WILL NEW WAVES OF RADICALIZATION IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS BE PREVENTED?

Radicalization and Countering Violent Extremism in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan
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by Dr. Ekaterina Sokirianskaia

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About Conflict Analysis and Prevention Centre

The Conflict Analysis and Prevention Centre (CAPC) is a new think-and-do tank established by Dr. Ekaterina Sokirianskaia at the end of 2017. CAPC’s mission is to provide nuanced and accurate field-based analysis of violent conflicts in Russia and the post-Soviet space; propose tailored conflict resolution strategies, policies, and tools; implement interventions that will minimise the likelihood of deadly violence; and facilitate conflict resolution and mitigation. We engage in raising early warning awareness, advocate for the rule of law, and support violent extremism prevention and post-conflict reconciliation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armed conflict in the North Caucasus, which has seen ebbs and flows of violence since the mid-90s, has now significantly quieted. The armed insurgency first emerged as the militant wing of a post-Soviet separatist movement in Chechnya, it gradually transformed into a regional jihadist project that was consolidated by Imarat Kavkaz (IK) in 2007, and in June 2015 experienced its third reincarnation. In the third wave, the remaining militant groups overwhelmingly swore allegiance to the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Levent (ISIL or ISIS)¹ and by 2016, roughly 3,000 radicals from the region joined jihadists in Syria and Iraq, precipitating a steady decrease in the number of victims and violent incidents in the North Caucasus. However, most experts and community leaders in the North Caucasus share concerns that the reprieve in violence could only be temporary. The risk of re-escalation is real, therefore the Russian federal and regional authorities should increase the effectiveness of their efforts that are aimed at preventing new waves of radicalization into jihadist violence.

Effective prevention should adequately address the drivers, triggers and processes of radicalization. In the North Caucasus, radicalization factors include individual socio-psychological problems – including war traumas, which are especially prevalent in Chechnya – dysfunctional relations in the family or with peers, extended periods of stress, a quest for significance, and a desire to exact revenge. Some individuals joined non-ISIS jihadist groups out of compassion towards the Syrian civilians who were suffering a horrendous humanitarian disaster, or in response to misguided feelings of religious obligation. ISIS has been exceptionally successful at manipulating feelings as different as anger, the desire to exact revenge, compassion, a fear of God, and the allure of romance.

Group dynamics have also played a crucial role in radicalization. In the North Caucasus, peer groups, family members, neighborhood friends, as well as detention and prison inmates are the most common networks through which people become exposed to violent ideologies. Finally, the North Caucasus insurgency has been feeding on the numerous macro-social problems that plague the region. Unresolved ethnic conflicts, an acute deficit of democratic procedure and accountability, bad governance, and the prevalence of systematic and grave human rights violations have been highly conducive to radicalization. The federal and regional governments must address these factors in order for prevention work in the North Caucasus to be successful.

Countering violent extremism (CVE) policies in the North Caucasus share many common traits, but also have strong regional specificities. Counter-narratives are central to ideological prevention efforts in all of the republics and are promoted during face-to-face meetings, in the local media, on the Internet, and in leaflets and brochures. As an alternative engagement, regional authorities have placed much emphasis on the development of a social volunteer movement and have been promoting various patriotic engagements. They organize regional and republican youth fora and distribute small grants to support state-sanctioned youth activism.

¹ Both Imarat Kavkaz and ISIS are recognized as terrorist organizations in Russia
The largest scale of preventive work has unfolded in Chechnya; however, it is highly politicized, very direct, and is largely criticized for being uncreative, and sometimes threatening. Much emphasis is placed on praising Ramzan Kadyrov and on trying to deter and control the youth.

Official counter-narratives are much softer, more nuanced, and less politicized in the other republics. Dagestan’s Ministry for Youth Policy has developed the training course called “Peaceful Dagestan” which travels around Dagestan’s towns and villages and reaches thousands of people annually. The authorities often promote counter-narratives in cooperation with republican patriotic organizations, military-patriotic clubs, and the “search movement”, which invites young people to join expeditions to excavate the relics of the Second World War.

The intensity of the ideological work is lower in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, which is probably due to the lower intensity of conflict there. In 2018, Ingushetia’s Committee for Youth implemented a training program called “DISlike Extremism” and held weekly capacity building trainings that helped young people apply for various federal youth fora and grants. This initiative has allowed Ingushetia to receive the largest amount of grants during the 2018 Mashuk forum. Several critical imams, including moderate Salafis, can speak in Ingushetia’s mosques and thereby produce counter-narratives from their ideological positions that are much more convincing for the radicalizing youth.

Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR) is the only republic, which has created a ministerial position for extremism prevention. Although the methods for CVE in KBR are, as elsewhere, often similar to the Soviet-type didactic meetings held at schools, universities, and in municipalities, some of its CVE officials have reportedly started recognizing the limitations of direct and confrontational counter-narratives and are now trying to engage indirectly and offer alternatives, for example, via sporting events.

Overall, the extensive CVE efforts in the region have led to the successful internalization by the youth that militant jihadism is strongly condemned by the society and state, and is strictly punishable by law. In recent years, the CVE community in the region has become quite vibrant, enjoying solid financial support from the state.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. The authorities primarily trust pro-government, patriotic organizations and the traditional clergy affiliated with the Spiritual Boards as their CVE actors; however, these messengers miss a large portion of the youth who do not find them credible. In most of the republics, the CVE practitioners avoid discussing difficult socio-political problems, religious issues, and the war in Syria – sometimes because they lack sophisticated arguments, other times because they are fearful of the security services’ reactions.

CAPC respondents have noted that the majority of CVE efforts are still extremely formal, tedious, and low quality enterprises. Creative and fresh approaches are usually generated by independent NGOs or when CVE work is implemented by enthusiasts or committed officials. The personalized nature of this success and the lack of sustainable platforms to share experience often prevent the
institutionalization of best practices. Fatigue with the subject is another challenge: there has been so much ideological CVE work already that the youth is tired of even some of the more creative programs and methodologies.

Broad counter-narratives and too much counter-propaganda may also have adverse effects, as they make the problem of radicalization appear bigger than it actually is and unintentionally promote the heroic perception of terrorist groups with some individuals. Most importantly, the root causes and factors conducive to radicalization are many and diverse, while the appeal of jihadist propaganda is varied and complex. Counter-narratives presuppose a simple causal relationship between ideology and violent actions and do not address numerous other individual, social and political factors, which must be addressed in order for the threat of radicalism to be minimized in the region.

Since political and social development processes are challenging and take time, the governments, education systems and civil society should look for ways to create a personally fulfilling environment for young people, which can partly compensate for the negative impact of structural problems. Supportive families, exciting activities aimed at genuine self-realization, timely management of psychological problems, quality relations with peers, opportunities for adventure, and a sense of purpose are important boons for prevention purposes.

Along with ideological work, CVE measures in the North Caucasus are aimed at controlling radical individuals. Historically, “at risk groups” in the region have been defined very broadly and at certain points included potentially all Salafi believers. In Chechnya, Salafism is banned and security servicemen systematically detain people with visible symbols of Salafi adherence, and subsequently often mistreat them.

In Dagestan the authorities have closed most of the Salafi mosques and in 2016 the republican Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced the so-called profuchet (preventive register) of religious extremists, which at its peak had over 16,000 people reportedly listed. Being on profuchet entails regular detentions, forced appearances at police stations, and de facto restrictions for any state-funded employment. In March 2017, the Minister of the Interior of Dagestan stated that the profuchet was no longer in practice; however, local lawyers say that it still exists informally.

Soft-power approaches have also been tested in Dagestan (2010–2012), and Ingushetia (since 2008), which liberalized the state’s attitude towards Salafi communities and launched efforts at increased dialogue with them. The results were generally positive and should be carefully and independently evaluated and considered for other republics.

In addition to fundamentalists, security services identify the widows and wives of killed or sentenced jihadists as another high risk group. Currently, Chechnya and Dagestan are facing the challenge of reintegrating the women and children brought back from ISIS. Thus far the returned widows and children do not undergo systematic re-integration or de-radicalization programs, and are treated differently by the governments of each of the North Caucasus republics.
In Chechnya, the widows and wives of Imarat Kavkaz fighters often lose their jobs, social payments, and are frequently subject to security services pressure while surprisingly, the returnees from ISIS are treated with the most leniency. In Dagestan, widow-returnees from ISIS receive criminal sentences, while wives and widows of IK fighters are put on profuchet; in contrast to the stern response of the security services, some municipalities are trying to provide ad hoc social support. In Kabardino-Balkarya and Ingushetia, the widows and wives of insurgents are usually not harassed and their children are monitored with caution. Ingushetia is the only republic that has announced its priority to address the vulnerabilities of affected women and children. It created two special councils aimed to coordinate work with the families in early 2017, which, however, have not yet turned into functioning institutions and seem to exist only on paper. Constructive engagement with the widows and children of former insurgents is a welcome development and requires vigorous methodological support and commitment of resources. Returnees from ISIS should be treated with particular attention due to the severity of their traumas, higher degree of initial radicalization, and subsequent indoctrination while in the Middle East.

Most importantly, CVE cannot replace conflict resolution. The federal and regional governments should systematically address the numerous grievances that are fueling the conflict; otherwise, preventive work will only bring cosmetic changes, and subsequent waves of radicalization into violent insurgency will be difficult to prevent.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To the government of the Russian Federation
To the governments of the North Caucasus republics

To address the factors leading to radicalization into violent extremism

1. Systematically address the individual factors of radicalization by:

   (a) Improving the government-supported services of psychological counselling;

   (b) Building the capacity of secondary school psychologists to work with trauma and to spot the processes leading to violent radicalization;

   (c) Providing family counseling and conflict resolution services; organizing interactive CVE training courses for parents of teenagers; and supporting NGOs that are working to meet these goals.

2. Invest more into research of the group dynamics of recruitment; organize trainings/capacity building seminars that are aimed at recognizing the signs of and preventing peer group radicalization for teachers, extra-curricular educators, sports trainers and community leaders.

3. Systematically address macro-social factors conducive to radicalization by:

   (a) Investigating allegations of grave human rights violations like torture, summary executions, illegal detentions, falsification of evidence in criminal cases, abductions and enforced disappearances; holding the perpetrators accountable with a strict adherence to the law; introducing measures to prevent such violations from happening in the future; increasing the political independence of courts; and ensuring the security and safety of critical civil society organizations across the region to conduct operations, including in Chechnya;

   (b) Rooting out corruption and criminal elements in power across the region; investigating and curbing the practices of illegal extortions/exaction from state employees and businesses in Chechnya; investing systematic effort in improving the quality of governance and of social services;

   (c) Continuing to address the issues of youth unemployment and low upward mobility by creating merit-based social lifts and supporting youth business, start-ups and social entrepreneurship;

   (d) Re-establishing competitive and free elections to increase the accountability of the elites to their constituencies and other democratic procedures;
(e) Ensuring that state schools and other state institutions remain secular, while at the same time respecting freedom of consciousness;

(f) Improving radically the quality of the political regime in Chechnya by guaranteeing enforcement of the Russian law and freedom of expression, and discouraging a personality cult of Ramzan Kadyrov.

To government officials and practitioners engaged in CVE efforts

To improve the quality of educational efforts aimed at countering the ideology of violent extremism and terrorism

4. Improve the quality of counter-narratives by making them creative and youth-friendly, and by promoting critical thinking; fine-tuning the messages, tailoring them to target groups based on gender and age; and avoiding massive counter-narrative engagement with the aim of influencing only a few individuals.

5. Consider supplementing/replacing counter-narratives with alternative narratives and engagements, and increase their sustainability by increasing the regularity of efforts.

6. Involve credible messengers from among respected public figures, educators, activists, sportsmen, and youth and religious leaders that are trusted by local communities; try to engage celebrities and figures popular with the youth in CVE focused events/discussions in local media.

7. Experiment with new formats, involving more youth-friendly tools such as YouTube, social media, pop-music, cartoons, photography, documentaries, reality-shows, soap-operas and peer-to-peer trainings, among other options.

8. Allow and facilitate authentic and honest debate on difficult issues, including the push and pull factors of radicalization and the armed conflicts in the Middle East.

9. Create a multi-disciplinary group of scholars, practitioners, religious and youth leaders, and bloggers to develop sophisticated and nuanced CVE approaches and alternative narratives that challenge violent extremist ideologies.

To promote alternative engagements

10. Create new opportunities for self-realization for the youth outside the government-controlled military-patriotic format; this can include fashionable (possibly rare, manageably “risky” and especially team) sports, as well as the facilitation of other modern and trendy activities; create more opportunities for girls and women to participate in self-realization activities.
11. Continue supporting volunteer work, including organizing humanitarian aid for people in Syria and other conflict areas; encourage and ensure freedom of other non-violent political and social engagements; and protect and support independent youth NGOs

To increase methodological sophistication of CVE efforts

12. Change CVE work reporting criteria to shift the main focus to the quality, not quantity, of the prevention work; develop relevant tools to better evaluate impact, including collecting feedback of CVE beneficiaries and involving independent external evaluators.

13. Develop effective incentives (including financial bonuses, motivation awards, career growth, etc.) to increase the motivation of CVE practitioners and encourage creativity in the state institutions.

14. Create more opportunities to engage former disillusioned radicals in CVE work.

15. Improve tools aimed at measuring the degree of an individual’s radicalization by analyzing and testing the best Russian and international approaches and experience on this issue.

16. Create sustainable platforms for regional practitioners to exchange the best methodologies and practices in CVE.

To prevent the unintended radicalization of “at risk” groups

17. Stop targeting law-abiding, fundamentalist Muslims by carrying out unmotivated pre-emptive detentions, including in secret detention facilities, and restricting their movements; ensure that profuchet of religious extremists that was officially abolished in Dagestan ceases to exist in practice, and any monitoring of individuals identified as potentially dangerous does not violate their basic human rights.

18. Halt the exertion of pressure on and closure of Salafi mosques, unless so determined by a court decision based on credible evidence and a fair judicial process.

19. Stop the harassment/illegal prosecution of law-abiding Salafi imams; instead, consider cooperating with those who openly oppose jihadist ideology and ISIS.

20. Avoid combating religious extremism by enforcing traditional Islam; abstain from instrumentalizing clergy for political purposes as this discredits them as credible CVE messengers.

21. Ensure that the rights of under-aged children are fully protected during any preventive work and their special needs are taken care of.
To support the reintegration of ex-fighters and their family members

22. Create conditions for systematic support in reintegration and psycho-social rehabilitation for ex-fighters and their family members.

23. Halt all punitive actions targeting the family members of active, killed and sentenced fighters in Chechnya, including burning homes, expulsions from villages, illegal detentions and physical violence; end the deprivation of pensions and employment restrictions for wives and widows of killed or sentenced jihadists in Chechnya, and prevent their stigmatization.

24. Constructively engage with families of radicalized individuals, aim to make them partners of the State in the process of preventing violent radicalization and facilitating exits from armed groups; and work to increase their trust in law-enforcement agencies.

25. Consider creating radicalization awareness/psycho-social rehabilitation centers to support individuals who exited from terrorist groups, as well as their family-members.

26. Consider setting up a multi-disciplinary group of experts and practitioners to design deradicalization and reintegration programs for widows and children of killed/sentenced fighters, especially those returning from ISIS.

To the funders supporting civil society projects in the North Caucasus

27. Support regional NGOs working on creative and innovative approaches to CVE.

28. Support projects aimed at facilitating debate, innovation, critical thinking and modern extra-curricular development for the North Caucasus youth.

29. Support training and capacity building for regional trauma psychologists and family counseling services.
I. INTRODUCTION

For nearly three decades now, since the collapse of the USSR, the North Caucasus has been riven by instability and armed conflict. The conflict has taken different forms and has passed through various degrees of intensity including two full-blown wars between the federal military and separatists in Chechnya, and then protracted armed struggle between regional Islamist insurgency and the security services during which Islamist fighters have systematically targeted law-enforcement, government officials, imams and civilians; while security services have combatted the insurgency with extremely heavy-handed methods, gravely violating human rights, which has largely contributed to the perpetuation of conflict.

The conflict dynamics have been shaped by a set of common factors across the region, but there is significant variation between the republics depending on local grievances and differing republican counter-insurgency policies. For years the highly resilient insurgency has been feeding on radical ideologies and some material support from abroad, but has primarily been sustained by domestic push factors: memories of the two brutal wars in Chechnya, heavy-handed counter-insurgency practices across the region, unresolved intra-confessional and ethnic conflicts, political repression, low quality of governance, and a lack of democratic procedures. The recent massive outflow of Russian jihadists to Syria and Iraq, predominantly from the North Caucasus, can be seen as a new phase of this protracted and unresolved conflict.

According to the Interior Ministry, 3,417 Russian citizens fought in ISIS as of March 2016, with hundreds of others fighting for non-ISIS groups, and were among the largest contingents of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. In August 2018, the Ministry of Defense reported that 4,500 fighters from Russia and the CIS countries had been eliminated during its military operations in Syria.

The decline and military defeat of the North Caucasus insurgency, mass outflow of radicals to the Middle East and the subsequent territorial elimination of ISIS in Syria and Iraq have significantly improved the security situation in the North Caucasus. In 2017, 175 people became victims of clashes (134 killed and 41 injured), while in 2018, 110 were either killed (83) and injured (27) as a result of armed conflict – a significant improvement from several years ago. By comparison, in 2011, 1,378 people were victims of conflict (750 people killed and 628 injured).
Local experts interviewed for this report understand that the reprieve could only be temporary, as most of the factors that have traditionally fed the armed conflict in the North Caucasus have not been addressed. As such, many emphasized the need to correct the underlying grievances and increase the effectiveness of prevention efforts in order to achieve durable stability.

In this context, both the Russian federal and regional authorities pay significant attention to reinforcing efforts aimed at preventing violent extremism; while law-enforcement agencies continue to implement the controlling and repressive functions with hard-power methods. In recent years, the Russian government has demonstrated an interest in and commitment to supplementing the traditional approaches of counter-terrorism with prevention programs, which typically include soft-power measures.

At the federal level, a complex bureaucratized system of ideological prevention has been developed that involves various institutions and levels of government. Country-wide efforts are coordinated by the National Anti-terrorism Committee (NAC), chaired by director of the FSB, which implements its policies through regional anti-terrorism commissions (ATC) which are overseen by regional heads.

The Russian term used to describe the efforts associated with the prevention of radicalization is prophylaktika (prevention). It stipulates measures, which are designed to prevent youth, or other vulnerable groups and communities, from becoming radicalized into violence by creating and increasing resilience to the ideology of terrorism and extremism. Another term frequently used in such programs is protivodejstviye (countering) of the above-mentioned ideologies. Both of these terms stand for what is internationally usually referred to as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).

