

LEGAL SUPPORT FOR COUNTERING THE CROSS-BORDER SPREAD OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: THE EXPERIENCE OF CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

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Abstract

The article examines the legal support for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism in the states of Central Asia in the context of intensified migration processes, globalization and the growth of modern security challenges. It is substantiated that the transnational spread of destructive religious ideologies poses a complex threat to national and regional security, which requires the improvement of legal mechanisms of state response, the development of interstate cooperation and the harmonization of approaches to countering extremism. The methodological basis of the study is the system-structural, structural-functional, comparative-legal and logical-semantic methods, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis of national legislation, international legal approaches and practice of the states of Central Asia in the field of countering religious extremism. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the legal nature of extremism, the features of the regulatory regulation of migration policy and legislation on countering extremist activity in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as a comparative assessment of the approaches of other Central Asian states to ensuring national security. It has been established that the effectiveness of the legal mechanism for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism depends on a comprehensive combination of preventive, administrative-legal, criminal-legal and international-legal instruments. Based on the results of the study, a conclusion was formulated on the need to improve national legislation in the field of countering extremism, strengthen coordination between state bodies, develop regional cooperation between Central Asian states and implement international standards in the field of preventing radicalization and cross-border security threats.

Keywords: religious extremism; cross-border threats; countering extremism; legal support; national security; migration policy; Central Asian states.

1. Introduction

The contemporary development of international migration processes, globalization, digital communication technologies, and transnational social networks has significantly transformed the nature of security threats faced by modern states (Radio Azattyq, 2022). Among the most complex challenges is the cross-border dissemination of extremist ideologies, including religious extremism, which increasingly transcends national boundaries and exploits migration channels, information networks, and social vulnerabilities. In the context of growing global interconnectedness, the activities of extremist groups and radical movements can no longer be considered solely domestic issues, as they frequently involve transnational actors, international financing mechanisms, cross-border recruitment networks, and the circulation of radical narratives through both physical and virtual spaces.

The states of Central Asia occupy a strategically important geopolitical position at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. This geographical location, combined with historical, cultural, and religious factors, creates both opportunities and risks associated with regional mobility and cross-border interaction (Krivtsanova, 2021). Since gaining independence, the Central Asian republics have experienced profound political, economic, and social transformations accompanied by significant migration flows, labor mobility, urbanization, and the gradual integration of their economies into global markets. These processes have contributed to the intensification of regional and international migration, increasing the movement of people, ideas, cultural practices, and religious beliefs across state borders.

At the same time, the expansion of migration processes has generated new legal and security challenges. While migration itself represents a natural and largely positive social phenomenon that promotes economic development and intercultural dialogue, it may also create conditions that facilitate the transmission of radical ideologies and extremist narratives (Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2014). Individuals and groups influenced by extremist interpretations of religion may exploit migration routes, diaspora networks, informal social structures, and digital communication platforms to disseminate destructive ideas, recruit supporters, and establish transnational connections. Consequently, migration and religious security have become increasingly interconnected areas of public policy requiring comprehensive legal regulation and coordinated state responses.

The problem of religious extremism remains particularly relevant for Central Asian states due to several interconnected factors. First, the region shares extensive land borders characterized by intensive economic, social, and cultural interaction. Second, the proximity of Central Asia to areas affected by armed conflicts, political instability, and terrorist activity has contributed to concerns regarding the possible penetration of radical ideologies into regional societies. Third, the return of individuals from foreign conflict zones, the activities of transnational extremist organizations, and the growing influence of online radicalization have created additional challenges for national legal systems and law-enforcement institutions (Lemon, 2019). Under these conditions, ensuring an effective balance between the protection of constitutional rights and freedoms, freedom of religion, migration management, and national security has become one of the most important tasks of contemporary state policy.

Recent global developments have further intensified the relevance of these issues. Political instability in various regions of the world, armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, and economic disparities have contributed to unprecedented levels of population mobility (Blazek, 2014). These circumstances increase the importance of developing effective legal mechanisms capable of preventing the spread of extremist ideologies without undermining fundamental human rights and democratic principles. In this

regard, the experience of Central Asian states deserves particular attention because these countries have developed diverse approaches to regulating migration processes, religious activities, and counter-extremism policies while operating under comparable historical and socio-cultural conditions.

The legal regulation of countering religious extremism in Central Asia has evolved significantly over the past two decades. The states of the region have adopted specialized legislation aimed at preventing extremist activities, combating terrorism, regulating religious associations, and strengthening border security. Simultaneously, governments have sought to improve migration governance systems, enhance information exchange among competent authorities, and expand international cooperation in the field of security. However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of legal mechanisms remains the subject of ongoing academic and practical debate. (Heller and Mumma, 2023). The transnational nature of extremist threats demonstrates that isolated national measures are often insufficient and must be supplemented by regional and international cooperation, harmonization of legal standards, and coordinated preventive strategies.

