abuses by state officials, police, security services, and representatives of other ethnic groups and religions.
- Efforts must be made to build a constructive and positive interfaith dialogue—this can be initiated by the government (e.g., by the State Committee on Religious Affairs) as well as by international organizations and civil society and religious groups/communities.

Politics

- Strengthen the existing age quota system in party politics⁹ at all levels and in state offices to make it a meaningful way of including youth in the decision-making process.
- Give more power to existing informal youth groups and movements.

Religion

- Collaboration with religious organizations, scholars, and imams is crucial to the success of the anti-radicalization campaign.
- Introduce subjects to the madrasas that will aid future imams in identifying radical narratives and help them construct legitimate counter-narratives that they can preach during their sermons and conversations with people.
- Representatives of ethnic minorities should have a stronger presence in the Muftiyat and in the Council of Scholars (*Sovet ulemov*) of Kyrgyzstan.
- The positive contribution of Islamic groups that strengthen resilience to radicalization, such as Nurjular or Tablighi Jamaat, should be acknowledged and supported.
- The situation with regard to Sulaimanchiler and Salafis must be better researched. We do not recommend banning either of these groups, but making efforts to reduce their popularity and influence.
- A special section should be developed for inclusion in the History of World Religions school course syllabus¹⁰ to help students learn how to identify radical messages in the religious materials they come across.
- A course on internet safety should be included into the school curriculum to counter the influence of radical media messaging.

Socialization

- The government must pay serious attention to creating infrastructure and opportunities for young people to spend their time meaningfully and in a way that benefits their personal development, particularly in remote areas of Kyrgyzstan.
- Special programs should be developed to reintegrate young people who were members of extremist organizations, have returned from Syria and Iraq, or served prison sentences on extremism charges. In addition, there should be a program on working with communities to better reintegrate these individuals into society.
- Policies and mechanisms are needed to prevent criminal groups connected to religion from influencing young people.

Psychology

- There is an overall stigma and taboo around seeking psychological help in Central Asia. Efforts must be made to normalize psychological help and health in the communities.

⁹ Currently, the law requires political parties to have at least 25% of their membership consist of young people (under the age of 28). Reinforcing this quotas will give more chances for young people to engage in formal politics and promote interests of the youth.

¹⁰ This is a state initiative to introduce such course into the course curriculum. A group of experts worked on developing the curriculum and textbook. The course has already been designed and it is now being piloted in several schools across the country.

- In addition to the aforementioned need to create opportunities and infrastructure for socialization to help overcome loneliness, young people should have easy access to professional psychological support. Furthermore, the children of migrants, children in single-parent households, and children who have experienced discrimination might benefit from professional help through individual or group therapy.

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Daavat—Kyrgyz version of Dawah (Arabic)—invitation to Islam; in the context of Kyrgyzstan, the term is usually associated with the Tablighi Jamaat movement

Daavatchi—Muslim who engages in *daavat* (Tablighi Jamaat) activities

Fard—obligatory duty of Muslims

Hadith—the record of the words, actions, and silent approval of the prophet Muhammad.

Halal—permissible or lawful in traditional Islamic law

Haram—forbidden; not accessible in traditional Islamic law

Hijab—Islamic veiling for women

Hizb-ut-Tahrir—an international, pan-Islamist political organization that describes its ideology as Islam and its aim as the re-establishment of the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate) or Islamic state to resume the Islamic way of life; in Kyrgyzstan, it is included on the list of extremist organizations

Iman—belief

Imam—person leading prayers in the mosque

Jamaat—religious community or congregation/ gathering

Jaysh ul-Mahdi—insurgent extremist group banned in Kyrgyzstan

Kafir—non-believer, disbeliever, adherent of a religion other than Islam

Khizmet—Islamic group, followers of Fethullah Gulen, originated in Turkey

Madrasa—a specific type of Islamic school or college

Mazkhab—Islamic school of thought

Mufti—head of Spiritual Administration of Muslims

Muftiyat—Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan

Nurjular—Islamic group, followers of Said Nursi’s teachings, originated in Turkey

Oblast—type of administrative division in Kyrgyzstan

Odnoklassniki—social network popular in the former Soviet space

Tablighi Jamaat—Islamic group, followers of Maulana Ilyas Zakariya, originated in India

The Turkestan Islamic Movement (Party)—Islamic terrorist organization founded by Uyghur jihadists in western China

Salafi—a reformist movement within Sunni Islam that advocates a return to the traditions of the first three generations of Muslims

Shukr—thankfulness, gratitude

Suleymanchiler—Islamic group, followers of Suleyman Hilmi Tunahan’s teachings, originated in Turkey

Yaqin Inkar—Islamic group that branched out from Tablighi Jamaat, banned in Kyrgyzstan

Osh TV, ELTR, Yntymak, Ayan TV, and Echo Manasa—local TV Channels

CSF—Conseil du Statut de la Femme

EPRS—Economic Policy Research Center

EU—European Union

FTI—Foundation Tolerance International

ICG—International Crisis Group

IOM—International Organization for Migration

ISIS—The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

NGO—non-governmental organization

LSG—local self-government

ONCA—Office of the National Security Advisor

RCMP NSCI—Royal Canadian Mounted Police, National Security Criminal Investigations

RIIS—Research Institution for Islamic Studies

US—United States of America

APPENDIX

Questionnaire Form

Dear participant, this questionnaire is designed to study the vulnerability of young people in Kyrgyzstan to radicalization. The questionnaire is anonymous and confidential: we are not asking you to indicate your name and we are not going to let anyone except for our research team access your answers. Your contribution will help us understand the situation with regards to youth radicalization.