The republican governments and local activists are developing programs and preventive projects in the framework of the federally defined priorities. The range of potential CVE policies and measures can be virtually unlimited, depending on local context, culture, and norms, as well as the creativity, political will and capacity of the implementing actors. In the North Caucasus the scope of the efforts is truly impressive, involving various formats and types of engagement. However, the problem of insufficient methodology and limited capacities of many of the local CVE practitioners have been identified by most of CAPC interlocutors involved in these activities; a desire and need to learn from international experience is also widely articulated. “We have hit a wall. There are certain tools that already exist in the world, all while we are trying to invent a bicycle,” a former security official working on these issues told us.

This report will analyze the drivers of radicalization that are characteristic of the current phase of the North Caucasus conflict. It will discuss the approaches to and practices of CVE in the four republics that have been the most affected by the insurgency in the near past – Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia.
and Kabardino-Balkariya – and should identify the needs that must be addressed in order to make prevention more efficient. This policy paper is the Conflict Analysis and Prevention Center’s first backgrounder report on the issue of violent radicalization and its prevention in the North Caucasus and is intended to launch CAPC’s work on CVE in the region. It is also the first policy report on mapping CVE practices in the North Caucasus region that we are aware of. Due to limitations of space and time we do not intend to be fully comprehensive or answer all of the main questions concerning the CVE portfolio; instead, we hope to start a more informed public discussion on the issue and give impetus to further research. This paper’s recommendations suggest the main avenues for change; sometimes their implementation may require more detailed analysis and technical or methodological elaboration. CAPC upcoming manuals, reports and methodological outputs will aim to further develop the themes identified in this backgrounder. The report is intended for regional CVE practitioners, educators, policy-makers, as well as the Russian federal officials responsible for CVE and agencies financially supporting the CVE efforts.

Fieldwork for this report has been carried out by its author in Moscow, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, and Istanbul. Additional interviews have been done by Skype, telephone and e-mail.
II. NEW PHASE OF THE OLD CONFLICT

Ideologically the North Caucasus conflict has undergone three main phases of transformation. It started as a mass nationalist movement in Chechnya that emerged in response to glasnost and perestroika in the late 1980s. When the Russian troops entered Chechnya on 11 December 1994, part of this movement took up arms and transformed into a secular nationalist separatist militancy. By the end of the first Chechen war (1994–1996), in which the Chechen separatists were victorious, the insurgency had significantly Islamized as a natural reaction to what became the “banality” of death, a greater general trend of Islamization across the region, and due to the influence of several dozen foreign fighters who travelled to the region to proselytize their ideology, transfer their combat skills, and channel financial support to jihad.

Between the wars (1996–1999), many of the Chechen combatant groups did not demobilize, but instead became engaged in internal political competition, the shadow economy, and criminal activities. The state institutions of the de facto independent republic were gradually collapsing, while some of the combatant groups increasingly demanded sharia. Perhaps the most prominent foreign fighter at the time was a Saudi citizen named Khattab, who together with the Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, ran a training camp that indoctrinated thousands and taught primary warfare skills to hundreds of young men from Chechnya and other neighboring North Caucasus republics. After the training, these men went back to their respective republics, with some of them subsequently forming the nucleus of local militant groups that aimed to support “Chechen brothers” in their fight against Russia.

The second Chechen war started after the incursion of Islamist fighters, led by Shamil Basayev, into Dagestan in August–September 1999. This war was significantly more brutal than the first, with the radical wing of the Chechen insurgency actively resorting to terrorism and the Russian federal forces committing the indiscriminate bombing of Chechen cities and villages, including hospitals, markets and schools, to large-scale abductions, enforced disappearances, torture in illegal detention facilities, and summary executions. By 2001, the federal troops established control over most of the Chechen territories and in 2003 they launched a political process that included a referendum on the Constitution of the Chechen Republic and installed, via election-by appointment, pro-Russian Chechen institutions, including a government led by the former separatist Mufti, Akhmad Kadyrov. All these events took place under conditions of continuing armed conflict, intimidation and fear.

Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in a bomb explosion in May 2004 and was soon succeeded by his son, the then

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30-year-old Ramzan, who with support of the Kremlin has since turned Chechnya into a state within the Russian state. He has created a totalitarian enclave in Chechnya with a strong personality cult behind its leader, and where the Russian laws and Constitution apply in a very limited fashion.\(^\text{12}\)

In 2002, the conflict began spilling over the Chechen borders due to outflows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and as a reaction to the security operations across the region. The insurgency gradually changed its scope and focus from a local Chechen struggle to a Caucasus-wide cause. In June 2004 there was a major raid on fighters in Ingushetia when for a few hours they took three cities under their control; in October 2005, part of the Salafi community in Kabardino-Balkariya took up arms and attacked the republican capital of Nalchik.\(^\text{13}\) In 2006–2008, Ingushetia was riven by a full-blown guerilla conflict; and by 2009 Dagestan became the epicenter of conflict-related violence and the main exporter of suicide-bombers to Russia.\(^\text{14}\) In 2007, the Chechen insurgency officially transformed into the regional militant jihadi project of Imarat Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate, IK), which aimed to appeal to all North Caucasian Muslims and fought to oust Russia from the Caucasus and create an independent sharia-based state in the region. The IK consisted of five vilayats (provinces), reflecting regional and national administrative divisions, each of which had its own commander, a military emir.\(^\text{15}\)

Although IK tried to replicate a state structure, its supporters perceived it as a guerilla organization with no potential to engage in real state-building. Given the asymmetry of the conflict, Russian security forces left no doubt as to the impossibility of a successful separatist project in the North Caucasus; thus the IK members treated their struggle as a suicidal enterprise. IK’s hopeless position and narrow regional focus accounted for its failure to mobilize support among radical Russian Muslims beyond the North Caucasus, which ISIS, in contrast, was able to do very skillfully. These are in short the main reasons why IK eventually lost the ideological battle to ISIS early on in the latter’s formation.

The third stage of the transformation from a regional cause to a global one came to effect in June 2015. The process was gradual and took nearly one year from the time the first allegiance (bayat) to ISIS was sworn by Suleiman Zainulabidov, the leader of a local IK group in northern Dagestan, in November 2014.\(^\text{16}\) IK was pushed to respond to ISIS’ global appeal and felt a need to create the illusion of a strong global backer, thus its previously loose association with Al-Qaeda (AQ)\(^\text{17}\) became more emphasized. However, ISIS was more successful in “outbidding” both IK and AQ, with IK fi-
nally losing its ideological battle in June 2015 when most of the regional insurgent groups swore loyalty to ISIS’ leader al-Baghdadi.\(^\text{18}\) ISIS announced the creation of its “province”, Vilayat Kavkaz, and declared Dagestani fighter, Rustam Asilderov, as its emir. Asilderov however, never aspired to or was capable of creating a new insurgent structure; he was killed by security servicemen in 2016 and was never officially replaced.

After rebranding, the regional insurgency continued to decline, with many of its experienced military leaders and ideologues killed and their insurgency groups subsequently dissolved. This decline was to a significant extent related to a drained recruitment base as a result of the mass exodus of North Caucasus radicals to Syria and Iraq. This exodus was facilitated by the security services that, months ahead of the Sochi Olympics in the winter of 2014, carried out a large-scale crackdown on non-violent Salafi communities and often “closed their eyes” to the mass departures of radicals to Syria and Iraq.\(^\text{19}\)

At the same time, the security services effectively crushed IK, killing hundreds of fighters, disrupting their communications and logistics, and achieving such a level of infiltration that the remaining groups became paralyzed by distrust and paranoia. Under the conditions of complete military defeat, IK lost its capacity to compete with the rising star that was ISIS. Beginning in 2015, the security services invested visible efforts in preventing the further outflow of fighters to Syria and Iraq.

ISIS-affiliated jihadists have changed the modus operandi in the region: instead of a formally hierarchical system of loosely connected regional groups, it worked through small, deeply concealed “sleeper cells” comprised of individual recruits. When ISIS was still in control of the territories in the Middle East, its Vilayat Kavkaz members were often commanded from outside the territory. The North Caucasian jihadists in ISIS were surprisingly successful at establishing connections with susceptible individuals back home, radicalizing and directing them towards terrorist acts and attacks on security servicemen.

Since ISIS has been all but defeated in the Middle East, ISIS-based recruiters have begun to play a negligible role.

ISIS has officially claimed responsibility for seven attacks in Russia in 2018, at least 27 attacks in total since 2015. In some cases there are doubts regarding the credibility of ISIS’ affiliation with the claimed attack, however, the majority of instances in which they have assumed responsibility are convincing. In addition, ISIS claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian passenger plane that was flying from Egypt on 31 October 2015, killing all 224 passengers and crew. While most of the attacks occurred in the North Caucasus, ISIS also claimed responsibility for acts of terror in the Moscow and Astrakhan oblasts, as well as in St. Petersburg, Surgut, and Nizhny Novgorod. In addition to

\(^\text{18}\) Caucasus Emirate and ISIS are recognized as terrorist organizations and banned in the Russian Federation, the UN, and US.

ISIS, the April 2017 metro bombing in St Petersburg, which killed 11 and injured dozens more, was claimed by an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group.\(^{20}\)

In 2015–2018, the sporadic attacks in the North Caucasus continued and the ISIS-inspired insurgents became visibly younger.\(^{21}\) According to Novaya Gazeta, after the December 2016/January 2017 attacks in Chechnya, many young suspects under the age of 18 were illegally detained.\(^{22}\) In August 2018, after a series of attacks by teenagers aged 11–17, between 150 and 200 teenagers were reportedly apprehended.\(^{23}\) In addition, the family members of the killed teenage attackers were expelled from Chechnya, according to Caucasus Knot.\(^{24}\) At this time, Ramzan Kadyrov ordered the security services to establish comprehensive control over all Chechen schoolchildren and students.\(^{25}\) A combination of harsh governmental measures and effective ideological indoctrination by ultra-radical groups contributes to the emergence of a new post-war generation of very young Chechen jihadists.

Even more attacks across Russia have reportedly been prevented. According to the Federal Security Service Chief, Alexander Bortnikov, in 2017: 61 terrorism-related crimes were prevented, including 18 major terrorist acts; 56 sleeper cells were discovered; over 1,000 fighters were arrested; and 78 terrorists were killed.\(^{26}\) In November 2018, Bortnikov announced that 70 international terrorist cells, including 38 affiliated with ISIS had been disclosed by security services in 24 regions since the beginning of the year; in addition, 777 active members and accomplices of international terrorist groups have been detained, including 36 leaders.\(^{27}\) Experts claim that these figures can be inflated, however, the problem of radicalization into armed insurgency clearly remains a challenge for Russia.\(^{28}\)

\(^{20}\) “Ответственность за теракт в метро взяла связанныя с ‘Аль-Каидой’ группа” (“Responsibility for the terrorist attack on the subway took associated with Al-Qaeda group”), RBC, 25 April 2017.


\(^{22}\) On 17-18 December 2016 sporadic clashes occurred in Grozny and its suburbs. 7 attackers were killed, 4 were detained; 3 law enforcement officers were killed and one was injured. On 10-12 January, the security services carried out an operation against an ISIS-affiliated armed group in the Kurchaloy district. 4 insurgents and two National Guard fighters were killed, 4 suspects were arrested. Later in January, ISIS inspired insurgents attacked police in the town of Shali. “Местные жители заявили о задержании родственников убитых в Шали” (“Local resident reports on detention of relatives of those killed in Shali”), Caucasus Knot, 30 January 2017. “Война детей” (“War of Children”), Novaya Gazeta, 13 March 2017.

\(^{23}\) “Жители Чечни рассказали о новой волне задержаний подростков” (“Residents of Chechnya told of a new wave of the detentions of teenagers”), Caucasus Knot, 27 August 2018.

\(^{24}\) “Из Чечни изгнаны семьи подростков, устроивших нападения на силовиков” (“Families of teenagers who organized attacks on security forces expelled from Chechnya”), Regnum News Agency, 5 September 2018;

\(^{25}\) “Указание Кадырова о контроле над учащимися обеспокоило жителей Чечни” (“Kadyrov’s instruction to control students worried residents of Chechnya”), Caucasus Knot, 30 August 2018.

\(^{26}\) 27 “КТО здесь: террористов задержали в Подмосковье” (“CTO here: terrorists detained in the suburbs of Moscow”), Gazeta, 12 December, 2017.

\(^{27}\) “В России выявили 70 ячеек международных террористических организаций” (“70 international terrorist cells discovered in Russia”), RIA, 7 November 2018.

\(^{28}\) “’Халифат’ остаётся в России” (“’Caliphate’ remains in Russia”), News.ru, 7 November 2018. “Уполномочены промолчать” (“Authorized to keep silent”), Novaya Gazeta, 27 April 2018.
III. DRIVERS TO RADICALIZATION

The literature on radicalization into violence has not established clear conceptual frameworks, and the very notion of radicalization is highly contested by academics for its imprecision and conceptual ambiguity. Many experts argue that radicalization per se, is not necessarily a violent, criminal or even an undesirable phenomenon. A lot of progressive social change in history has been driven by radicals with various political positions. Moreover, most of the people with radical views never actually resort to violence.29 Keeping this limitation in mind, we will nonetheless speak of “radicalization” throughout the report for a lack of a better term. We will treat radicalization as a complex, non-linear process of cognitive evolution towards certain beliefs, and in some cases behavior, that accept violence as a legitimate means of social change.30

There is an emerging consensus that there is no one pathway to violent radicalization, nor is there one profile for who is vulnerable; rather, there are a myriad of factors that must come together in quite unpredictable ways.

The best example of this is ISIS, whose foreign fighters came from different social, educational and ethnic environments; they originated from over 80 countries, including affluent democratic Western societies. The only common demographic trait of ISIS radicalization is the disproportionate participation of the youth and males, which is typical of most terrorist organizations.31 ISIS has been the most skillful group in recent memory to play on a myriad of emotions, offering age, gender, and ethnic specific agenda, manipulating the vulnerabilities and grievances of individuals. A lot of ISIS’ appeal was due in part to the marketing of its “success story”, i.e. its claimed ability to create a true Islamic alternative, a real state ruled by sharia law and delivering sharia justice. With ISIS’ defeat and the loss of territories in the Middle East, this appeal disappeared and recruitment has visibly dwindled.

3.1. Individual factors

It is very clear that the North Caucasus jihadists who joined the suicidal enterprise of Imarat Kavkaz, or those who left behind their homeland, family, and friends and bought a one-way ticket to the Middle East were on a serious quest, striving to compensate for something that was fundamentally missing in their lives. Even though there is no identifiable profile for a radical, there may be common psychological processes that radicals experience. Analyzing these processes is crucial for understanding violent radicalization and designing effective CVE responses.

31 Erica Harper “Reconceptualizing the drivers of violent extremism: an agenda for child and youth resilience”, WANA Institute, 2018
Most individuals have strong protective mechanisms that shield them from extremist ideas such as the capacity for critical thinking and open-mindedness, as well as resilience built from tolerant education at home or school, and non-violent social and familial bonds.

For those most vulnerable to the appeals of radicalism, such defenses are either absent or broken. Identity crises, a search for meaning, and a loss of self-esteem due to personal failure or discrimination make individuals more susceptible to radical rhetoric. Frustrated youth without a coherent purpose and uncertain prospects are particularly prone to resonate with the narratives of perceived humiliation and loss of significance of Muslims as a group.\(^{32}\)

Other psychological preconditions that can be conducive to radicalization are personal ties to an already radicalized individual, a yearning to do something significant with one's life, and the need to belong. General feelings of compassion and concern for the suffering of others (usually of the same identity), and a desire for love, adventure, rebellion, or extraordinary life experience have also been cited as factoring into the appeal of radicalism.\(^{33}\)

Our interviews suggest that in most cases, there is a trigger that closes the gap between radical ideology and violent action, thus bringing cognitive closure; after this point it may be very hard to change the mind of a radicalizing individual. According to a Salafi activist: “radicalization is a process that consists of many small episodes, incidents, cases of injustice, and moments of injured dignity. These episodes come together in a mosaic picture of the world, and at some point, one decides that he cannot accept it and wants to wage a war on it.”\(^{34}\)

CAPC research shows that personal grievances and a sense of victimization feature very prominently in the individual level motivations that culminate in the desire to exact revenge – for one's own mistreatment, for killed relatives and friends, and for the perceived injustices inflicted on the local and global Muslim community.

A school principal in Dagestan told us:

“In my observations, most of those who joined fighters had problems with law-enforcement agencies. The officers, who should be protecting citizens, they are the ones who commit violations the most often. They use violence, threaten to “put them on a bottle” [sodomize]. Also, if someone commits a petty crime, even at a very young age, they throw this child into a detention facility. And there is very active recruitment in the preliminary detention facilities; after 2-3 months, he comes out as a ready-made radical”.


\(^{34}\) Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, Salafi activist and blogger, Dagestan, March 2017
A Dagestani Salafi activist echoed: “The desire for revenge is enormous. And they want to do it beautifully, theatrically.” ISIS was well-equipped to satisfy this lust for revenge.35

Arie Kruglanski, an influential scholar on the psychology of terrorism, claims that the variety of reasons for radicalization – honor, humiliation, injustice, vengeance, social status, monetary benefits, loyalty to the leader, desire to enter paradise, etc., – all share one root cause: the quest for significance. The fundamental need to matter, a drive for a sense of value and self-esteem, underlie the aforementioned motivations and are variations of the significance quest.36 Kruglanski claims that terrorist organizations and insurgency groups offer great significance gains, such as the allure of heroism and martyrdom. This usually appeals to people experiencing personal crisis.37

CAPC field research confirms that personal failures or impeded prospects for self-realization are highly conducive to radicalization. In the North Caucasus, senior relatives often impose their own visions and expectations for careers, marriage, and education on the adolescents, unaware of the possible consequences of such rigid control.

One defense lawyer described how her client made his choice in favor of ISIS:

“The factor that very strongly influenced his decision was that his family put pressure on him to quit law school and join an oil industry university. They thought there were too many lawyers and that he had better chances to find a well-paying job as an engineer. He changed departments but could not manage there, he was a humanities person. Three months he somehow lasted, and then he dropped out [and went to Syria].”38

Scholars working with Kruglanski’s significance model explain ISIS’ extraordinary appeal by claiming that violence is the most primordial way of restoring an injured identity and gaining dominance and status; it is “an unparalleled way of affirming ones’ significance.”39 For men, the unmitigated use of sex – of Muslim brides and slaves – is another status symbol of dominance.