The complexity of religious extremism as a legal and social phenomenon also contributes to the necessity of further scientific research. Extremism cannot be reduced solely to criminal behavior or security concerns. It encompasses ideological, political, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions that require interdisciplinary analysis. Moreover, the legal understanding of extremism remains controversial in both academic literature and legislative practice. Differences in legal definitions, methods of classification, and approaches to identifying extremist activity may create difficulties for law-enforcement agencies and hinder effective interstate cooperation. Therefore, the development of a coherent theoretical and legal framework for understanding religious extremism constitutes an important prerequisite for improving national and regional security mechanisms (McDaniel et al., 2019)

The purpose of this article is to examine the legal foundations for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism in the states of Central Asia and to assess the effectiveness of existing legal mechanisms aimed at preventing radicalization and ensuring national security. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between migration processes and security challenges, the evolution of anti-extremism legislation, and the role of interstate cooperation in addressing transnational threats. The study seeks to identify the principal legal risks associated with the dissemination of destructive religious ideologies across borders and to formulate recommendations for improving national legislation and regional coordination mechanisms.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the comprehensive legal analysis of the relationship between migration processes and the cross-border spread of religious extremism within the Central Asian region. Unlike studies focusing exclusively on domestic manifestations of extremism, this article examines the transnational dimension of the phenomenon and evaluates the capacity of contemporary legal systems to respond to emerging security challenges. Furthermore, the research substantiates the necessity of strengthening regional legal cooperation, harmonizing anti-extremism legislation, and implementing integrated preventive measures aimed at reducing the risks of radicalization while preserving the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by democratic constitutional systems.

2. Literature Review

The interaction between migration processes and religious factors has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent decades. However, studies addressing this issue are characterized by considerable methodological diversity and are situated within different academic traditions, including legal studies, sociology, political science, migration studies, religious studies, and security research. Consequently, the relationship between migration, religion, and security remains a multidimensional research field

requiring an interdisciplinary approach.

One of the most developed areas of research concerns the legal and social vulnerability of migrants in host societies. A number of scholars emphasize that migrants often encounter difficulties related to limited knowledge of their legal rights, insufficient understanding of the legal system of the receiving state, language barriers, and restricted access to public institutions. These factors may significantly affect their ability to adapt to new social environments and exercise their rights effectively. Such issues have been examined by Blazek (2014), who analyzed the relationship between migration, vulnerability, and social exclusion, as well as by Heller and Mumma (2023) and McDaniel, Rodriguez, and Wang (2019), who explored the role of integration policies and institutional support mechanisms in facilitating migrants' inclusion within host societies. These studies suggest that migrants' vulnerability is frequently associated with their pre-migration social capital, educational background, and economic circumstances, which may limit their opportunities for successful integration.

Another important direction of contemporary scholarship focuses on the socio-cultural consequences of migration. Researchers have increasingly emphasized that migration involves not only the movement of people but also the transfer of cultural values, religious traditions, identities, and social practices. In this regard, migration may contribute to significant transformations within receiving societies, particularly in multicultural environments characterized by intensive intercultural interaction. Gaertner and Dovidio (1989) note that intercultural contacts may generate both positive integration effects and social tensions resulting from differences in cultural and religious norms. Consequently, migration has become an important factor influencing social cohesion, identity formation, and the dynamics of intergroup relations.

Special attention in the literature has been devoted to the challenges faced by second-generation migrants and migrant children. Research conducted by Levecque and Rossem (2015), as well as Toselli, Gualdi-Russo, Marzouk, Sundquist, and Sundquist (2014), demonstrates that migrant youth may experience difficulties associated with social adaptation, identity formation, and psychological well-being. Educational institutions often become the primary arena in which these processes unfold. Feelings of exclusion, alienation, and uncertainty regarding cultural belonging may emerge during interactions between migrant children and members of the host society. These experiences may affect not only their social integration but also their broader perceptions of identity, community, and social participation.

The opposite perspective within migration studies focuses on the protection of migrants' rights and the role of religion in facilitating integration processes. Scholars increasingly recognize that religious institutions frequently serve as important mechanisms of social support, cultural preservation, and community building among migrant populations. Lisovskaya (2019), Penninx (2019), and Kogan, Fong, and Reitz (2020) emphasize that freedom of religion and the protection of religious rights constitute essential components of successful integration policies. Their findings suggest that the recognition of religious diversity and the accommodation of legitimate religious practices may strengthen social inclusion and contribute to social stability within multicultural societies.

Migration has also become an important subject of research within diaspora studies, ethnic studies, and race relations. Contemporary Western scholarship examines migration from historical, anthropological, political, cultural, and religious perspectives. Simultaneously, social scientists increasingly investigate migration through the lenses of social policy, law, economics, ethnicity, and race. Particularly noteworthy are studies addressing the integration experiences of migrant communities in European countries. Hickman and Ryan (2020), for example, analyze the position of Irish migrants within British society, while Ryan (2018) examines the differentiated integration of Polish migrants in London. These studies demonstrate that integration processes are highly contextual

and influenced by a complex interaction of legal, social, economic, and cultural factors.