SOCIALIZATION

1. **How many close friends do you have?** _____
2. **How often do you feel lonely or isolated?** 1. Often 2. Sometimes 3. Hardly ever
3. **How often do you have conflicts?** 1. Often 2. Sometimes 3. Never
4. **With whom do you have conflicts?** 1. Peers 2. Family members 3. Representatives of other ethnic groups
4. Representatives of other religions 5. Other _____
5. **On a scale from 0 to 5, define the level of influence you have from**
 - A. Parents (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
 - B. Classmates and friends (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
 - C. Teachers (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
 - D. Local imams (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
 - E. Religious friends (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
 - F. Members of criminal groups (no influence) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong influence)
6. **Do you agree with following that person's friends must be from the same religion?** 1. Agree 2. Disagree 3. Hard to answer

RELIGION

7. **With which religion do you identify?** 1. Islam 2. Christianity 3. Buddhism 4. Tengrianism 5. I am atheist 6. I am agnostic
7. Other _____
8. **If Muslim, with which particular group do you sympathize?** 1. Khizmet 2. Nurjuler 3. Sulaimanchiler
4. Tablighi Jamaat (davatchiler) 5. Salafiya 6. Other _____
9. **On a scale from 0 to 5, please evaluate your religious practices:**
 - A. Daily prayer (low) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
 - B. Attending mosque/church (low) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
 - C. Fasting during Ramadan/Easter (low) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
 - D. Attending religious classes (low) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
10. **Where do you get information about religion? (Identify the most important sources for each category)**
 - A. Books 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - B. Internet sites 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - C. Religious scholars 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - D. Local imams/priests 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - E. Family or friends 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - F. Going to *davat* 1. No 2. Yes _____
 - G. Nowhere

11. On a scale from 0 to 5, what is your attitude toward people who kill themselves and others for religious purposes?

(Negative) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)

IDENTITY

12. On a scale from 0 to 5, how strongly do you identify yourself with...?

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. | Kyrgyzstan | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B. | Your religion | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C. | Your ethnicity | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| D. | Your place of origin | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

13. On a scale from 0 to 5, mark how important the following norms are for you.

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| A. | Constitution and law | (not important) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (important) |
| B. | Ethnic traditions | (not important) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (important) |
| C. | Religious norms | (not important) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (important) |
| D. | Norms of my friends | (not important) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (important) |

14. On a scale from 0 to 5, what is your attitude toward...?:

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------|
| A. | Representatives of other ethnic groups | (negative) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (positive) |
| B. | Representatives of other religions | (negative) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (positive) |
| C. | Converts to other religions | (negative) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (positive) |

JUSTICE AND GRIEVANCES

15. Have you personally, your family members, or your relatives experienced harassment or discrimination?

1. No 2. Yes (me personally) 3. Yes (my family members) 4. Yes (my relatives)

16. If you answered Yes to the previous question, on what basis? 1. Because of my ethnicity

2. As a migrant 3. Because of poverty

4. Because of language

5. Because of religion

6. Other

17. Who was the harasser? 1. State officials 2. Police officers 3. Criminals 4. Representatives of other ethnic groups

5. Peers 6. Other _____

18. On a scale from 0 to 5, how just is our society? (unjust) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (just)

19. Do you think our government is just? 1. Yes 2. No, why?

20. On a scale of 0 to 5, how often do you feel that you want revenge against...?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| A. | Government | (never) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (often) |
| B. | Society in general | (never) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (often) |
| C. | Peers | (never) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (often) |
| D. | Representatives of other ethnic groups | (never) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (often) |
| E. | Others _____ | (never) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (often) |

21. On a scale from 0 to 5, how fairly do you think religious people are treated...?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| A. | In Kyrgyzstan | (not fairly) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (fairly) |
| B. | In neighboring Central Asian countries | (not fairly) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (fairly) |
| C. | In Russia | (not fairly) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (fairly) |
| D. | In the Middle East | (not fairly) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (fairly) |

22. On a scale from 0 to 5, how justifiable is violence...?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| A. | In everyday life | (never justifiable) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (justifiable) |
| B. | For the purposes of revenge | (never justifiable) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (justifiable) |

- C. For political purposes (never justifiable) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (justifiable)
D. For religious purposes (never justifiable) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (justifiable)