Sex and love were likewise powerful pull factors for women. Personal connections to existing terrorists have always been prominent in recruitment. Recruiting from a network of friends, lovers, and family is easier and is a risk management strategy; the likelihood of betrayal is lower among people who share affective ties. Imarat Kavkaz had a stable female support base, especially in Dagestan, of young women who romanticized jihad and married and remarried insurgents. “It is better to be a widow of shaheed than a wife of a coward,” was the popular saying in one such female jamaat.40 ISIS has also been exceptionally successful in recruiting

35 CAPC interview, director of school and Salafi activist, Makhachkala, November 2016 and September 2018.
36 Arie Kruglanski, Michele Gelfand, Jocelyn Bélanger, Malkanthi Hetiarachchi, and Rohan Gunaratna “Significance Quest Theory as the Driver of Radicalization towards Terrorism”, Resilience and Resolve, 2015.
37 Arie Kruglanski, Michele Gelfand, Jocelyn Bélanger, Malkanthi Hetiarachchi, and Rohan Gunaratna “Significance Quest Theory as the Driver of Radicalization towards Terrorism”, Resilience and Resolve, 2015.
38 CAPC interview, Chechen lawyer, Moscow, September 2018.
40 Ekaterina Sokirianskaia’s observations and interviews, Makhachkala, 2016.
women through the allure of romance with jihadists. For some women, whose life prospects and partner choices were seriously restricted by local traditions, marrying a jihadist was an act of liberation.

The motivations of the North Caucasus foreign fighters have not always stemmed from a need to compensate for internal aggression or imbalance. In the early years of the Syrian war, feelings of compassion and concern for the Syrian civilians, especially for the women and children, and the desire to defend them was a prominent mobilization factor. The emotional context of the Syrian war was mind-boggling for sensitive people with strong feelings of justice, which was readily manipulated by the jihadist groups.

Another dominant motivator that frequently featured in CAPC interviews was the feeling of religious obligation, a desire to build an alternative society based on religious principles, or feelings of guilt for the failure to live a pious life. The latter is especially notable with middle-aged men who joined jihadist movements to find a shortcut to paradise. Fearing that being a good Muslim was not enough to earn forgiveness for their "sinful" youth, they sought to cleanse themselves and earn guaranteed paradise through jihad.

The age factor is important in understanding radicalization. Radicalization is thought to occur during adolescence or with young adults who are passionate and seek to discover their own identity. During this period of maturation, young people experiment with their group relationships, political ideologies, their place in the world, and get involved in counter-cultures. However, ISIS-driven radicalization has shown that even though their main support base remains to be younger adults, people of very different ages can be susceptible to its propaganda.

At the same time, age can also be conducive to de-radicalization. Once a matured person experiences major life events (marriage, birth of a child, or other developments that strengthen his social bonds), the radical ideas tend to lose their appeal.

The shift from identifying with a radical community to joining an insurgent cell is usually gradual. Kruglanski notes that psychologically, radicalization results in an exclusive commitment to a single goal that becomes detrimental to other goals. In the radicalization process, the individual drifts away from their own social networks and becomes closer to the new radicalized community. Identification with a violence-justifying ideology helps change values and overcome social taboos. Individuals increasingly feel a need for cognitive closure and become ready to act.

In IK, one would need to pass many smaller tests before he was trusted to join active groups and be involved in more important missions. With ISIS this seems to be changing, as we are increasingly seeing individuals moving to violence with minimal preliminary tests and often bypassing many of

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41 CAPC interviews, family members and peers of radicalized individuals, defense lawyers, community leaders, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, May–October 2018.
Will new waves of radicalization in the North Caucasus be prevented?
Conflict Analysis and Prevention Center • January 2019

These changes require additional research in order to develop more effective methods of interventions aimed to prevent violence.

CVE efforts should take into consideration the above mentioned psychological factors and processes. They should be able to build resilience by addressing individual vulnerabilities and strengthening protective mechanisms. Specific knowledge and significant experience are required for work to this end to be effective. Today, all regional schools have psychologists on staff, but in the larger schools there should be several to ensure that each case receives adequate resources and attention. These specialists will benefit from targeted capacity-building courses that will strengthen their ability to support both children and adults in dealing with the challenges of violent ideologies. Accessible psychological counseling services and family counseling are crucial to strengthening resilience to radicalism.

Greater possibilities for self-realization for the youth, the development of critical thinking and tolerant attitudes, creating safe and positive alternatives to satisfy the desire for adventure and risk (by organizing managed risk-taking sports and activities), and providing outlets for compassionate services and projects to support the innocent victims of armed conflicts can also significantly contribute to addressing individual drivers of radicalization into violence.

3.2. Micro-social factors: group dynamics, peers and family

Individuals are usually radicalized as members of small, face-to-face groups; group membership plays a crucial role in understanding the mechanisms of violent radicalization and exit from violence. Research across countries shows that the majority of Al-Qaeda and ISIS fighters have been recruited through friendship networks. Terrorism is very much a group phenomenon as it is easier to prepare an attack in a group and people in the organization are more motivated to follow through. Although ISIS has been prominent in encouraging the so-called “lone wolf” phenomenon, subsequent investigations have shown that ostensibly individual attackers have in fact had accomplices and maintained contacts to terrorist organizations.

Apart from a few exceptions of complete self-radicalization online, our interviewees pointed to a combination of off-line interactions with consumption of online radical content that lead to the decision to join an extremist group. Availability and openness of radical groups to new recruits is an important enabling factor. ISIS’s embrace of all recruits without prior vetting and in its early years, the unprecedented ease of joining its rank and file, significantly contributed to its successful recruitment.

44 CAPC interviews, family members and defense lawyers of radicalized individuals, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, May–October, 2018.
47 CAPC interviews, family members and peers of radicalized individuals, defense lawyers, community leaders, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, May–October 2018.
Radical groups supply individuals with a strong sense of belonging and help maintain a clear image of the out-group as evil.48 Even superficial observation of online content reveals that jihadi groups construct their norms and values as superior to those of other groups. The sharp division into “them” and “us” forms the foundation for legitimizing violence against an out-group viewed as the culprit responsible for the suffering of the in-group. For ISIS, the use of taqfir was an effective mechanism of dehumanizing “the other.” Jihadi groups believe in the efficacy of the use of violence, moreover, they think that violence is the only way to be heard and feared by enemies.

Radical commanders follow strict organizational principles to ensure ideological isolation, compliance, and to increase in-group cohesion. A deputy-mufti of Kabardino-Balkariya remembered: “I tried to convince one such radical, aged 22. He fell under the influence of an 18-year-old fellow who had spent one year in Egypt [where he] radicalized and started to form an insurgency group. After our first conversation when I put my arguments on the table, he said that he was forbidden to speak with me [by his emir]. He said that my knowledge of Islam was superior to his and that I could mislead him. He did not want to even think that he had already been misled and that I would help him get out.”49

Emotional isolation is central to the violent radicalization process. Recruiters gradually cut the new members’ ties with their families. The father of a Dagestani insurgent told CAPC how his daughter-in-law tried to convince his son to return from the regional insurgency group: “Whenever she had a chance, she sent him a note about the children, once she sent a photo of the little feet of their newborn, and then his emir banned his communication with home.”50

When an individual’s social world becomes limited to just a few friends in his combat group or terrorist cell, group cohesion increases dramatically and the social value of the group is maximized. Dedication to a common cause and devotion to comrades serve as a strong obstacle to exiting violence and leaving the group.51

In the North Caucasus, our interviews featured peer groups, neighborhood friends, and detention facilities as the common environments where people become exposed to extremist ideologies. We have registered a number of cases when several members of pre-existing peer groups (several sportsmen training in one club, schoolmates and neighborhood friends, members of worker’s units) migrated to Syria collectively. Sometimes recruitment of an individual was the result of him passively following the shifting alliance of his group. Pre-existing radical networks of IK sympathizers also played a role in recruitment. By 2015 these latter networks split where some insurgents supported ISIS while others rejected it; the issue was highly debated and individuals and families often left for Syria together, or followed each other.

49 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, deputy mufti of Kabardino-Balkariya, Nalchik, March 2017.
50 CAPC interview, father of a former IK insurgent, Dagestan, October 2018.
Prison communities are notorious for enabling radicalization, but in the North Caucasus, preliminary detention facilities are equally important. “In our municipal detention facility there are cells on the ground floor, this is where they keep people suspected of terrorism and insurgency. Full-scale recruitment is going on there. Some of my clients, who didn’t even pray, have visibly radicalized. They told me about the peer pressure there, how they were brainwashed,” a defense lawyer from Dagestan told us.52

The common perception that radicalization happens at the mosque has been proved false. In the North Caucasus, radicalized individuals who travelled to Syria attended various mosques across the region and were unlikely to be radicalized by an imam in the mosque as all of the buildings were wired and otherwise very carefully monitored by the security services, as was repeatedly admitted in interviews with CAPC.53

The role of kinship has also been emphasized by our interviewees and students in the North Caucasus.54 CAPC knows of several families where nearly all of the members were radicalized and subsequently killed or imprisoned as insurgents, or resettled to Syria following one family member who radicalized and “contaminated” the others.

Families can be very influential both as an enabling environment for radicalization, and as gatekeepers for preventing their dear ones from falling victim. A vulnerable, dysfunctional or violent family environment is highly conducive to radicalization. According to a Chechen observer:

It does not matter whether it is a full or single-parent family. It depends on the quality of communication in the family. If there is no proper communication with an adolescent, this is the most significant contributor to radicalization.55

Families should be equipped with the tools to recognize the signs of radicalization and the skills to improve their ability to communicate with and support their children as they mature, thereby increasing their resilience to radicalization. However, according to a Chechen journalist who lost two cousins in ISIS, “This is no easy task since radicalization rarely happens at home; oftentimes someone from outside [the family] introduces these ideas. ‘A chap from the street, a guy from the gym’. This is a story about teenage infatuation, about choosing role models and leaders...It’s a simple need to emulate someone and be part of a group.”

More research and better understanding are needed of how peer groups affect individual radicalization. The importance of constructive, safe and diverse social bonds is hard to overestimate. Families

52 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, human rights lawyer, Khasavyurt, March 2017. A fragment of this quote was first used in in “Dagestan’s Abandoned Counter-insurgency Experiment”, International Crisis Group, 5 July 2018.
55 CAPC interview, Chechen lawyer working on terrorist-related crimes, Moscow, September 2018.
should be advised on how to address the challenge of their dear ones engaging with a radical milieu and supported in this process.

3.3. Macro-social factors

Radicalization happens in affluent democratic societies as well as in conflict-riven and low-income countries. Research shows that states that are unable to generate inclusive, effective and just systems of authority are more likely to end up with recruits. Radicalization into violence often precedes Islamization: radical Islamist ideology offers an action plan for the already angered youth who want to realize their ambitions or who seek to improve their status.

The North Caucasus insurgency in its various forms and manifestations has been feeding on the numerous social, political and economic problems that the region is facing. These problems are easily manipulated by the recruiters and framed in terms of injustice, subjugation or humiliation. The lack of rule of law and accountability, unresolved ethnic conflicts, bad governance, widespread corruption, economic underdevelopment and a dearth of social lifts for the youth are all conducive to the appeal of jihadism.

A. Political and religious factors

The North Caucasus, more than any other part of Russia, suffers from an acute deficit of democratic procedure and accountability. For many years now, there have been no free, fair and competitive elections, apart from a few exceptions at the level of village administrations. Since the late 1990s, the once unprecedented degree of regional autonomy has been gradually rolled back such that in 2017, de facto direct external governance was introduced in Dagestan.

The estrangement of the population and the republican elites, who are not accountable to their constituencies but rather implement the directives of the federal center, has reached unprecedented levels in most of the republics. This lack of accountability leads to immense corruption, the “capture” of state institutions by informal networks, and criminal clans that pursue their own self-interested agenda and block merit-based social mobility.

59 On 3 October 2017, after the arrests of several high-level officials of Dagestan’s government, for the first time in the post-Soviet history of the North Caucasus an ethnic Russian, with no roots to the region, was appointed the head of the republic. “When Moscow’s patience runs out High-ranking state officials behind bars, outsiders taking over the government, and federal agents raiding left and right. Welcome to Dagestan this week”, Meduza, 8 February 2018.
A deficit of democratic legitimacy, lack of accountability for the elites, and the resulting low quality of governance create a deep distrust of state institutions. As a result, communities self-organize to solve their daily problems. Thus, according to CAPC sources, in some villages of Dagestan waste-management and the installation of gas and electricity are managed by locally elected councils – Islamic divans – rather than municipal administrations. In one village, residents have reportedly purchased a second-hand fire truck to protect themselves in possible emergencies.60

Corruption and the political dependence of the courts boost the importance of alternative justice, which in the North Caucasian context is customary or sharia law. The very notion of secular laws and a secular state has been significantly discredited; especially with the religious youth, many of whom perceive it as oppressive and illegitimate. “Young people join the insurgency because they are tired of the omnipresent clans. We have never had justice in Dagestan. The word ‘Dagestan’ means corruption. These are synonyms. Until they start chopping hands off of thieves it will continue this way,” a municipal security official told us.61

Such frustrating conditions are conducive to a search for political alternatives, thus recruiters were able to successfully market their “utopia” of the multi-national Caliphate.

Political repression of secular opposition members and activists across the North Caucasus leads to a situation in which radical Islamists remain as virtually the only consistent challengers of the regime. The secular public space shrinks: the youth are interested in religion, but in places like Chechnya there is such an overwhelming influence of Islam in the public space that the secular nature of the state is fully eroded. Sufi Islam is everywhere: on television and social media, in the workplace, and in universities and schools.

Islam is the key issue that is contested politically. Both the official propaganda and opposition militantly impose their strands of Islam. The Chechen authorities impose dress-codes, dole out savage punishments for the sale or consumption of alcohol, and support “morality policing” by state and non-state actors who try to catch, humiliate, abuse, or threaten anyone thought to be violating the rules of Islamic behavior.62

The radical Islamists promote the idea of the futility of human life on Earth. “I have noticed that many young people around me have lost all interest in life, they have no ambitions: ‘This life is in vain, it is worth nothing. You should endure this life and stay as pure as you can and make yourself ready for the next life.’ This is a ready-made suicide bomber ideology, but it is understandable, it’s

60 CAPC interview, residents of villages in Northern Dagestan, Khasavyurt, May 2018.
61 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, municipal security official, Makhachkala, December 2016.
a reaction to the doomed realities around these youth. And then comes Syria, with all these videos of women and children killed. It gave them a higher purpose, and affected them very strongly,” a Chechen journalist told CAPC.63

In Dagestan as well there is a growing pressure from conservative groups to ban certain cultural activities – film screenings, festivals, concerts, art exhibits – while for the New Year celebrations, all festive trees must be guarded by the police. In Ingushetia, the recently emerged movements “Antilirika”, “Antisikh”, “Antifinta”, also aim to defend sharia values (more on this read in the subsequent section on Ingushetia).

The secular state can only defeat this radical, religious-based propaganda if it offers an effective and fair alternative. However, “in Chechnya no one can ask the question of whether God exists. If you ask this, even in a progressive intellectual environment...everyone will think you are an infidel, an unreliable person. And when you don’t have the freedom of thought, when your human qualities are mainly measured by the degree of your religiousness, this pushes people to the extremes.”64

B. Social inequality, deficit of merit-based social mobility

Socio-economic conditions have long been thought to make individuals more vulnerable and susceptible to being influenced by extremist groups. However, several cross-country studies found no support for the low-income hypothesis, and research has shown that lower levels of education do not correlate with a greater inclination to support violent extremism.65

CAPC’s own research also shows that many of the North Caucasus recruits come from middle-class and rather educated environments.66 Moreover, ISIS strategically recruited the “cream” of the activist youth: celebrity imams, businessmen, popular singers, etc. According to our interviews with conservative Russian Muslims in Istanbul, many Dagestani families resettled to ISIS with very significant funds: they sold their houses and cars to start a new life “in the lands of Islam.”67

However, social inequality, when seen as a result of an unfair distribution of wealth, state-supported predatory practices, or corruption, can be very conducive to radicalization. Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan rank among the most underdeveloped republics, with the highest birthrates, population density and unemployment in the country. Their budgets are heavily subsidized by the federal center, which also tries to tackle the problem of youth unemployment that has proven to be very challenging. Merit-based upward mobility is severely impeded due to the omnipresent clientelist networks.

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63 CAPC interview, Chechen journalist and activist, Grozny, October 2018.
64 CAPC interview, Chechen activist, Grozny, May 2018.
66 CAPC observations and interviews, activists, local residents, community leaders, subject-matter experts in the North Caucasus, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, May–October 2018
This is most visible in today’s Chechnya.

“Kadyrov is strikingly rich; he flaunts his huge park of luxury cars, expensive horses, his palace with a zoo, and his daughter is hosting a luxury fashion show and inviting celebrities. Everyone around him enjoys money and power while the rest [of the republic] has no rights and people are hardly making their ends meet,” a local activist told CAPC.68 In conditions of acute economic crisis, the Chechen authorities have not decreased, but on the contrary, have increased their collection of informal taxes, i.e. extortions and exactions from state-employed citizens and businesses. This dramatically affects the livelihoods of the already low-income population.

“The young generation learns quickly that in order to be successful you have to take a few simple steps: be loyal to the authorities and gain the attention of Kadyrov and serve his interests. But those who resent this path feel that the money earned locally cannot be clean, they see that most of the people around them earn their millions in an illegal or dirty manner. ISIS has skillfully played on this grievance and claimed to offer an alternative: a state based on Islamic socialism, fair distribution of wealth, and career growth conditioned on loyalty to the Caliphate and personal achievement.”69

Lack of opportunity (including for the educated youth), a limited selection of often unsatisfactory jobs, and the feeling that one cannot be promoted without connections or bribes creates fertile soil for radicalization. Many of our interviewers noted that although none of their acquaintances joined for money, the fact that ISIS offered some financial support and housing, and promised to distribute wealth fairly by sharia law, was important to the new recruits. Many sincerely believed that this was an opportunity to start a new life.

C. Human rights

Consistent findings across academic and expert field research show that injustice, security service brutality, and discrimination against minority groups70 are the primary motivators for joining extremist organizations.71 Even development agencies state that people do not radicalize because they are poor, but because they are angry and frustrated.72

The role of injustices, heavy-handed counter-insurgency measures, and unresolved war traumas in driving violent extremism in the North Caucasus is very well documented. For two decades, counter-insurgency has been carried out in an extremely brutal manner. 3-5,000 people went missing in Chechnya (its population at that time was less than one million) after detentions by security servicemen. In the early years of the second war (1999–2000), military servicemen massively bombed

68 CAPC interview, Chechen activist, Grozny, October 2018.
69 CAPC interview, Chechen journalist, Moscow, May 2018.
70 “Regime Repression and Youth Radicalization in Egypt”, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 1 March 2017.
residential areas, committed extra-judicial killings and torture. Apart from a handful of exceptions, no one has been held accountable.\textsuperscript{73}

The traumas and memories of the wars are still very much a part of the social reality in Chechnya: “You come to your village and always there are conversations about war. Everyone blames their problems on war. At the same time, Kadyrov’s propaganda also uses war. ‘If it’s not us, there will be war’. ‘The war was over due to solely my family’. And this affects the fragile psyche of the children. Radicals echo: ‘These people have sold their souls to the infidels’. ‘They have killed our fathers. And you are sitting here and doing nothing’. And nobody has been addressing this trauma!” a Chechen activist told us\textsuperscript{74}.

“[Imagine] when the entire social space around you is absorbed with mythical heroes; heroes who died as martyrs, who went missing, who fought with the Russians for Islam. When there are so many examples around [of martyrdom and death] it affects people very strongly. This is what makes readiness for death easy. In other regions people are also frustrated, but they are not ready for death. Here, everything is mixed and merged: the recent past and the near future, and much of it is about death.”\textsuperscript{75}

Since 2003 and until today, counter-insurgency in Chechnya is implemented mainly by local security services and is still extremely violent: suspected insurgents are killed or sentenced, but prior to either of those fates are subjected to savage mistreatment. According to Novaya Gazeta and Memorial Human Rights Center, in January 2017 alone the security services summarily executed 27 people.\textsuperscript{76}

For years now Chechen law-enforcement have systematically used the collective responsibility principle: carrying out punitive actions against family members such as burning their homes, detaining or taking them hostage, and subjecting them to beatings, torture and a slew of physical, material, and social threats.

Torture is widespread and systematic, even while investigating petty crimes. According to a human rights expert, “The Chechen police don’t trust any evidence or testimonies unless produced under torture.”\textsuperscript{77}

There are no mechanisms for protecting human rights: investigative authorities are afraid and incapable of carrying out any investigation into the actions of the Chechen strongmen and security services. Any public criticism of the authorities will result in savage repressions and public humiliation. The factor of collective responsibility creates a climate of immense fear. The regime intimidates


\textsuperscript{74} CAPC interview, Chechen activist, Grozny, October 2018

\textsuperscript{75} CAPC interview, Chechen journalist, Grozny, May 2018.

\textsuperscript{76} “Это была казнь. В ночь на 26 января в Грозном расстреляли десятки людей” [‘This was an execution. On the night of 26 January, dozens of people were shot dead in Grozny’], Novaya Gazeta, 10 July 2017.

\textsuperscript{77} CAPC interview, Chechnya expert, Moscow, May 2018.
Chechens not only in Chechnya, but is able to menace its targets everywhere in Russia, and has even reached the EU, Turkey, and Jordan. Lawlessness, acute injustice, and the lack of any legal protection produce anger, hopelessness, and despair and are among the most powerful contributors to radicalization. It is important to recognize that radicalization is in most cases not just the result of brainwashing, but also of cost-benefit analysis. In the Chechen case, the desire to exit the unbearable environment is so strong for some individuals that they are ready to pay a very high cost, including their own life.

In other NC republics as well, counter-terrorism measures are oftentimes implemented through the falsification of criminal cases, torture and even summary executions. In Ingushetia, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov is often credited with putting an end to enforced disappearances, the last of which happened in 2012. Still, human rights groups report allegations of summary executions during security operations where witnesses claim that the suspected fighters had not opened fire and were not on wanted lists.

Thus, on 8 June 2018, a resident of Ingushetia, Ibrahim Aliev, was officially arrested by the FSB servicemen; on 12 June his relatives were informed that Aliev was killed during the interrogation after he tried to grab scissors and attack an investigator. For a long time, the security services refused to return the body of Aliev to his family, and finally did so only after the family agreed to sever all communication with human rights defenders and to have a closed funeral. Such dubious cases and their subsequent lack of investigation are clearly playing into the hands of the radicals.

A similar case in Dagestan, when two shepherd teenagers were summarily executed in the high mountain village of Goor-Khindakh, created a huge public outcry. In a focus group with Dagestani students, this incident was quoted to the CAPC director as a reason for radicalization: “Young people can’t endure this. How can your blood not boil when you see this poor father who lost two sons, two simple innocent shepherds?” Each of the North Caucasus republics have cases such as these which caused immense public outrage, acquired highly symbolic and emotional value, and were thereby used by radical recruiters as a tool.

The officials claim that there is no insurgency left in KBR, but there are still cases concerning insurgency-related crimes, although their numbers have reduced. Torture is still systematically reported in the republic.
"In my practice, up to 80 percent of cases are fully or partly fabricated," a human rights lawyer told CAPC. "Those who do it feel impunity. If a couple of perpetrators were held accountable then the situation would change. Sometimes I feel that the centers for countering extremism are radicalizing youth on purpose. For them it is a kind of business: they have huge, uncontrolled funds allocated for the purposes of infiltrating insurgency groups and developing networks of agents, there are promotions and salary increases for investigating such crimes, thereby further feeding radicalization. They report based on numbers of investigated cases, which makes fabricating cases the easiest strategy," he added.84

In Ingushetia, the investigative authorities have taken action in response to the most outrageous cases of abuse and falsification of criminal files. In December 2016, the director of the Center for Countering Extremism, Timur Khamkhoev, his deputy, and two other officers were accused of exceeding official credentials and for the violent treatment of detainees that resulted in substantial violations of the rights of citizens.85 However, according to local human rights groups, despite Khamkhoev and his team receiving sentences of 3–10 years in jail, torture continues to be registered in the republic’s Center for Countering Extremism, although its staffers exceed their authority less frequently now, being afraid of the possible consequences.86

Grave human rights violations produce strong emotional responses, they accumulate in people’s memories, breed new insecurities, and reinforce narratives of victimization and existential threats to the community. Especially in the North Caucasus – where the local codes emphasize honor and justice even if life is the price for the restoration of dignity – such egregious violations mobilize the youth in support of radical networks, which in turn further disseminate the narratives of victimization. Until 2014, in Dagestan’s capital of Makhachkala such radical milieus were very vibrant and were systematically targeted by law-enforcement.

A Dagestani living in Istanbul explained her experience back home:

“I came to Islam later than others and I had a very radical period. Everybody has such periods. Now I re-evaluate many issues and treat them more calmly. This is because I have left this community. This community, the very environment, puts you under pressure. All the discussions are about one issue: who was killed, tortured, abducted. Imagine, in the evenings we get together at a friend’s place, all women. What can we discuss? What are our events? So we sit and discuss all these horrors and agitate each other to an extent that you feel sick. Because if you sincerely embrace Islam, you can’t remain indifferent. This concerns you directly, these are your brothers, sisters, you want to do something for them. It’s one Muslim ummah, one body, when one part is aching, the other one feels it.

about torture"], Caucasus Knot, 24 May 2016.
84 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in previous capacity, interview with Aralbek Dumanishev, defense lawyer, Nalchik, February 2017.
85 CAPC interviews, Tamirlan Akiev, Memorial Director in Ingushetia; Oleg Orlov, Memorial Human Rights Center Program Director; Tatyana Lokshina, Human Rights Watch Russia Director; Nazran and Moscow, February–May 2017.
86 “Главе центра ‘Э’ МВД Ингушетии вынесли приговор за смерть запытанного” [“The Head of Center ‘E’ of the Ingushetia Ministry of Internal Affairs was convicted for the death that resulted from torture”], Lenta, 27 June 2018. CAPC interview, Tamerlan Akiev, Memorial Director in Ingushetia, Nazran, October 2018.
And so you talk and go home to digest all of it until the morning... And the next evening, you join the group again and again immerse yourself with all this negativity”.87

Human rights violations and other macro-social and political factors that contribute to the development of feelings of stigmatization, discrimination, frustration and humiliation are conducive to the emergence of radical environments. In his major speech on countering terrorism, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Terrorism is fundamentally the denial and destruction of human rights [and] the fight against terrorism will never succeed by perpetuating the same denial and destruction...when we protect human rights, we are tackling the root causes of terrorism.”88 For CVE efforts to be effective, the root causes of radicalization, primarily the immense deficit of the rule of law, should be systematically addressed.

At the same time, political and social development processes are challenging and take time. In parallel to eradicating the root causes, governments and civil society should look for ways to create personally fulfilling environments for young people, which can partly compensate for the negative impact of structural political problems. Experts claim that supportive families, exciting activities aimed at self-realization, timely management of psychological problems, quality relations with peers, socialization that provides connectedness, adventure, and sense of purpose are conducive to the successful transition to adulthood89. Much of it can be created by shrewd youth policy through the educational system and with civil society initiatives.

IV. APPROACHES TO CVE: GENERAL OUTREACH

Prevention of violent extremism and terrorism in the North Caucasus is part of a rather streamlined, country-wide effort that nonetheless has strong regional specificities. In the North Caucasus, each republic has its own context-specific conditions for and strategies of CVE. They mostly depend on the republican leadership, as well as the history and intensity of the conflict.

4.1. The general framework

Prevention efforts are developing within the strategic framework for “countering the ideology of terrorism and extremism.” One of the main reference points is the 2006 Federal Law Number 35, “On Countering Terrorism”, which outlines the suggested political, economic, social and informational methods of addressing the problem. The 2009 “Conception of Response to Terrorism” outlines preventive counter-terrorism priorities that include: political development and international cooperation; social and economic growth; the principle of the “inevitability” of punishment for terrorism-related crimes; ideological propaganda for anti-terrorism; the emphasis of “socially meaningful” values; and the creation of conditions for peaceful inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue.90

Ideological work to counter the appeal of terrorism is implemented in compliance with “The Complex Plan for Countering the Ideology of Terrorism in the Russian Federation for 2013-2018,” designed as a supplement to the Concept. This plan highlights the need to combat radicalization through the education system and the general upbringing of children by emphasizing moral and cultural values as well as patriotism.91

The second core document regulating the anti-extremism dimension of CVE is the “Strategy of Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation for 2015-2025,” approved by the President at the end of 2014.92 The Strategy prescribes two directions for extremism prevention: ideological – as propaganda in education, mass media, cultural institutions, etc.; and law-enforcing – in the form of criminal prosecution and administrative control over suspected people and groups.

Other documents that constitute the legal framework of these efforts are the “Doctrine of Information Security in the Russian Federation” and the “Strategy of National Security of the Russian Fed-

eration.” The “Strategy of the State Nationality Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025” is also usually named among the relevant documents since the risk of inter-ethnic clashes and ethnic separatism is thought to be linked to extremism and terrorism prevention. As such, North Caucasus CVE programs at all levels of implementation (from republics to rural schools) contain an ethnic tolerance element. Another element visibly featured in CVE measures is patriotic education.

Republics develop their own programs on countering the ideologies that lead to extremism and terrorism that are designed to implement the federal government policy by: ensuring better coordination of various government agencies and institutions, increasing responsibility of the implementers, improving evaluation, and capacity-building for implementing officials.

A significant part of the work is transferred to the municipalities, where local anti-terrorist committees are created and tasked with implementing various municipal programs. These committees are usually directed by the head of the municipality and include municipal directors of security services (FSB, MIA), chairs of the municipal council, and representatives of federal executive and municipal authorities.

In compliance with the approaches outlined in the programmatic documents, CVE in the North Caucasus can be roughly divided into ideological work (general outreach) and repressive/controlling work (targeting groups identified as being “at risk”). The general outreach methods include broadly disseminated counter-narratives which are promoted during face-to-face meetings, in the local media, on the internet, in leaflets and brochures, and in lectures by law-enforcement representatives, educators, religious leaders and pro-government civil activists. Documentaries and videos are also common mediums for counter-narrative distribution.

Targeted work is often directed at at-risk teenagers, especially those from socially underprivileged, incomplete, or dysfunctional families; and from families where ex-fighters returned after serving criminal sentences, or where family members are currently fighting or have died in combat (widows and children are considered especially vulnerable). Controlling policies are also directed at individuals who have been identified by law-enforcement as sympathetic to extremist ideology. Some municipalities monitor young people who are absent from their place of domicile registration for over 30 days.

Prevention efforts are routinely evaluated. The evaluation criteria are mainly quantitative (the number of participants at events, the number of events, and the number of posters, banners, brochures, booklets, conferences, publications, TV programs, videos, exhibitions, lectures, and attendees of patriotic camps,) which local experts say encourages a very formal approach with no tools to measure the real impact.


94 See for example: Постановление "Об утверждении муниципальной программы администрации МР ‘Кизилюртовский район’ ["About the approval of the municipal program of administration in ‘Kizilyurt district’"], "Комплексная программа противодействия идеологии терроризма в Кизилюртовском районе на 2017 г." ["Comprehensive program to counter the ideology of terrorism in the Kizilyurt area for 2017”].

95 CAPC interviews, CVE experts and practitioners, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkariya, Chechnya, May-October 2018.
4.2. Ideological work: Counter-narratives and moral-spiritual upbringing

As in many other parts of the world, counter-narratives are seen as central to ideological work in countering radicalization. Counter-narratives have been defined as “an intentional and direct effort to deconstruct, discredit, and demystify violent extremist messaging through ideology, logic, fact or humor.”96

Effective counter-narratives should be context specific, tailored for a specific target group, and most importantly, delivered by credible messengers. The channels of communicating the message are also highly important and should be suited to the intended audience. In the North Caucasus, the counter-narratives often engage audiences directly and confrontationally; however, recently in some republics, most notably in Kabardino-Balkariya, an understanding of alternative narratives being more effective than counter-narratives is emerging.

In the last five years, the republican authorities have learned to cooperate with the civil society, which was previously treated with suspicion and ideological work was mainly the prerogative of law-enforcement. Still, most of the NGOs invited to participate in the CVE efforts are government supported and patriotic or military-patriotic organizations (Yunarmia, or Youth army, search groups, pro-government youth movements, veteran’s organizations) or other pro-government groups (government-created “councils of elders”, Committees of rural women, United Russia affiliated initiatives, etc.)

However, independent civil society organizations have proven to be more creative, innovative and better methodologically equipped than the rigid government bureaucracy. Now in several of the republics, government agencies cooperate with some of these NGOs and even commission them to put together some of the didactic materials or request to use their survey data and methodological outputs.97

In the last two years, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the development of a social volunteer movement in Russia, and specifically in the North Caucasus. A unified information system of “Volunteers of Russia” has been created which is aimed at improving the mechanisms of cooperation between authorities, volunteers, and the organizers of volunteer work.

The government distributes funds for volunteer organizations during some of the federal fora, the most important one for the North Caucasus being the forum Mashuk, which takes place in Pyatigorsk and in 2018 it was attended by Putin. Other large-scale gatherings such as the prestigious “Territory of Meanings” or “Volunteers of Russia” also invite representatives of the North Caucasus republics and are valuable opportunities to secure funds. In some places, the volunteer organizations are doing highly valuable work and are genuinely attracting young people. In other places, volunteer

97 CAPC interview, Ingush practitioners, Magas, September 2018.
organizations exist mostly on paper, and are mobilized administratively when needed. This usually depends on the level of personal motivation and engagement of the leaders or educators initiating such groups.

A significant role for counter-narratives is given to the clergy from the republican Spiritual Boards of Muslims. Imams undergo special trainings to work on extremism prevention with the youth. The regional Pyatigorsk University’s prestigious Higher School of Governance has opened an MA program on “Theology,” with a specialization in Government-confessional relations (with Islamic and Orthodox components).

A. Chechnya

The largest scale of preventive work has unfolded in Chechnya. In 2013, Ramzan Kadyrov approved the “Unified Concept of the ‘Spiritual-Moral Upbringing’ of the Young Generation in Chechnya,” which is designed to coordinate the activities of various state institutions and organizations that carry out ideological work with the youth. The aims of the Concept include, inter alia, “to inoculate the growing generation with the fundamental values, ideas and beliefs that reflect the essence of the Chechen mentality, thereby forming an active civil and personal attitude of the youth.”

The goals include: imbuing the youth with “the principles of stability and immutability of the public order”; the “popularization of traditional spiritual, moral and cultural values”; an essentialized upbringing “on the basis of customs and traditions of the people of the Chechen Republic”; with an emphasis on the “values reflected in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, customary law of the people of the Chechen republic, and in the traditional teachings of spiritual leaders.”

To implement this concept, the Chechen government, parliament, municipal officials, and official clergy carry out massive propaganda work through the media, internet and at events, targeting all ages and professional groups, involving government institutions, village communities, universities and vocational and secondary schools. “Many ministries as part of their official duties have to visit schools and universities,” a Chechen educator explained. Chechnya also has a Ministry for Youth Affairs, with a 26-year-old minister who often wears a Khadhi-muridi Koch – a quasi-military uniform of Kunta-khadzi followers.

Ideological work already begins in the kindergarten where, according to the Concept, Chechen children should learn about the “heroic deeds of the holy sheiks, ustaz (leaders of tariqas) and national heroes,” and celebrate the birthdays of the Prophet Muhammad and the first President of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, the father of the incumbent leader Ramzan. For older children, government institutions and religious organizations hold meetings in educational establishments and in the settlements of even the most distant villages.

99 A Murid is a follower, or disciple. Kunta Khadzi Kishiev (1830–1867) is a Chechen religious leader, promoter of Qadir tariqa in Chechnya, founder of Zikrism. He played a very important role in the Islamization of the Chechens and Ingush, nearly 80 percent of who today are his followers. They believe that Khunta-Khadzi has not died and will return.
Representatives of the clergy – members of the Spiritual Boards of Muslims – play the most visible role in counter-narratives: they present religious arguments asserting that Chechens have all of the necessary conditions to practice their faith in Chechnya, praise the Kadyrov family, and explain that Islam obliges Muslims to support their ruler.

Ideological work is also carried out regularly with adults in a similar meeting format. According to CAPC source in one of the ministries, imams combine anti-extremist and political propaganda; for example, by praising the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and President Putin for resisting Western imperialism and “its desire to destroy Russia and eliminate Muslims.” They urge their audience “as true believers” to support Putin and Kadyrov “in their struggle against the common enemy.” According to the source, “whenever [they] needed to justify Kadyrov’s actions, mullahs can distort suras from the Koran or say something that is not in the scripture.” The fact that the mullahs have become the main ideological force of the regime prevents them from being seen as credible messengers by many Chechens with developed critical thinking.

The key problem identified by all interlocutors is that these engagements are usually very tedious. “It’s so boring that after these sessions, radicalization only increases,” one educator joked and compared this work with the Soviet-style propaganda: “I remember in my komsomol youth we had zam-polits [deputy commanders for ideology in the military] who would come to schools and deliver lectures about the dangers of smoking.”

Many CAPC respondents also noted the insufficient skills of the CVE propagandists: “They don’t know the subject. They only shout: ‘They are terrorists! They are shaytans [devils]!’ I wish they would undergo trainings, where they would learn the basics of such work. You can’t blurt such things out, there are different ways and tools for how to make the audience come to the desired conclusions themselves,” a recently resigned university professor told CAPC.

Chechen television produces documentaries and reportages about war. Here, the counter-narratives are also straightforward: “Supporters of Ichkeria [separatists] were all traitors and they brought us to war!’ It’s all propaganda, with zero analysis and weak interpretations,” a local journalist said.

Many CAPC interlocutors noted not just the formal, but also the threatening nature of CVE narratives: “When the security services come to talk to the kids, they are threatening them. The imams are also aggressive because Ramzan is threatening the imams. Responsible officials are afraid that they will be beaten and fired if anything happens on the territory under their control. So they come into the classroom charged with this negative energy, which comes top-down. This policeman stands in front of the kids and thinks ‘because of these cubs I can lose my job and more’. The

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100 CAPC interview, staffer of one Chechen ministry, Grozny, March 2017.
101 CAPC interview, Chechen educator and activist, Grozny, October 2018.
102 CAPC interview, Chechen journalist, Grozny, October 2018.
103 Numerous sources indicate that physical violence is applied to officials who underperform or misbehave; some officials have appeared in public with bruises or broken limbs.
situation when everything depends on the mood of one person is very difficult," a Chechen expert explained to us.