POLITICS

23. On a scale from 0 to 5, please define your interest in politics (not interested) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly interested)
24. Do you participate in elections? 1. Always 2. Sometimes 3. Never
25. If a candidate in elections holds strong religious views, would it make you more likely to support his/her candidature?
1. Yes 2. Maybe 3. No 4. Hard to answer
26. What is your attitude toward the current political system in Kyrgyzstan? 1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative 4. Hard to answer
27. How high, in your opinion, is the level of corruption in Kyrgyzstan? 1. High 2. Moderate 3. Low
28. Is there a need for change in the political system of Kyrgyzstan? 1. No 2. Yes (a. Completely b. Partially c. Hard to answer)
29. Should Kyrgyzstan remain a secular state? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Hard to answer
30. Do you support the idea of Kyrgyzstan as an Islamic state governed by sharia law? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Hard to answer
31. On a scale from 0 to 5, how much do you trust the following organizations?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| A. State officials | (Low trust) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (High trust) |
| B. Religious leaders | (Low trust) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (High trust) |
| C. International NGOs | (Low trust) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (High trust) |
| D. Mass media | (Low trust) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (High trust) |
32. On a scale from 0 to 5, how problematic are the following issues for young people in Kyrgyzstan?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|
| 1. Finding jobs | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 2. Corruption | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 3. Low morals in society | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 4. Crime rates and safety | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 5. Interethnic relations | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 6. High cost of living | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 7. Migration | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 8. Quality of education | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 9. Quality of medical care | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
| 10. Shortage of opportunities | (Not problematic) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Highly problematic) |
33. On a scale from 0 to 10, how do you rate the impact of the following governments' policies on religious communities in Kyrgyzstan?
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|------------|
| 1. Russia | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 2. China | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 3. United States | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 4. European Union | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 5. Saudi Arabia | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 6. Turkey | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 7. Iran | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
| 8. Other _____ | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
34. On a scale from 0 to 10, how do you rate the following governments' foreign policies toward conflicts in the Middle East?
- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|------------|
| 1. Russia | (Negative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (Positive) |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|------------|

2. China (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
3. United States (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
4. European Union (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
5. Saudi Arabia (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
6. Turkey (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
7. Iran (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
8. Israel (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
9. Other _____ (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)

35. On a scale from 0 to 10, how do you rate the following governments' protection of religious rights for Muslims living in these countries?

1. Russia (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
2. China (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
3. United States (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
4. European Union (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
5. Saudi Arabia (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
6. Turkey (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)
7. Other _____ (Negative) 1 2 3 4 5 (Positive)

36. Do you believe that United States and other Western countries are trying to take over the Muslim world?

1. Yes 2. Maybe 3. No 4. I have no opinion on this

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITION

37. Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Questionnaire – Short Form (Q-LES-Q-SF)

Taking everything into consideration, during the past week how satisfied have you been with your.....

.....work/study?	1	2	3	4	5
.....household activities?	1	2	3	4	5
.....social relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
.....family relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
.....leisure time activities?	1	2	3	4	5
.....ability to function in daily life?	1	2	3	4	5
.....economic status?	1	2	3	4	5
.....living/housing situation?*	1	2	3	4	5
.....ability to get around physically without feeling dizzy or unsteady or falling?*	1	2	3	4	5
.....your vision in terms of ability to do work or hobbies?*	1	2	3	4	5
.....overall sense of wellbeing?	1	2	3	4	5
.....medication? (If not taking any, check here ____ and leave item blank).	1	2	3	4	5
.....How would you rate your overall life satisfaction and contentment during the past week?	1	2	3	4	5

38. Beck's Youth Anger Test

Here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think or feel. Read each sentence carefully, and circle the one word (Never, Sometimes, Often or Always) that best describes you. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS.

I think people try to cheat me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel like screaming.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think people are unfair to me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think people try to hurt me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think my life is unfair.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
People bully me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
People make me mad.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think people bother me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I get mad at other people.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
When I get mad, I stay mad.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
When I get mad, I have trouble getting over it.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think people try to control me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel people try to put me down.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel mean.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel like exploding.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think people are against me.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I get angry.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

39. **Gender** 1. Female 2. Male

40. **Age** _____

41. **Ethnicity** _____

42. **Marital status** 1. Married 2. Single, never married 3. Divorced

43. **Work/study status** 1. High-school student – grade _____ 2. Medrese student – year _____

3. College student – year _____ 4. Work as _____ 5. Unemployed

44. **Number of people in the family** (siblings, parents, grandparents living together) _____

45. **Average monthly income for family** _____

46. **Do you have family members who are labor migrants?** 1. No 2. Yes, please list _____

Where do they work? 1. Russia 2. Kazakhstan 3. Other _____

47. **Have you ever been a labor migrant yourself?**

1. No 2. Yes, where? 1. Russia 2. Kazakhstan 3. Other _____