CAPC interviewees agree that these methods do not work. “We live on the same street with our extended family members and I observe my cousins, brothers, the youngsters: they are laughing at them (officials), they have memes in their phones mocking them. Young men anywhere have the tendency to challenge the authorities, but when they are approached with threatening rhetoric by people whom they consider hypocrites, it just doesn’t work,” a resident of Grozny told us.

Moreover, professionals who work with the youth emphasize that aggressive propaganda has the reverse of the intended preventive effect. “The more they blame ISIS, the more interest the youngsters have in it. It becomes attractive, romanticized. They need heroes. When you ask them ‘who are your heroes?’ they can name Dudaev, Maskhadov, Gelaev (separatist leaders of Chechnya). I am telling them that I am against our streets being named after the Russian war generals (as Kadyrov’s government does), but I am also against these people. I lived in that time and they brought lots of grief to our people. These personalities are mythologized by the youth, but no one holds a proper public discussion with them about such figures. Still, they need heroes and they find them in the wrong places, including ISIS,” a former university professor from Grozny told us.

Regardless of shortcomings, the sheer scale and intensity of propaganda efforts are conducive to at least a partial internalization of the underlying message.

“Ramzan very sincerely believes that this will help. When he speaks, his veins are swelling. ‘You don’t work with the youth [properly]!’ he roars. But from Ramzan, this [messaging] goes down to towns and villages. Thousands of people get involved who otherwise don’t care. Ramzan told the ministers, they told their deputies and they ordered the schools principals. The school principal tasked the Basics of Life Safety to teacher Abdulla from the village of Varandy. And Abdulla has lots of other problems. He doesn’t believe in this. So he comes and tells the kids, ‘you shouldn’t go to Syria! Don’t listen to Mutsuraev songs!’ Ramzan’s emotional drive doesn’t reach the classroom,” a Chechen activist explained.

What’s more, “such formalism and boredom incite hatred towards officialdom. You just have to be honest and tell the truth to this youth. But they [who are responsible for CVE efforts] can’t tell the truth,” a school teacher from Grozny told CAPC.

104 CAPC interview, Chechen journalist, Grozny, October 2018.
105 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, resident of Grozny March 2017.
106 CAPC interview, Chechen journalist, Moscow, October 2018.
107 ОБЖ - Acronym for “Basics of life security” is a mandatory course in the Russian school curriculum which teaches behavior skills in various emergency situations. The course is taught in primary, secondary and high school.
108 Timur Mutsuraev is a popular Chechen bard singer, whose songs about independence and jihad mobilized thousands to join the insurgency during the wars.
109 CAPC interview, Chechen activist, Grozny, October 2018.
110 CAPC interview, Chechen educator, Grozny, May 2018.
The Chechen government involves youth organizations in CVE work, such as Youth Guard of United Russia, the patriotic club Putin, the youth public-patriotic movement Akhmat (named after Ramzan Kadyrov’s father), and Patriots of Chechnya.

Several Chechen NGOs have also started to focus on CVE, and their work is usually done in a more creative and professional way than the government-inspired initiatives are. A Chechen women’s NGO, Women for Development, does preventive webinars and off-line discussions for women, especially on the topic of love and romance on the internet. The organization Objective – led by a controversial public figure, Kheda Saratova – and the CVE project Denal, that is connected to it, are holding trainings with youth and are inviting psychologists, lawyers, and families of and the returnees from the Syrian war. The main focus of these efforts is on understanding the “essence” of extremism and terrorism, and the methods of recruitment and its prevention.

Tatyana Lokshina, associate director for Europe and Central Asia division of Human Rights Watch, managed to attend one such meeting and explained to CAPC: “Engaging the returnees in preventive talks with high school students seems to be a very good idea with a lot of potential. However, the returnee present at the event I attended was given very little time, merely five minutes, to describe her experience of living in ISIS. A lot of time, on the other hand, was devoted to the glorification of Chechen authorities.”

In addition, the Ingush organization Genesis is implementing a CVE project on conflict and radicalization prevention together with a local Chechen NGO called Dialogue (for more on Genesis, see section on Ingushetia).

B. Dagestan

Official counter-narratives are much softer, more nuanced, and less politicized in the other republics compared to Chechnya. Dagestan’s efforts are developed within the framework of the “Comprehensive program for countering the ideology of terrorism in the Republic of Dagestan in 2018-2020.”

In 2017, the youth policy in Dagestan was officially ranked as the best in the North Caucasus, which is currently primarily implemented by the Ministry for Youth Affairs (commonly referred to as the Ministry of Youth) and is curated by the deputy prime minister of the government, Ummupazil Omarova.

The Ministry of Youth has a special prevention unit that is manned by four enthusiastic officials who implement their own program but also distribute funds for prevention to local NGOs. In 2018, they received 20 applications and supported 5 projects, allocating 200,000 rubles (14,000 USD) to each.

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111 CAPC interview, Tatyana Lokshina, email, November 2018.
112 “Финал конкурса грантов прошел в Минмолодежи Дагестана” [“The final of the grant competition was held in the Ministry of Youth of Dagestan"], RIA Dagestan, 29 October 2018.
The unit has developed a training course called “Peaceful Dagestan,” which travels around Dagestan’s towns and villages and is presented at various events.\textsuperscript{113} “We understood that we needed to carry out enlightened educational work. That is why we have hired young theologians as government officers...and we have them go [to schools] and explain that in this state, there are no conditions for armed rebellion,” a Ministry of Youth staffer told CAPC.

The presentation contains several dozen colorful slides which begin by showcasing the beauty of Dagestan, its geographical position and history, and explains what kind of challenges the republic is facing, the notion of jihad and what it really means in Islam, and how the Prophet treated people of other faiths.

When we started to work on this we came to the conclusion that [in our society] there are no clear answers to the questions: What is jihad? Where do we live? Why do we have [insurgency] problems in Dagestan? Why have Dagestanis always had a dagger on their waste? We explain our geopolitical location and the path of our forefathers, starting from Imam Shamil\textsuperscript{114} who resisted the Wahhabist ideology. We explain the concept of defensive jihad; we explain the sharia choice of Caliph. We are explaining to them that no one can promote their ideology at gunpoint. This is all presented in a simple, popular language. In the end, we bring them to the conclusion that [to be a good Muslim], it’s enough to take care of your family and the people around you, that you should have a moral stem, Mikail Mikailov, a Ministry of Youth expert told CAPC.\textsuperscript{115}

It took the Ministry one year to develop this course, for which they received a gratitude paper from the National Anti-terrorism Committee. “We tried to make it attractive. Young people have a video clip mentality, so we were trying to satisfy this demand,” another Ministry of Youth official told CAPC.

According to him, the Peaceful Dagestan seminar goes over well with high school students, parents, and teachers and “is pretty multi-purpose.” “In Khasavyurt district, we did it in one place, but they liked it [so much that they] asked us to do it in ten other villages,” the official explained, adding that schools need such assistance because the teachers are unable to adequately respond to their students’ interests and curiosity in religion.

The Ministry of Youth staffers explained that their lectures do not include Q&A sessions in order to avoid a situation getting out of control. “Initially, we had 30 minutes for Q&A at the end, but then we decided not to do it anymore. They started asking secondary provocative questions, about amulets and music. Then debates break out, tensions emerge and they forget everything they were being told for 1–1.5 hours. The effect of the lecture is gone. So we tell them: here is a website where you can learn more, here’s your local imam who can answer questions. And we close this way.”

\textsuperscript{113} “Экстремизм – путь в никуда” [“Extremism – a path to nowhere”], Ministry of Youth Affairs for the Republic of Dagestan, 24 September 2018.

\textsuperscript{114} Imam Shamil was a Dagestan-born political, military, and spiritual leader of Caucasian anti-colonial resistance to the Russian Empire in the 1830s-1850s.

\textsuperscript{115} CAPC interview, Mikail Mikailov, Ministry of Youth policy expert, Makhachkala, September 2018.
As of October 2018, according to the official statistics, the Ministry delivered trainings to 20,000 people aged 14-30 in 28 republican districts. All of the events usually included municipal authorities and public associations. The Ministry of Youth has also produced an anti-ISIS propaganda documentary called ISIS: an Eastern Trap, which has received nearly 500,000 views on YouTube.

Other courses developed by the Ministry include “Code and Honor of a Dagestani” (Код чести дагестанца) and “Internet Security” (Internet БЕЗопасности), which are also popular with the educational institutions and various forums.¹¹⁶

Many trainings are outsourced to patriotic organizations, such as the Association of Public Unions, or Patriots, which is close to the Spiritual Board of Muslims and works in cooperation with the authorities, municipal organizations, and other groups such as the Youth of Untsukul district. The authorities also promote counter-narratives in cooperation with the military-patriotic clubs and the Russian Guard and military. Special summer camps for military trainings for members of the Youth Army (Yunarmia) are organized for children aged 14–16. Another format is the “search movement” which invites young people to participate in expeditions where they excavate the relics of the Second World War in other regions of Russia.¹¹⁷

These activities are seen as a way to distract and channel the youth’s energy into patriotic activities. One more channel of alternative engagement is the volunteer movement. Volunteers are encouraged to get involved in projects that support environmental protection and healthcare, enhance the urban landscape, and improve the quality of education.

In 2018, Dagestan’s authorities organized “The autumn marathon of good deeds,” where 26,000 people reportedly benefited. The action engaged volunteers from 9 cities and 23 municipalities in activities such as collecting garbage, raising money for people who were ill, and distributing aid to the poor.

Dagestan, like other republics, annually hosts several youth fora, including an international youth forum “The Caspian” and a regional forum “Peaceful Caucasus.” Young people are encouraged and trained to apply and participate in the federally organized contests. Last year Dagestani youth received 18.7 million rubles (280K USD) for 79 social projects in the Mashuk forum.¹¹⁸

Municipalities also organize events. “They visit mosques, and meet with at-risk groups, they talk to them, they invite them to the administration. Representatives of the Interior Ministry and the FSB are all engaged,” the director of an extremism prevention center in the south of Dagestan told us.¹¹⁹

However, the feedback on these activities is often reserved: “In the municipality, we have an an-

¹¹⁶ “Школьникам рассказали, как обезопасить себя в интернете” [“Schoolchildren were told how to protect themselves on the Internet”], Ministry of Youth Affairs for the Republic of Dagestan, 5 December 2017.
¹¹⁷ “Студенты Даггосуниверситета участвуют в поисковой экспедиции в Ленинградской области” [“Students of Daggos University are participating in a search expedition in the Leningrad region”], RIA Dagestan, 4 May 2018.
¹¹⁸ “Дагестанцы стали лидерами по количеству выигранных грантов на форуме ‘Машук – 2018’” [“Dagestanis were the leaders in the number of grants won at the forum ‘Mashuk – 2018’”], RIA Dagestan, 21 September 2018.
¹¹⁹ CAPC interview, Sevil Novruzova, Director of an extremism prevention center, Derbent, March 2017.
ti-terrorism committee, but they are idlers. They invite us (a school or class) and some retired traffic policeman delivers a three-year old report,” a teacher from rural Dagestan told CAPC.120

Local schools carry out prevention work by implementing the federal and regional programmatic documents. Usually, the CVE programs in schools have several elements, including: “the development of a legal culture,” tolerance, “respect of the law,” rules of behavior in emergency situations, patriotism, and “intolerance towards the ideology of terrorism and extremism.”121

These elements are implemented through the school curriculum, extra-curricular engagements, in contests (for drawings or essays in school newspapers), roundtable discussions, pupil’s councils, and parents’ committees, and engage children of all ages. The schools are also required to place significant emphasis on patriotic education, which often means the glorification of military victories and the heroization of war veterans (to this end, meetings with veterans of the Second World War or of the war in Afghanistan are regularly organized).

Similar to Chechnya, the titles of many school events and their subsequent topics are reminiscent of the Soviet analogues, like roundtable discussions dubbed “Terrorism – a threat to society,” or public actions titled “When we are united, we are undefeatable.”

Perhaps the most emotional event of the year is the Solidarity Against Terrorism day, commemorated on September 3 every year. On 1 September 2004, 1,200 people were taken hostage by terrorists in Middle School #1 in the North Ossetian town of Beslan, and on 3 September, 334 people (186 of them children) were killed during the storming of the building.

On the Solidarity Against Terrorism days, schools organize memorial events commemorating the tragedy in Beslan. Usually, short documentaries or videos about Beslan are shown, sometimes children make sketches or put on small performances.122

Some schools have more personalized approaches.

“We teach them purity of thoughts, purity in relations with each other. We teach them not to take bribes, that Islam does not even allow bank interests so no one can take extras [for services]. We talk a lot of morality. In our school, children don’t bully each other. No one mistreats kids with handicaps. It is a huge effort to achieve this,” a school principle in the north of Dagestan told CAPC. “We also speak a lot about radicalism. Every 1st of September we speak about Beslan, and it is not just as a formality. We want every heart to feel this pain, we want them to weep for these children.”123

120 CAPC interview, secondary school teacher, Dagestan, September 2018.
121 CAPC interview, school teacher in Dagestan, Khasavyurt, October 2018.
122 “Мы не забудем никогда”. Литературно-театрализованное представление посвятили памяти жертв Беслана” [“We will never forget.” Literary and dramatic performances dedicated to the memory of the victims of Beslan”]. Mirmol, 3 September 2018.
123 CAPC interview, school principle, Dagestan, September 2018.
Video materials for CVE are usually produced by regional or local television channels, or by Ministries of Youth. They include short clips and longer documentaries, some of which are quite high quality, while others are blatant propaganda or very tedious. “We get commissions for such production,” an editor of one of the local TV channels told us, “but honestly, we didn’t know how to do it, I am a little ashamed for the quality of the output and to speak frankly, I saw it as a way to earn a little extra money.”

CVE work is also done at the university level and in vocational schools. Our youth interlocutors however, were skeptical about their effects:

According to a 3rd year medical student in Makhachkala, “They (the representatives of the Spiritual Board) cram us into the class, 150 people, maybe one or two students are listening to them, some are playing with their phones, others are doing homework for the next class... Every month or so they come, sometimes it is interesting, but mostly they cannot present things attractively... He says ‘they (ISIS) are Wahhabis, it is wrong’, but no real arguments. People who go there (to ISIS) are those who have delved into religion very deeply.... He already has knowledge of religion, but he will listen if they bring him strong arguments. If he is not dumb or a fanatic, he will listen. Because he feels strongly about these issues, he is ready to die for them. You can cure a soul with your words if you bring good arguments and explain things eloquently. But here comes this... in a skull-cap (he means ironically, a Sufi) and sells you this crap.”

According to the chief-editor of a republican newspaper, Dagestani counter-narratives are indeed often an over-emotional form of propaganda without due arguments. A local official seconded the sentiment, “Sometimes I get angry when I attend conferences. They get together, pronounce their slogans to each other, spend lots of money and go home, while the problem remains.”

C. Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkariya

CVE efforts in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkariya bare close similarities to what has been described for Dagestan, however, the intensity of the propaganda work is lower, most likely due to the lower intensity of conflict. The Ingush State Committee for Youth Affairs, Ministry for Nationalities, Ministry of Education and Science, representatives of the Anti-terrorist Committee, the clergy, pro-government youth organizations and other volunteer unions are all involved in prevention efforts.

Like in Dagestan, the authorities offer the youth alternatives through controlled government channels, mainly emphasizing social volunteering as a social lift and mechanism of positive engagement. Apart from volunteering, the republic develops other movements aimed to protect healthy and moral lifestyles, such as, “Antilyrika” (a movement combatting what is known as “pharmaceutical drug-addiction”) and the recently emerged movement “Antisikhr” (combating spiritualism, sortilege and

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124 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, editor of a TV channel in Dagestan, Makhachkala, March 2017.
125 CAPC interviews and focus group discussion with youth conducted by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia February 2017.
126 Lirika is a pharmaceutical that can be bought strictly with a doctor’s prescription in any pharmacy for epilep-
witchcraft). This is another way to encourage youth self-realization and raise their significance in
the society. Also, the important dimension here is the perceived Islamic angle of such activities. The
republican authorities, if they do not directly create such organizations, clearly support (in the case
of Antilyrika) or do not disrupt (in the case of Antisikhr) their activities.127

The Committee for Youth Matters (Committee for Youth) holds weekly capacity building trainings
that help young people apply for various federal events, fora, and grants, and to encourage them to
take advantage of other opportunities. The Republic also organizes its own youth fora, such as Targim,
the intellectual games “Mountains of intellect” (Горы от ума), Brain Ring, and various sports com-
petitions. The Committee for Youth trains young people to apply for grants for the implementation
of small projects; in 2018, at the Mashuk forum, Ingushetia was the leader in the amount of grants
awarded: 23.6 million rubles (340K USD), a visible improvement compared to the 2.4 million (35K)
awarded to Ingush participants in 2016.128

Ingushetia also promotes federally produced CVE videos, which are usually done by the National
Anti-terrorism Committee, that inform the audience about the strict criminal responsibility for ter-
rorism-related crimes and long prison sentences.129

In 2018, the Committee for Youth implemented a training program called “DISlike Extremism” for
high school, college and vocational school students in the republic.130 It aimed to discuss internet se-
curity, the dangers of terrorist ideology, and various mechanisms of recruitment. Unlike the Peaceful
Dagestan initiative, this training has an extensive Q&A section and in the end encourages the young
people to join the volunteer corpus on the spot.

Ingushetia’s Committee for Youth seems to be an effective institution managing state-civil society
cooperation on CVE. “We have never perceived the Committee for Youth Affairs as a government
organization. They have always been creative, open, and very accessible; it was very easy to cooperate
with them,” Ingush CVE practitioner, Marieta Dzeitova, noted.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, counter-narratives are massively disseminated through local media.
Republican TV channels organize lectures and discussions on the issues of Islam and the war in the Middle
East. “They are showing roundtables almost every week, they discuss extremism and al-Baghdadi; but the
people who participate in this, most of the population will not listen to them,” an Ingush activist told CAPC.

127 CAPC Interview, Ingush expert, email, December 2018.
128 “Ингушетия стала лидером в СКФО по количеству грантов на форуме ‘Машук’” [“Ingushetia became the leader
in the NCFD in the number of grants at the ‘Mashuk’ Forum”], Press Service of Ingushetia, 19 September 2018.
129 “Антитеррор 2018 – Денежные переводы” [“Antiterror 2018 – Money Transfers”], video posted by Magas Munici-

130 “В Ингушетии продолжаются мероприятия из цикла ‘DISlike to extremism’ continue in Ingushetia”], video posted by Committee of Youth Affairs for the Republic of Ingushetia, 15
December 2017.
Scholars of CVE emphasize that dialogue is one of the most essential tools for counter-radicalization, however, in the conditions of the authoritarian state, free and sincere discussion that can convince youth is very difficult to achieve. Many local interlocutors said that the authorities do not want respected community leaders to discuss radicalization issues as they will inevitably touch upon push factors of radicalization, which will, in their view, harm the legitimacy of the regime.

Yet in Ingushetia, critical imams, including moderate Salafis, can speak in mosques and thereby produce counter-narratives from their religious positions that are much more convincing for the already radicalizing youth.

One such imam (Ingush, but popular throughout the Caucasus) is the charismatic Khamzat Chumakov. According to an Ingush political activist close to Chumakov:

“Around 70 people reconsidered going to Syria after talking to Khamzat, they either sought his advice themselves or their relatives brought them to him. Khamzat explained that the Prophet told us that one should run away from a place where there is fitna (distress, disagreement) among Muslims. A Muslim has to run away from such a place because he doesn’t know which side he should belong to. He also quoted many reliable hadith to prove his points. During khutbas (Friday sermons) he several times explained that Muslims are being used to incite war in the Middle East, and that where there are fitnas, a Muslim has no right to join. He is very open to anyone who has questions; you can stay after prayer and talk to him. This really helps to persuade [against travelling to Syria].”

Moderate Salafi voices speaking against ISIS used to also be heard in Dagestan; however, in the last several years most of the popular Salafi mosques were closed, while moderate Salafi imams who spoke about ISIS were threatened by the security services, ISIS, or both.

“They have received text messages and direct threats, they [ISIS] said ‘when we return... you will be the first ones hung here, you are the traitors who should be dealt with as a priority,’” a Salafi activist told CAPC. In 2016, ISIS published a table with portraits of Salafi leaders from across the North Caucasus titled those “who tore apart their religion,” which included imam Khamzat Chumakov. According to our sources, since the fall of 2018 after the mass protests broke out in Ingushetia related to the territorial dispute with Chechnya, Khamzat Chumakov and the Ingush Salafi imams have declined in popularity due to the fact that they abstained from supporting these actions. Nonetheless, they are still the authorities on religious issues with a significant part of youth, while their position on the protests increased the republican authorities’ acceptance of them.

131 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, Bagaudin Khautiev, Ingush political activist, Nazran, March 2017.
132 Mass protests in Ingushetia started in October 2018 after the heads of Chechen and Ingush Republics signed an agreement on administrative borders between the two republics. The Ingush protesters are confident that this agreement annexed a significant part of Ingushetia in favor of Chechnya. Salafi imams oftentimes do not support mass protest rallies. Here, they were citing danger of violence being used against the protesters and fear of fitna (conflict, schism) among the republican Muslims, they also did not support the protests. CAPC observations and interviews, Nazran, October 2018.
In addition to counter-narratives, alternative narratives are offered by independent local NGOs. The Ingush NGO Genesis Fund is organizing methodologically sophisticated trainings with young people, youth NGOs, and youth leaders in four republics in cooperation with republican governments. The trainings approach CVE from various angles: they teach tolerance, conflict-management, leadership, team-building skills, and the basics of information security; they discuss the involvement of women in extremist networks; and engage public associations, student self-government and volunteering networks. The project also teaches youth trainers, facilitates surveys measuring support for extremist ideology, hosts video-conferences and webinars, and acts as a resource center for CVE practitioners. From the perspective of CAPC, this is one of the best regional CVE initiatives.

In general, the Ingush approaches to prevention look quite constructive, and according to Ingush experts, the republican authorities are indeed trying to demonstrate a large scale of prevention work; however, many of their activities remain at the level of declarations of intent. In January 2017, the Ingush authorities announced the creation of the Coordination Council of Youth Organizations, which was aimed to work with relatives and family members of former fighters. And in February, the first ever in Russia public council was set up to work with relatives of participants and victims of violent conflict.\textsuperscript{133} Since their announcements however, no information about the activities of these councils has been made publically available or could be informally obtained: they seem to exist only on paper. Moreover, some of the initiatives could not be implemented due to a lack of funds. For example, the human rights council working under the auspices of the republican Head Yunus-Bek Yevkurov planned a number of CVE conferences and seminars in 2018; however, none of them ever took place.\textsuperscript{134}

Kabardino-Balkariya is the only republic which has created a ministerial position for extremism prevention. In July 2015, the then Head of the Republic, Yury Kokov, announced the new institution for coordinating activities of the executive agencies in extremism prevention and youth policy.\textsuperscript{135} The aim of the Ministry, which does not have any apparatus or structural units, is to coordinate republican and municipal efforts on prevention. Kabardino-Balkariya does not have a separate Youth Policy Ministry or State Committee, the mainstream youth policy is implemented through the Ministry of Enlightenment and Youth Policy, while CVE efforts are implemented by nearly all agencies dealing with youth, including the new Extremism Prevention Minister, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of KBR, the Ministry of Sports, and the Ministry for Interactions with Civil Society Agencies and Nationalities Affairs.

The methods for CVE in KBR are similar to those in Dagestan and Ingushetia: there are frequent meetings in universities and vocational schools, youth fora,\textsuperscript{136} and village gatherings against extremism, which often feature Soviet-type declarative titles such as “Youth of the village Lechinkay against

\textsuperscript{133} “В Ингушетии создадут молодежный совет по социализации семей членов \textit{НВФ}” [“In Ingushetia, they will create a youth council for the socialization of families of members of illegal armed groups”], Ingushetia.ru, January 2017. “В Ингушетии образован Совет по социализации семей участников и жертв вооруженных конфликтов” [“In Ingushetia, the Council for the socialization of the families of participants and victims of armed conflicts has been established”], Ingushetia.ru, 14 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{134} CAPC interview, Ingush expert, email, December 2018.
\textsuperscript{135} “Залим Каширков became Minister for the Prevention of Extremism in Kabardino-Balkaria”, Caucasus Knot, 3 August 2015.
\textsuperscript{136} For example, in 2018 the following fora took place: “Время действовать” [“Time to Act”], “Дружный Кавказ”
terrorism and extremism and for strengthening inter-confessional and inter-ethnic agreement.” During such meetings, municipal officials, clergy, and pro-government NGO activists make speeches and play videos condemning terrorism and extremism. Another genre of CVE is evidenced in the so-called heroic-patriotic events, such as “We are against terrorism!” where children watch films, give presentations about the killed policemen, present their drawings, and recite poems. Being a multi-ethnic republic, Kabardino-Balkariya also organizes ethnic tolerance activities aimed at overcoming tensions and fostering dialogue. Republican events dedicated to overcoming intra-confessional contradictions within the Muslim ummah are a strategic development.

The government-supported NGOs are also active in KBR and sometimes initiate such gatherings. The most active actor in this field is the organization Peace to your home, led by Sufadin Shibzukhov, a former investigator and a member of the Public Council of the republican Interior Ministry, who has received a Presidential Grant for this work. Shibzukhov has a tragic personal story: his son who worked in the republican police was brutally killed by fighters and beheaded. After this, the grief-stricken father started this preventive work. Other active NGOs are KBROO Patriot, Youth Army, the republican branch of the veteran organization Combat Brotherhood (Boevoe bratstvo) and various search organizations.

An interesting development in Kabardino-Balkariya is that some of its CVE officials have reportedly started coming to the understanding that direct confrontational counter-narratives are not effective. “The recent tendency is that the ministries don’t want to engage in counter-narratives directly, straightforwardly. But during each event, they indirectly shape the perception that we are for peace and against terror. They offer alternatives. Some don’t even emphasize this on their websites, but they do events in compliance with the profile of their organization,” Ekaterina Surkova, coordinator of the Together project led by Genesis in KBR told to CAPC.

She explained that in her previous capacity she was a social trainer in one of the ministries and together with the State Drug Control Agency used to visit schools and have conversations with high school students about drug abuse. “I realized that when we explained different psychotropic substances, that the children didn’t know about them. But after our lectures they learned [what they were]. Same with terrorism, there is no need to promote it by talking too much about it.”
The distinctive feature of the KBR approach is the active position of the Ministry of Sports as athletes have been identified as a target audience for terrorists. “They are strong in spirit, have a strong will, and they are brought up with the idea that the word of the trainer is law, which means they have respect for authority – that’s why terrorists want them. We did a training for athletes on tolerance and inter-cultural dialogue and there we directly explained to them that, ‘guys, you are in a category that is attractive to terrorists, they like you,’” Surkova noted. Surkova together with the Ministry of Sports plans to do trainings in sports-clubs and gyms, where they will try to also engage the trainers, “because informal education is more effective, the trainers should help us in countering the radicalization of youth into extremist communities.”

In higher educational institutions, the scale of CVE efforts is definitely more modest than in Chechnya: “They (government) don’t do anything here at the university; maybe they did come a few times, got all of the students into one room and lectured them there, but there is no systematic effort at prevention. And this is great! With their formalist, propagandist approaches they will only harm the youth and will make them more interested in the forbidden fruit,” a professor of one of the leading republican higher education institutions told us.

Independent experts in KBR also note a lack of critical thinking development and the absence of free and meaningful discussions of the radicalization issue. “I am working very closely on such issues but I have never been invited to any program on local radio or television [to discuss CVE issues]. It is very important to have an ongoing, free discussion in the media, to organize forums, to work separately with youth and parents...But there are no such authentic discussions because in the end, we will anyway come to the conclusion that we would not have such problems if we had free media, independent courts and real elections,” the leader of the Kabardino-Balkar Human Rights Center told CAPC.

D. Religious counter-narratives?

The role of religious education and counter-narratives in CVE is a disputed issue. The general approach in the region is to promote and even enforce what is usually referred to as “traditional Islam,” as a way to combat fundamentalism.

Most traditional Muslims in the region support the idea of early religious education as they consider this knowledge to be a central and internalized counter-narrative, a vaccine against religious radicalism. “My mother taught me how to pray. This was in the Soviet times; the village shop was located in the former mosque, but everybody prayed. I probably do not know the religious arguments so well, but I have deep iman (faith). The neophytes came to Islam at the age of 20–30,

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142 CAPC interview, Ekaterina Surkova, coordinator of the project “Together!” in Kabardino-Balkariya, phone call, November 2018.
143 CAPC interview, university professor, Nalchik, October 2018.
144 CAPC interview, Valery Khatazhukov, Director of Kabardino-Balkar Human Rights Center, Nalchik, October 2018.
145 In the North Caucasus, traditional usually refers to Sufism in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, and other types of ethnic Islamic practices in Kabardino-Balkariya and Karachay-Cherkessia (where Sufi tradition is weak). “Traditional Islam” is thought to be a more tolerant strand in Islam, interwoven with local ethnic traditions and generally accepting and cooperative with the secular authorities. Experts of Islam criticize this term for its lack of clarity and the disputed nature of what should be considered “traditional” in this region.
they are very precise in their external attributes of faith, but they have less faith itself. Because for them, faith has never been a childhood fairytale as it was for me. For me, this [faith] is the most remarkable and happy thing, something that my mom taught me,” a former Dagestani security official told us.146

In Chechnya, authorities enforce traditional Islam aggressively, which they see as the key tool in preventing extremist ideology. Imams carry out active propaganda work in schools, and in every school one deputy principle responsible for the moral-spiritual education of the children is appointed by the Spiritual Board. “Usually these are young men who can’t find other employment; it’s an easy job that doesn’t require many qualifications. They treat this work very formally,” a teacher from Grozny explained to CAPC. Ingushetia, on the other hand, teaches Islam in school from the fourth to the eleventh grade twice a week, girls and boys separately.147 Imams also visit schools in Ingushetia. “Khizir Tsoloev, the imam of the Central Mosque is visiting schools every week, he is telling youngsters that it is forbidden to kill people, that they should pray, that they should not smoke or take drugs, that they should listen to their parents. In Nazran, high school students are brought to the mosque in an organized manner every Friday,” a resident of the town told us.148

Paradoxically, in Dagestan, the republic with probably the most conservative population of the North Caucasus, the educational system defends its secular nature. The older generation of Soviet educators has more cautious attitudes towards religious education; however, even they have now allowed some presence of the religious figures.

“We have to focus on a moral upbringing. I will not let religion into my school. They organize contests, with questions of ‘how many times was the Prophet Muhammed married’. Why does a child need to learn this at an early age? We should delicately, without any pressure, tell them what it means to be a true Muslim, explain the logic and meaning of what Allah taught us. I tell them you should pray 5 times a day to not be lazy, to be healthy, not to get sick,” a school principle told us.

Such attitudes are seen as a problem by the younger generation of CVE practitioners, such as the Ministry of Youth staff. “There are very strong Islamophobic positions in the republican educational system. The schools have distanced themselves from the imams, hence our serious problems now. The subject on ‘Introduction to religious cultures and secular ethics’ is introduced in the 4th grade, instead of the 8th grade, which is too early. Moreover, our school principals tried to convince the parents to choose secular ethics, not Islamic culture,” one of the CVE practitioners told us. Nonetheless, in Dagestan, every municipal district has special “enlightenment units” of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD) that are tasked with the religious education of the population. They do not receive any salaries from the state, but they have oral agreements to visit schools and conduct “enlightenment” work. Some schools however, are reluctant to invite them:

146 CAPC interview, CVE expert, Makhachkala, December 2016.
147 The official course description is indicated as “history of religion” or “introduction to world religions and secular ethics.”
148 CAPC interview, resident of Nazran, March 2017.
“This ‘traditional Islam’ and the Spiritual Boards have done much harm. They provoke radicalism and hostilities among people [who are followers of different strands in Islam]. They say ‘give money to the mosque’, but never say ‘invest in education, build a kindergarten, a road, a school.’ They promote polygamy. They support the rich and powerful, who have earned their money in dishonest ways. [If] he stole money, but went to hajj and donated to the mosque, then all his sins are cleared. A kind of trade with God,” the school principle noted.

“This criticism could have been valid years ago,” say the supporters of a religious approach, “but now we have lots of young people among the clergy, who speak good Arabic, who undergo capacity-building trainings. They are modern, educated, and have even gone through public speaking courses,” a Ministry of Youth representative defended his cause.

Whatever the dispute, de facto religion plays a key role in public and family life in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, and has already assumed an important role in the regional CVE efforts. Therefore, it is very hard to ignore it altogether. However, promoting one religious strand in Islam over others is polarizing and should be beyond the scope of a secular educational system. “Religion should not be taught as part of the school curriculum, especially with the kind of spiritual teachers we have. Otherwise, religion turns into state ideology that has nothing to do with faith, mullahs turn into state officials serving the interests of the authorities, all while the youth is looking for their own road to the temple,” a Chechen school teacher explained.”149

E. Evaluating success and challenges

In the last several years, the CVE efforts in the North Caucasus have become massive. We can identify a number of clear achievements to this end:

1. The extensive CVE efforts in the region have led to the successful internalization by the youth that the ideas promoted by extremism and terrorism are strongly condemned by the society and state, and that terrorist offences are strictly punishable by the law.

In recent years, the CVE community in the region has become large and quite vibrant, the pro-government NGOs are enjoying solid financial support from the state. Independent civil society is also being integrated into this work. “When we started five years ago, this was the exclusive domain of the security services. In the first year [of our work], all of the controlling agencies (prosecutor’s office, security officials, etc.) checked on us and were very interested in why we got involved in such a theme. Gradually, with difficulty, the potential of NGOs has been recognized and utilized. Now, we (civil society) are nearly equal [with the state]. Some issues the security services are eagerly transferring to the NGOs, education and enlightenment work for example,” Ingush practitioner and chair of the Genesis Fund Marieta Dzejtova, noted.

149 CAPC interview, school teacher, Chechnya, May 2018.
A pool of methodology and video materials has been created, albeit within the framework of the government approaches, but which nonetheless make dissemination of CVE counter-narratives easier.

The volunteer movement and small grant programs have allowed some active youth leaders to channel their energy towards socially oriented projects. They have learned how to apply for grants, compete for funding, and implement and report on their projects, which are useful civil society skills.

In Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, some new approaches are being sought out and tested, which opens new windows for innovation.

In some republics, the authorities have started to understand that offering alternatives rather than counter-narratives might be a more effective strategy.

Many challenges remain, however. They can be summarized as follows:

Credibility of messengers

Apart from educators the government primarily trusts pro-government, patriotic organizations and the traditional clergy affiliated with the Spiritual Boards, however, these messengers miss a large portion of the youth who do not find them credible. In most of the republics, government officials and the clergy avoid discussing any difficult topics of regional socio-political problems, geopolitics, and specifically the war in Syria; sometimes because they lack sophisticated arguments, other times because they are fearful of the security services’ reactions.

Insufficient credibility of the official messengers affects even independent organizations: “There is a crisis of trust in the government institutions; this CVE theme has been abused by the officials and now every time we come to a new youth group we have to overcome this,” a local NGO practitioner told us.

The crisis of trust concerns the entire older generation that is perceived as: “The adults who have lied [to the youth] too much. When we approach the youth, we are also seen as representatives of the generation that is lying, pretending, and we need to overcome this,” she continued.150

Boredom and fatigue

Most of the CVE efforts are still very formal, low quality, tedious enterprises. The youth is tired even of the more creative trainings. “‘Oh, extremism again’, is the first reaction we get when entering a new classroom,” explained a trainer from Ingushetia, “the youth is really tired of this topic.”

The lack of creativity is particularly striking in Chechnya, but in the other republics as well, this aspect must be urgently improved to avoid making CVE efforts counter-productive.

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150 CAPC interview, CVE practitioner, Magas, May 2018.
“In my opinion, there is no creativity in Kabardino-Balkariya. This is because those who choose CVE as their main focus are the older generation. It is very hard to expect creativity from them,” Ekaterina Surkova explained. A lack of initiative and enthusiasm on behalf of the implementers likewise contributes to the low quality of events. As Dagestan’s Youth Ministry specialist acknowledged, “Unfortunately, not everyone really cares, it’s a human factor, often the CVE events are formal and boring.”

The local experts are aware of these challenges and are looking for new approaches: “We need to switch from empty propaganda and slogans to counter-narratives based on analysis of ISIS recruitment materials. We need to analyze the radical content in order to understand how it affects the youth, which strings they pull and which feelings they manipulate, and we should use these same ‘weapons’ in counter radicalization,” one of them told us.151

Indeed, youth tire quickly of highly normative ideological engagements. They need activities that will reflect their genuine interests; these should be modern, forward-looking, trendy, cool, and use the language and tools that they find appealing.

Success-stories of government-led CVE are personalized, not institutional

Higher quality and fresh ideas appear when CVE work is implemented by independent NGOs or committed officials or educators. The personalized nature of success however, prevents the institutionalization of the successful experiences.

Lack of mechanisms for collecting and disseminating best practices

Many experts explained to CAPC that there is no mechanism for collecting and supporting best practices. “We don’t learn from each other’s experiences. There’s no platform for exchange. We meet at one-day conferences, we make our presentation, everybody likes it very much, and then we go home and that is it,” Mikail Mikailov of the Youth Ministry of Dagestan told us. At the same time, organizations often intentionally do not share their approaches and methods, as they are afraid of a “plagiarism of ideas.” Sometimes best practices are developed in the framework of the specially created structures, but they are not being implemented. Thus, in Ingushetia a consultative-analytical council for prevention of extremism was created in 2012 which developed a detailed roadmap and programs. However, according to our sources, none of its proposals were actually integrated into the republican policy.152

Methodological hunger

Although a body of methodological materials has been created, to take the expression of one NGO practitioner, “the methodology of most of the initiatives and programs are quite lame.” In addition, assessments of the available tools are not always easy to understand: “It is very hard for an average

151 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, CVE practitioner, Makhachkala, March 2017.
152 CAPC interview, Ingush CVE expert, Magas, March 2017.
teacher at a school to make her way through the bulk of the existing literature and make her own methodological decisions,” the practitioner noted.153

**Insufficiency of one-time efforts. Negative influence of other milieus.**

Several practitioners have emphasized that it is hard to influence youth in a one-time event. Longer seminars, weekly camps, or regular courses can have more sustainable effects. “We teach them tolerance and respect for other people, but after the training, young people go home and they face very different values in the family... sometimes it feels like it’s a futile effort. The positive thing is that young people today are learning to think critically for themselves, they don’t challenge their parents directly, but they still choose their own way,” Dzeitova noted.

**General concerns about efficiency of direct counter-narratives**

Finally there is a general problem with counter-narratives being the central approach the government relies on. International experts warn that extremist propaganda attracts only specific individuals, and that addressing the entire population to reach a few is risky.154

First, such broad counter-narratives may make the problem appear bigger than it actually is. Second, for those who are seeking adventures, such counter-narratives can solidify their heroic perception of terrorist groups. And most importantly, and as has been shown in part one of this report, the root causes and factors conducive to radicalization are many and diverse. The appeal of jihadist propaganda is extremely varied and complex. Counter-narratives presuppose a simple causal relationship between ideology and violent actions and do not address other factors such as feelings of alienation, isolation, or indignation for perceived injustices; a lust for revenge, adventure or violence; or a search for belonging and significance.

In addition to engaging with the ideology by attempting to refute it, attempts should be made to identify and provide alternative ways of serving the purposes which violent ideology is used as a substitute for. This is important especially for young people, who are not looking forward to being persuaded or ideologically brainwashed but to be informed, talked to and debated with.

Open debates about difficult subjects, where constructive, productive and feasible ways of engaging with challenging political issues can be identified, should be encouraged. Organizing humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees or returnees to Syria, human rights volunteering, and engaging in other uncontrolled social and political activism, including protests, will help to positively and constructively channel frustrations within the framework of law. Any alternative activities should be meaningful and feel genuine for those involved.

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153 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, CVE expert, Nazran, March 2017.
The possibility of “reversing” the violent radicalization process is one of the core issues that is disputed amongst regional CVE practitioners, and family members and friends of individuals affected by radicalization. The cousin of a Chechen fighter killed in Syria said: “If he has decided [to join jihadists], nothing would make him reconsider. Those who make up their minds are looking for confirmation of their decision; they connect with other people who hold radical views. They limit their communication with others, they stop listening.”

Both traditional and Salafi Islamic leaders emphasized the challenge:

“ISIS is the passion of the soul, if you are in passion’s captivity, logic doesn’t work,” the Mufti of North Ossetia told us.155 “If a person has ISIS in his head, he is hopeless, I don’t even talk to them,” a moderate Salafi leader from Dagestan said. Yet, many in the region believe this is not an impossible mission and that people “with a reputation for honesty and fairness,” be they religious figures, community leaders or educators, should be able to have a positive impact.

The degree of influence that can be exerted on individuals visibly moving closer to violent networks and the appropriate approach depend on the stage of radicalization and the individual characteristics of the radicalized person. Identification of the stage, degree and type of radicalization requires specific knowledge and significant experience.

Along with the ideological work that was analyzed in the previous sections, CVE measures implemented by the authorities in the North Caucasus are also aimed at controlling already radical individuals and containing their capacity to spread their beliefs. Historically, “at risk groups” have been defined very broadly in the region, especially in Chechnya, and at time have included potentially all Salafi believers. The security services treated adherence to fundamentalist beliefs as a pre-criminal stage of terrorism. In Dagestan, the 1999 republican law on the “Ban of Salafism and other forms of religious extremism” was adopted by its People’s Assembly after the incursion of Islamist groups from Chechnya.156 Although it has never been enforced, it has freed the hands of the local police, who could now arbitrarily identify people as extremists and subject them to repressive measures. Most of the police stations created informal registers of “Wahhabis” in their areas and used them to monitor, detain and interrogate people after each insurgency-related incident. Oftentimes, detainees would be subjected to torture and sometimes disappeared, which according to experts, led to the visible radicalization of parts of the Salafi community in Dagestan.

155 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, Khadzhimurat Gatsalov, Mufti of North Ossetia, Vladikavkaz, March 2017.
156 “О запрете ваххабитской и иной экстремистской деятельности на территории Республики Дагестан (с изменениями на 6 февраля 2018 года)” (“On the prohibition of Wahhabi and other extremist activities on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan (as amended on 6 February 2018”), Republic of Dagestan, 6 February 2018.
Kabardino-Balkaria was also notorious for extrajudicial harassment of fundamentalist Muslims. The repressions were most acute in early 2000s and led to the radicalization of a Kabardino-Balkar Salafi jamaat and an ensuing large-scale insurgent attack on the republican capital of Nalchik in 2005.157 CAPC interlocutors articulated an acute need to improve the quality of the tools used to identify and assess an individual's readiness to commit violence. This is a serious challenge and a big international debate. Relevant federal and regional authorities should invest effort to collect and analyze the best Russian and international practices, carry out additional research and come up with more adequate solutions.158

Soft-power approaches have also been tested. Between 2010–2012 in Dagestan, under the presidency of Magomedsalam Magomedov, a new policy was adopted that liberalized the state’s attitude to the republic’s sizeable Salafi population; the policy stopped their harassment, launched efforts at increased dialogue, facilitated reconciliation between the Salafi and the Sufi leaders, and let Salafis participate in public life. These policies have resulted in a significant decrease of intra-confessional tensions.159 Within two years, the decade-long marginalization and alienation of its sizeable Salafi community had visibly decreased.160 This is a very important development given that these milieus have a tendency of self-isolation and often create parallel social networks and realities, which in its turn can be conducive to radicalization. Yet liberalization was half-hearted, and while the political authorities promoted dialogue, law enforcement agencies continued their indiscriminate heavy-handed methods. The experiment was suspended after the assassination of Dagestan’s most prominent Sufi sheikh Said-afandi Chirkeyski, who was killed by a female suicide bomber in August 2012 and then completely rolled back by the following pre-Olympic crackdown on Salafism.161

Similar measures were adopted in Ingushetia where since 2008, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov has insisted on the integration of law-abiding Salafis and intra-confessional dialogue; furthermore, he defended the continued functioning of Ingushetia’s 13 Salafi mosques, insisting that they are properly registered and included in the Spiritual Board of Muslims.162 In Ingushetia, the liberalization and integration policies have worked, have been maintained until now, and to a significant extent have contributed to the reduction of violence. At the same time, the attempts of intra-confessional dialogue have failed, and the intra-confessional schism between the republican Sufis and Salafis in Ingushetia has deep-

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159 The deep intra-confessional schism between Sufis and Salafis in three republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia) dates back to late 1990s and has largely fuelled the armed conflict. “Традиционного ислама на Северном Кавказе нет” [“There is no traditional Islam in the North Caucasus”], Lenta, 4 March 2015. “The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (II), Islam, the Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency”, International Crisis Group, 19 October 2012.
162 “Отлучить от республики. Как давний конфликт привел к отрешению Юнус-Бека Евкурова от мусульманской общины” [“Excommunicated from the republic. How an old conflict led to the removal of Yunus-Bek Yevkurov from the Muslim community”], MediaZone, 29 May 2018.
ened, mostly due to the personal conflict between the republican leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and the Mufti Issa Khamkhoev.

5.1. “Preventive work” with Salafi believers

Chechnya and Dagestan apply the most heavy-handed “preventive measures” against Salafi believers. In Chechnya, control and deterrence are seen as the two key pillars of dealing with the groups at risk. The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has publicly stated that people with Salafi views would not be allowed to live in Chechnya and should be killed.163 The official religion of the republic is the declared “path” of Ramzan Kadyrov’s father, Akhmat-Hadji Kadyrov, a Sufi cleric who was killed in a bomb blast in 2004. Any digression from these views is unacceptable.164

Security servicemen systematically detain people with visible symbols of adherence to Salafism, often mistreating them, and sometimes keeping them incommunicado and subjecting them to torture. This can include those who have received a religious education abroad, as they can be forced to publicly retract their beliefs and support the official religious lines.165 Salafi believers can also become easy targets of falsified criminal cases. Ramzan Kadyrov encourages his subordinates to compete in “disclosing” and “bringing to his attention” groups of religious dissenters.166

As mentioned earlier, Kadyrov holds local police, authorities and the clergy personally accountable for the emergence of radical Salafi youth on their territories.167 This makes them particularly “zealous” and aggressive in hunting and disclosing any potential troublemakers. On televised shows, representatives of the authorities and the clergy have been seen begging for Ramzan’s pardon for failing to recognize the signs of radicalization among their youth.168

In Dagestan, the republican Ministry of Internal Affairs came up with the idea of the so-called profuchet (prophylactic/preventive register) of religious extremists; which at its peak in 2015 reportedly had over 16,000 people listed.169 Being on this prevention list resulted in regular detentions at checkpoints and administrative borders, and forced appearances at police stations where one would be made to write an obyasnitelnaya, (explanatory statement), detailing where and why they were trav-
elling. Individuals on profuchet are photographed and finger-printed, their saliva collected and voice samples recorded; they are required to inform the local police of any planned trips, and are subject to de facto restrictions for state-funded employment.

A woman from South of Dagestan told CAPC:

“My husband was sentenced as an insurgent; as a result, I was put on this preventive register. This means I can’t get state employment. Every week, a police officer calls me on my mobile to check [what I am doing]. They want me to inform them whenever I go somewhere out of town. They also check my children; regularly interrogate me, asking ‘how do I provide for my children, why don’t I work.’ And where can I find employment being on their list? Sometimes, they come to the school or kindergarten and interrogate my children in my absence. This is forbidden by law. They ask: ‘What does your mother tell you about Islam? What is your mother doing?’ The teachers are scared; they are also invited to the police stations and are regularly interrogated about children like mine. As a result the teachers are biased against my kids.

Every six months they also have to question the neighbors about us, what are we doing, who comes and visits us. As a result the neighbors are also intimidated. They regularly summon me to the police station, take my fingerprints. Once they came to my home, drunk! The children are very much affected. They are scared; scared of cars, scared of a ringing doorbell. If they see a police car they panic: ‘Mama, what if they take you!’ I feel ashamed [of this situation] and sorry for them”.

The criteria and procedure for adding names to the register is non-transparent and regulated by classified orders in the Interior Ministry. “They put you on this register for 50 years, until 2070,” a Salafi registered on this list told us. “People can get randomly added to these prevention lists; if the neighbor doesn’t like him, he can report him [as an extremist]. The police have to register some people, this is a requirement. Getting off this register is very hard, almost impossible; as a result the situation in our region becomes more tense,” a municipal official explained.

In March 2017, the Minister of the Interior of Dagestan issued a written document that stated that the profuchet lists for extremists were no longer kept. However, local activists say that profuchet still exists informally. “For 6 months now they (the Interior Ministry) are working with the same lists. They have started to visit homes again; they need to produce results by the end of the year, so they have intensified their efforts,” a Dagestani human rights lawyer explained. On a positive note, the general tension related to profuchet has been reduced. “There are many businessmen, [Salafi] Muslims, who walk around with long beards now and no one is harasing them.”

\[170\] CAPC interview, wife of sentenced insurgent, Makhachkala, May 2018.
\[171\] Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, municipal official, Makhachkala, December 2016.
\[172\] “Дагестан: профилактический учет потенциальных экстремистов отменен?” [“Dagestan: was the preventive list of extremists cancelled?”], Memorial HRC, 29 March, 2017.
\[173\] CAPC interview, Murat Magomedov, lawyer at Memorial in Dagestan, Makhachkala, September 2018.
\[174\] CAPC interview, Salafi activist in Dagestan, Makhachkala, September 2018.
5.2. “Preventive” detentions and closure of mosques

After each attack, the Chechen police carry out “preventive” detentions, and apprehend between 150–200 people, according to local activists. Those detained are treated as accomplices and are mostly kept without registration or instigation of criminal cases, and are held in illegal detention facilities.

According to local activists, of the multitude detained, only a small minority are those who may actually have a connection to radical networks. Witnesses, local analysts, activists and defense lawyers believe that the authorities know that the majority of detainees are not guilty, but keep them in detention anyway to deter any future involvement. “They ‘educate’ them there for some time and then release them. In preliminary detention, there are special cells where they do the beatings. They call it ‘prevention’. They think this is generosity; instead of sending them to jail in Russia, they just ‘educate them’ and set them free.”

Local sources suggest that suspects can be kept like this for months. “Relatives don’t complain to any institutions or human rights organizations, they are even afraid to ask about the whereabouts of their children. They just wait and hope. This is meant to bring terror to society,” an NGO member explained. In late 2017, CAPC was contacted by the friends of a group of such detainees, who were kept for three weeks in an illegal detention facility, in an unheated cellar, and fed with one loaf of bread for several people a day. These people were subsequently released without any charges. Relatives usually do not make such cases public out of fear of reprisals.

Since 2017, underage adolescents and teenagers frequently become subject to such pre-emptive arrests in Chechnya. Children are entitled to specific protections under the law, a premise that is unfortunately often ignored. This is not only illegal, but counter-productive: a degree of radicalism is a normal characteristic of the youth and usually does not transform into action, but the traumatic experience of being targeted by police can enable a violent radicalization trend.

In Dagestan, people put on the prouchet list are also subject to recurrent detentions. In addition, the closure of Salafi mosques has been seen as a preventive measure. The Dagestani security services believe that certain mosques facilitated radicalization into violent extremism while the communities that crystallized around them constitute radical milieus. In November 2016, the main Salafi Kotrova mosque in Makhachkala was seized, first by Sufis and then by security services. Subsequently, several other key Salafi mosques across the republic were closed. In 2016 and early 2017, the security services carried out raids on the Tangim mosque in Makhachkala nearly every Friday, detaining 30–200 people each time and putting them on preventive registration lists.

176  CAPC interview, Chechen activists, Grozny, February 2017.
177  CAPC interview, activists, lawyers, former prisoners, Grozny, February 2017.
178  CAPC interviews, local activists and relatives of suspected jihadists, Grozny, March 2017.
180  “Дагестан: массовые задержания прихожан мечети на улице Венгерских бойцов” [“Dagestan: mass arrests of
Closures of mosques were accompanied by unlawful detentions, interrogations, and even torture of popular Salafi imams. Magomedov Magomednabi, a charismatic imam from Khasavyurt was tortured and sentenced to 4.5 years in jail in a fabricated trial. This Salafi imam openly spoke against ISIS and received death threats from the group’s supporters. Memorial Human Rights Group recognized him as political prisoner.

These types of humiliating and disruptive “prevention” procedures have very little practical effect, but produce enormous frustrations and anger, according to CAPC sources including from among government and former security officials. Kabardino-Balkariya and Ingushetia do not keep mass prevention registers or harass Salafis as Dagestan and Chechnya do. As a result, both republics have been more stable security wise.

5.3. Engaging with family members of active, killed and sentenced fighters

The security services identify the widows and wives of killed or sentenced jihadists as a high risk group. Children of killed fighters are also thought to be susceptible to radicalization due to the trauma they have gone through and the anger accumulated in their families. Until recently, security services across the region treated the widows with great suspicion, at best, but more often as accomplices or potential suicide-bombers.

As has been mentioned earlier, family members of fighters have always been targets of acute repression in Chechnya including suffering detentions, beatings, and burning of their homes. Since 2016–2017, we have seen public expulsions of families of killed insurgents from their villages, supposedly organized by ad hoc village councils, however, the authorities are clearly behind these events. In addition, the authorities encourage families of killed policemen to publicly declare blood feuds with the relatives of killed insurgents. They refer to the vendetta tradition that is still practiced in Chechnya, but which they manipulate and change for their own expedience.

As has been analyzed in the previous chapters, the North Caucasus has seen three waves of insurgen-
cy; consequently, there have been three categories of immediate family members of fighters left behind: the spouses and children of nationalist/separatist fighters in Chechnya (killed or sentenced in mid and late 1990s and early 2000s); spouses and children of Imarat Kavkaz fighters (2007–2015); and the wives and children of ISIS and non-ISIS jihadists who joined fights in the Middle East or in the North Caucasus (2013–2017). This amounts to a very significant number of affected people.

While the wives and children of the first category are currently unlikely to be seen as a threat or specifically targeted, the other two categories are monitored closely, with the family-members of the second wave – of IK fighters who joined the local insurgencies and were killed or sentenced to prison terms – being under the most scrutiny.

CAPC analysis shows that especially during the height of Imarat Kavkaz, wives were often disapproving, or perhaps even unaware, of their husbands’ decisions, but must now nonetheless bear the consequences of their jihadi husband’s choices. Recruiters skillfully cut relations between the spouses. “I was twenty-two when my husband left [for insurgency] and pregnant with our second child. In the hospital when I gave birth, a note from him was delivered to me which said that I had to reconcile myself with his choice, that he had left and he would die on this path and that I shouldn’t wait or hope,” a widow of a Chechen suicide bomber told CAPC. “He left me with 10,000 rubles (180 USD) and five children, the youngest of which was two... He later wrote to me from Syria that ‘Allah would take care of us,’” a Dagestani widow of a killed jihadist told us. Radical preachers insist that neither wife, nor family, nor property can be an obstacle on the path of jihad.187

It also happens that girls marry radicals without knowing who they are, or that the husbands radicalize in the later years of marriage. A widow of a suicide-bomber who blew himself up in Chechnya told CAPC: “He abducted me for marriage, directly from the university. I hardly knew him, he saw me several times on the bus when I was going to the university from our village, he invited me for a date, I didn’t like him, so a month later he abducted me. After the abduction, my relatives came and they offered me to return home, but I agreed to stay and marry him, since I knew that my father was very strict and he would give me a very hard time for this.”188

A widow of an emir in Kabardino-Balkariya told CAPC that she married her husband in secret from her family because he already had a wife and her parents disapproved of polygamy. The husband-to-be promised her that he would seek a divorce from his first marriage. Only later did she find out that he had a weapon on him and that he was a fighter.189

While there are many cases where wives did not share the ultra-radical ideologies of their spouses, there are definitely numerous other women who were supporters of the jihadi ideology and were sometimes even more radical than their husbands, driving them or their siblings into the terrorist networks.

188 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, widow of fighter, Chechnya, March 2017.
Regardless of their actual role in Chechnya, the widows and wives of insurgents and terrorists often lose their jobs, their social payments, and any other sources of income. “The director of [place where she worked] apologized and told me that she was ordered to fire me, she had no choice... and I also had to take my children from the kindergarten. I couldn’t control myself and burst into tears. It was very hard to explain to my son why he couldn’t go to the kindergarten that he had enjoyed so much. I felt that they wanted to push me out of there, that they were trying to psychologically destroy me, crush me; I’ve had so much grief myself, but I also felt like a complete outcast. They did it to punish me and to threaten others. They knew very well that I had nothing to do with his (husband’s) activities, that I wasn’t aware [of what he was doing] and I had never helped him, but still they needed to destroy my life,” one of the Chechen widows told us.190

In Dagestan, women are invited to police stations for “preventive conversations” or interrogations: “3–4 adult men were pressuring me psychologically, shouting and swearing. I was pregnant, the attitude was really terrible. While in Russia, I was interrogated by an FSB serviceman, he was very polite, delicate, but our cops are like chained dogs,” a wife of a sentenced insurgent from Dagestan told us.191

In the conditions of protracted conflict, when many policemen have had colleagues and relatives killed by insurgents, the factor of revenge has quite prominently shaped their attitudes towards such women. This probably explains why widows of Imarat Kavkaz fighters are treated with more hatred than returnees from ISIS.

In addition to law-enforcement pressure, widows often find themselves in isolation: “most of my friends have cut all contact with me, some apologized that this was done for security reasons.”192 Not infrequently, the husband’s family tries to take the children from such women, as is tradition in Ingushetia and Chechnya; and sometimes, the woman’s own family is reluctant to care for “the children of a terrorist.”193 Such conditions are not conducive to the rehabilitation or the deradicalization of affected women.

Children of killed or sentenced insurgents, like their mothers, are the focus of attention of the security services, especially after they become teenagers. Recently, much emphasis has been placed on these children getting a full secondary education. Police departments that oversee the matters of the younger children make sure that the children attend schools, to the extent that parents can be deprived of their rights if the children drop out. On a positive note, for several years now no problems have been created at schools for wearing hijabs, as was the case a decade ago which resulted in a significant dropout rate for girls once they reached puberty.

Since 2017, Chechnya and Dagestan have been faced with the new challenge of reintegrating the widows of ISIS fighters who have been returned from Syria and Iraq. On 2 August 2017, Ramzan

190  CAPC interview, Chechen widow of suicide bomber currently living in Europe, Skype, September 2018.
191  North Caucasians often refer to other regions as “Russia.” CAPC interview, wife of sentenced insurgent, Skype, June 2016.
192  CAPC interview, Chechen widow of suicide bomber currently living in Europe, Skype, September 2018.
193  According to customary law in Chechnya and Ingushetia, children as a rule stay with their fathers after a divorce.
Kadyrov returned the first Chechen child from Iraq. His Middle East aide, a Russian senator of Syrian descent, Ziyad Sabsabi, and with support from the Foreign Ministry, began to search for Russian women and children in detention facilities across Syria and Iraq. This turned into one of the most active initiatives to return women and children from Syria and Iraq globally. Since then, 24 women and 105 children have been returned to Russia, according to the Ministry. In December 2017, President Putin endorsed the mission of return and said that “Children, when taken to armed conflict zones, did not make a decision to go there and we have no right to abandon them there.”

In Iraq, the small children, who have already lived through the horrors of war, are incarcerated with their mothers. According to their grandmothers, who sometimes receive phone calls from detention centers, the children remain in hugely overcrowded cells, lack adequate medical aid, suffer from malnutrition, lack proper clothing, and are frequently subjected to acts of hatred and revenge from their captors, many of whom suffered savage violence at the hands of ISIS.

After the first women and children were brought back to Russia, desperate relatives flocked to Chechnya where the pro-government NGO Objective has been tasked with collecting names and managing communications with the families. As of May 2018, its list contained the names of 1,521 women and children who are believed to still remain in Syria and Iraq.

Russian law stipulates that the voluntary surrender of armed groups exempts the members from criminal liability, unless other crimes have been committed. Therefore, most of the repatriated Russian women have been freed by authorities upon their return. Remarkably and unexpectedly, they are treated the most softly in Chechnya; upon their return, they are released to their homes and allowed to rebuild their lives on their own. Returnees in Dagestan, however, have been arrested, and their voluntary statements of surrender have “disappeared” from their case files. Several women have already been sentenced to terms of four to eight years in prison, which they can serve after their children come of age.

“I still can’t believe I’m alive, my children are fed and all of this fear and horror are in the past,” Zagidat Abubakarova, a Dagestani mother of four told CAPC. Abubakarova received 8.5 years in prison for her engagement in ISIS, which was postponed until her youngest child turns 14.

Last April, in Iraq at least 21 Russian women were sentenced to life in prison for joining ISIS, this was determined without due process and without any legal assistance, the provision of which would have taken into consideration their personal circumstances and roles in ISIS. Another 42 women are

194 “Путин похвалил Кадырова за возвращение женщин и детей из Сирии” ["Putin praised Kadyrov for the return of women and children from Syria"], Caucasus Knot, 14 December 2017.
195 CAPC interviews, grandmothers of children remaining in Iraq, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, September 2018.
196 CAPC interview, Kheda Saratova, Objective Director, Alpa Gazieva, Objective staffer, Grozny, September 2018.
197 CAPC interview, Kheda Saratova, Objective Director, Alpa Gazieva, Objective staffer, Grozny, September 2018.
198 “Вернувшаяся из Сирии дагестанка приговорена к 8 годам колонии” ["Dagestani who returned from Syria sentenced to 8 years in prison"], KavkazReali, 24 January 2018. “Спасённая из Ирака девушка получила в Дагестане почти 4.5 года” ["Rescued from Iraq, girl sentenced to nearly 4.5 years in prison in Dagestan"], BBC Russia, 24 January 2018.
199 CAPC interview, Zagidat Abubakarova, returnee from ISIS, Makhachkala, September 2018.
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awaiting sentencing.\textsuperscript{199} According to Kheda Saratova, director of NGO Objective, by the end of 2018, 57 Russian women and 115 of their children officially remained in the Baghdad prison, in addition, according to her, some number of unregistered female prisoners were brought there from various detention centres.\textsuperscript{200}

In December 2017, the return of women from Syria and Iraq stopped. On 7 February 2018 another child was brought from Iraq without her mother. Alexander Bortnikov, director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), said the return of former ISIS fighters to Russia represented a serious threat and that women and children returned through humanitarian corridors are “increasingly being used by the gang leaders of international terrorist organizations as recruiters, suicide bombers or executors of terrorist acts, as well as liaison persons.”\textsuperscript{201} After more than half a year of unexplained inactivity in repatriations, Ramzan Kadyrov announced that the authorities of Chechnya were working on the return of 117 Russian children, with 300 more still residing in coalition camps. Clearly, the security officials are wrestling to push their position and it looks like the return of women is now under question. The Russian authorities seem to remain committed to bringing the children back.

After a long pause, on 30 December 2018, 30 children (27 from Dagestan and Chechnya, the rest from other regions) were brought from Iraq to Moscow. All of them were born in Russia, so their citizenship had been automatically confirmed. Another 26 children should be brought back in January 2019, according to the Children’s Ombudswoman of Russia.\textsuperscript{202}

Despite the ostensible security concerns, as of the writing of this report, neither the women whose husbands were killed or sentenced as jihadists in the North Caucasus, nor the newly returned widows of ISIS fighters undergo any systematic rehabilitation, deradicalization or reintegration programs. Their children are also in need of such programs as family traumas affect them severely. “It is already not easy to lose your father, but because of all that follows, they are constantly living under immense stress.”\textsuperscript{203}

Most of the mothers choose not to tell their children why and how their fathers died until adolescence. The wife of a man who is serving a very long sentence for the attack on Nalchik in 2005 explained: “I have not told them anything yet. They are very sensitive, how can you explain it to them? Should you say, ‘your father is a hero’ or, ‘your father is a terrorist’? They could be fixated on the idea that they are the children of an enemy of the people.”\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{199} "Страшные приговоры, ничего не понятно": как в Ираке судят россиянок за связь с террористами" [“Terrible sentences, nothing is clear’: how Russian women are judged in Iraq for having contact with terrorists"], RT News, 29 April 2018.
\textsuperscript{200} «Возвращаемые из Ирака российские дети находились в тюрьмы с матерями» [“The Russian children returned from Iraq were incarcerated with their mothers in prison”], RIA Novosti, 28 December 2018.
\textsuperscript{201} “ФСБ против Рамзана Кадырова?” [“Is the FSB against Ramzan Kadyrov?”], Paragraphs, 23 November 2018.
\textsuperscript{202} "Нальчанка добилась возвращения внучки из Ирака" [“Resident of Nalchik has achieved the return of her granddaughter from Iraq”], Caucasus Knot, 2 January 2019.
\textsuperscript{203} CAPC interview, widow of ex-insurgent, Skype, September 2018.
\textsuperscript{204} CAPC interview, wife of a sentenced insurgent, Nalchik, October 2017.
Will new waves of radicalization in the North Caucasus be prevented?

Other mothers choose not to hide the truth, especially with older children, but then the children require professional support. “When my husband was arrested, the children were extremely traumatized; they were panicked and fearful, and especially scared of the cars with dark windows that were always following us. The Red Cross psychologists worked with all six of them. Talking sessions, art therapy, they loved it,” the wife of an Ingush man who received a life-sentence for terrorism told CAPC.205

In Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia, the widows and wives of insurgents are not harassed; they can keep their jobs and continue receiving social payments. Children are monitored but without making it too conspicuous or worrying to the families. As a result, the widows are better integrated, children do not live under conditions of stress and are thereby more successful at school and extra-curricular activities. “My kids are under control; I check their phones, their contacts in social media. I have signed them up for a course on Arabic and Islam...Every day I bother them over their studies, the older son goes to a technical (engineering) club, the small one is a footballer, training very seriously, and he also takes courses in English after school,” the wife of a man sentenced to a very long prison term for terrorism in Kabardino-Balkaria told us.206

Ingushetia is the only republic that has announced its priority to address the vulnerabilities of women whose husbands were killed or sentenced for terrorism or insurgency. In 2017, as mentioned earlier, the republic arranged two public councils to this end, which have not yet turned into functional institutions.”207 Yet, the widows are offered psychological help and training in professional skills by local women’s NGO.208

In Ingushetia, the initiative named Turpalkho has organized a military-patriotic summer camp for children of killed insurgents and police officers. The teenagers – without identifying their fathers – were brought together for a regular summer camp. A week before the end of the session, the children were gathered and the identities of their fathers were revealed, which had no impact on their already established relations.209 The key challenge was dealing with the mothers. “Initially the widows on both sides were very hostile to the idea of bringing the children together, however in the end, some of them started to maintain friendly relations, because their children became friends in the camp,” an Ingush practitioner told us.210

Some of Dagestan’s municipalities are also trying to reorient their policies to enable more constructive engagement with such women; some have distributed land slots to families of former combat-

205 Interview by Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in her previous capacity, wife of an Ingush man sentenced for terrorism, Skype, March 2017.
208 CAPC interview, Tamara Malsagova, expert of administration of the Head of Ingushetia, Magas, September 2018.
209 “В Дагестане откроют детдом для детей убитых боевиков и силовиков. Зачем?” [“In Dagestan, they will open an orphanage for the children of dead militants and security officials. What for?”], Meduza, 29 December 2016.
210 CAPC interview, Mareta Dzeitova, Magas, September 2018.
ants, or accepted children to the kindergartens on a priority basis.\textsuperscript{211} They are also trying to bring older children to better quality schools where they would be taken better care of.

“One man was killed [as an insurgent] not far from here, both of his children were brought to my school. The boy was looking pale and sick, still in shock. And the girl was even worse. We worked with them; I have two psychologists at school and they focused on them. They first needed to just be patted on the head and hugged. I also talked to these children; I told the boy 'Why do you think people were brought to this life by Allah? You are born as a Muslim to feel the taste of this life. When children around you smile, try to also smile,”’ a school principal told us.\textsuperscript{212}

Programs aimed to support the rehabilitation of children should be very mindful not to increase the vulnerabilities of those whom they are trying to help. The supported child should feel that she is supported because the state cares about her well-being and success, not because it wants to prevent her from becoming a terrorist. Otherwise, such efforts will increase the risk of marginalization and anger, and become counter-productive.

### 5.4. Evaluating success and challenges

Similar to ideological CVE work, the indicators used to assess the impact of preventive measures targeting the “at risk” groups are mostly quantitative: number of terrorist acts prevented, number of people targeted, etc. There are no publicly available systematic and credible studies that independently evaluate the effectiveness of these policies.

One could argue that the success of preventive measures targeting the groups identified as being “at risk” should be measured by the number of attacks and assessments of terrorism risk in the region. As has been mentioned earlier, the level of violence has been very significantly reduced in recent years; this however, has been due in large part to the military successes of security services and outflow of fighters to the Middle East, rather than effective prevention measures.

Security experts and community leaders interviewed by CAPC agree that the pre-Olympic sweep of non-violent Salafis has significantly contributed to the surge in violent radicalization and the outflow of thousands of North Caucasians to Turkey, Syria and Iraq. The subsequent practice of profuchet had much more negative effects than positive results. Treating Salafism as a form of pre-terrorism resulted in the alienation and marginalization of these communities, and increased distrust and outright hatred towards security services. The civil society groups working in the region have repeatedly emphasized that harsh violent methods have been among the key factors feeding the violent conflict for over two decades now.\textsuperscript{213} Ensuring freedom of religion for law-abiding citizens is a prerequisite

\textsuperscript{211} In some areas there are long waiting lists to be accepted to the kindergarten due to deficiencies in the social infrastructure.

\textsuperscript{212} CAPC interview, school principle, Dagestan, May 2018.

\textsuperscript{213} “Правозащитники связали радикализацию молодежи на Северном Кавказе с давлением силовиков” [“Human rights activists linked the radicalization of young people in the North Caucasus with the pressure of the security
for sustainable development and effective prevention. The authorities should stop arbitrarily detaining people without legal grounds or court decisions, and illegal practices in Chechnya should be immediately halted and thoroughly investigated.

The soft-power approaches that have been introduced in Ingushetia and Dagestan, that emphasize dialogue and the integration of law-abiding Salafis and the programs that give space for non-violent leaders to preach moderate lines of fundamentalism in mosques, have had mixed yet promising results. As such, they should be carefully evaluated and their lessons thoroughly analyzed. Moreover, it is crucially important to recognize that only a small number of people who hold radical views actually resort to violence, and therefore treating all fundamentalist believers as potential terrorists is wrong and counter-productive. On the contrary, the authorities should provide a safe space for religious dissent and even radicalism within the limits of law. It is better that the radical ideas are openly debated and addressed, this will deprive them of the allure of heroism and the attraction of a “forbidden fruit.” Counter-narratives should work at different levels and based on CAPC observations, the general outreach measures miss the individuals who are already susceptible to radical ideas. Radicalizing individuals will take seriously and be more likely to be persuaded by imams speaking from moderate Salafi positions. Thus, non-violent reformist Salafi voices can be crucial in the work with at risk groups.

The attempts of Ingush and Dagestani authorities to work constructively with the widows and children of former insurgents are very welcome developments; they definitely need greater methodological support and resources to this end. Returnees from ISIS should be treated with particular attention, given the severity of their traumas and much higher degree of initial radicalization and subsequent indoctrination while in the Middle East.
CONCLUSION

The North Caucasus conflict, one of the most protracted and at certain times the deadliest conflicts in Europe, has produced powerful insurgencies that fought first under the Chechen separatist agenda, then under regional Islamist banners and finally transformed into part of the global jihadist movement affiliated with ISIS.

This report looked into the factors that led to the radicalization of parts of the population into the insurgency, and examined the current regional CVE approaches aimed at its prevention. It argued that the conflict has fed on some external ideological influences and sources of funding, but mostly it has been fueled by local grievances and socio-political problems that have yet to be systemically addressed. The traumas incurred from the Chechen conflict have never been authentically resolved, but suppressed; instead of an inclusive political and reconciliation process, a repressive dictatorship has been put in place, which has become a prominent driver of radicalization itself. Individual factors and group dynamics are equally important; effective infrastructure and mechanisms for addressing them will significantly contribute to the prevention of violent extremism.

Current prevention efforts in the North Caucasus are predominantly government-led and rely heavily on counter-narratives. In recent years, the federal and regional governments have also focused on creating alternative channels of engagement and self-realization for active youth through social volunteering opportunities and participation in various events and fora. The government has also facilitated the emergence of a CVE community which draws on the work of youth policy practitioners, educators, pro-government NGOs, and volunteers. This community benefits from the government funding and implements the government strategies on prevention of the ideologies of terrorism and extremism. However, most of these efforts are very formal, uncreative and tedious. Only when dedicated enthusiasts in the government or among the NGOs feel strongly about the CVE project do prevention activities become stimulating and efficient.

Even then, the straightforward and direct messaging, insufficient credibility of many of the messengers, and exaggerated emphasis on patriotic, military activities alienate significant segments of the youth and completely miss those who are already radicalizing or who are more susceptible to the radical content.

The recent tendencies in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkariya to work on overcoming the intra-confessional schism rather than marginalizing and prosecuting law-abiding Salafi communities is a very welcome development that has already brought about positive change. The initiatives of the Ingush government to prioritize the integration of and provide social support to the widows and children of killed fighters are equally promising. The municipal policies in Dagestan that aim to support the education of the children of fighters and offer some social support to the widows are also strategic decisions. The Russian policy of returning children and women from ISIS has been one of the most internationally impressive effort to this end and should be vigorously continued. However, the re-
turnees should undergo mandatory deradicalization and reintegration programs, as well as receive support and counselling from psychologists specializing in trauma.

The government policy will greatly benefit from a serious fine-tuning of the CVE practices, including the promotion of critical thinking, increasing the credibility of CVE messengers, encouraging open debate, and including independent public figures and civil society in programmatic activities. These reforms would support greater self-realization among the youth, thereby advancing young people’s genuine rather than government-defined interests.

Most importantly however, the government should systematically address the numerous grievances that are fueling the conflict climate, such as: curbing police brutality and corruption, introducing political pluralism, ending the targeted marginalization of Salafi groups, practicing stricter adherence to the rule of law, facilitating the resolution of intra-confessional and inter-ethnic conflicts, improving the quality of governance, and increasing the efficiency of state support for economic development. The Kremlin must take urgent measures to bring Chechnya into the framework of the Russian Constitution and legal code, and initiate an authentic resolution and reconciliation process. CVE cannot replace conflict resolution. Without measures to address the systemic problems of the North Caucasus region, CVE will only bring cosmetic changes, and subsequent waves of radicalization into violent insurgency will be difficult to prevent.