The European experience has generated a substantial body of legal scholarship concerning the relationship between migration, religious diversity, and constitutional rights. Contemporary demographic and socio-cultural transformations have stimulated renewed debates regarding the interpretation of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Bosso (2022) argues that increasing migration has challenged traditional understandings of constitutional identity and state sovereignty, generating new legal questions regarding the inclusion of migrant communities within constitutional democracies. Similarly, Alicino (2022) demonstrates that contemporary European legal systems are increasingly confronted with the task of balancing religious freedom with public security concerns and broader societal interests. These debates illustrate the growing complexity of legal regulation in multicultural societies and the need for adaptive legal frameworks capable of addressing emerging challenges.

The reviewed scholarly trajectories indicate that migration research has gradually evolved from a predominantly socio-economic perspective toward a more comprehensive analysis incorporating issues of identity, religion, social integration, constitutional rights, and security. Nevertheless, despite the extensive body of international literature, the interaction between migration processes and religious policy remains insufficiently explored within the Central Asian context.

The available literature concerning Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states primarily focuses on issues of migration management, religious regulation, and national security as separate research domains. Studies examining the mechanisms of radicalization and the spread of extremist ideologies have made valuable contributions to understanding contemporary security threats in the region. In particular, Karimova [19] investigates the mechanisms through which radical ideologies are disseminated, while Azilkhanov [20] identifies contemporary factors contributing to the emergence of religious extremism in Kazakhstan. These studies provide important insights into the dynamics of radicalization and the risks associated with extremist activities.

At the same time, a review of the existing literature reveals a significant research gap. While migration, religion, and extremism have each been examined independently, there remains a lack of comprehensive interdisciplinary studies analyzing the interrelationship between migration processes, religious policy, and the cross-border dissemination of extremist ideologies. Existing research rarely addresses the legal mechanisms through which states may simultaneously protect migrants' rights, ensure freedom of religion, and prevent the spread of destructive religious narratives that threaten public security and constitutional order.

This gap becomes particularly significant in light of contemporary regional developments. The increasing intensity of migration flows, the expansion of transnational communication networks, and the growing influence of digital platforms have transformed the nature of security threats associated with religious extremism. Under these conditions, migration may serve not only as a demographic and economic phenomenon but also as a potential channel through which radical ideologies, extremist narratives, and transnational religious movements cross national borders.

Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive legal analysis capable of integrating migration governance, religious policy, national security regulation, and counter-extremism legislation into a unified analytical framework. Such an approach is particularly relevant for Central Asian states, where migration dynamics, religious transformation, and security challenges increasingly intersect. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the legal mechanisms aimed at countering the cross-border dissemination of destructive religious ideologies and religious extremism while ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms within the framework of contemporary constitutional democracies.

3. Materials and Methods

The methodological framework of this study is based on a combination of general scientific and special legal research methods that ensure a comprehensive analysis of the legal mechanisms for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism in the states of Central Asia. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the research problem, which encompasses issues of national security, migration governance, religious policy, and international cooperation, the study employs a set of complementary methodological approaches aimed at revealing the legal nature of religious extremism and evaluating the effectiveness of existing regulatory instruments.

The empirical basis of the research includes national legislation of the Central Asian states regulating migration processes, religious activities, counter-extremism measures, and national security issues. Particular attention is devoted to the legal framework of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as to a comparative analysis of relevant legislative acts adopted in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition, the study examines international legal instruments, regional agreements, strategic policy documents, and recommendations of international organizations concerning the prevention of extremism, radicalization, and transnational security threats.

The study relies on the dialectical method as a general scientific approach that enables the examination of religious extremism as a dynamic social and legal phenomenon evolving under the influence of political, economic, social, and cultural factors. This approach facilitates the identification of the interrelationship between migration processes, religious transformations, and contemporary security challenges within the Central Asian region.

A system-structural method was applied to analyze religious extremism as a complex multidimensional phenomenon and to determine the place of legal mechanisms within the broader system of national and regional security. The use of this method made it possible to identify the structural elements of the legal framework governing migration, religious activities, and counter-extremism policies, as well as to reveal the interconnections between preventive, administrative, criminal-law, and international legal measures.

The formal-legal method served as one of the principal research tools. It was employed to examine the content of legislative provisions, legal definitions, and regulatory mechanisms related to extremism, terrorism, migration management, and freedom of religion. Through this method, the study evaluates the consistency of legal norms, identifies potential gaps in regulation, and assesses the adequacy of existing legal instruments for addressing contemporary transnational threats.

The comparative-legal method was used to compare the legislation and legal practices of the Central Asian states in the field of countering religious extremism. This approach enabled the identification of common regional trends, distinctive national features, and best practices that may contribute to the improvement of legal regulation and interstate cooperation. Comparative analysis also facilitated the assessment of the degree of harmonization among national legal systems and their compliance with international standards.

The logical-semantic method was applied to clarify and interpret key conceptual categories, including “religious extremism,” “radicalization,” “cross-border threats,” “migration security,” and “counter-extremism activities.” The use of this method contributed to the development of a coherent conceptual framework necessary for a comprehensive legal analysis of the studied phenomenon.

Furthermore, the study employed the method of legal modeling to formulate proposals aimed at improving legislation and institutional mechanisms for preventing the cross-border dissemination of extremist ideologies. This method enabled the development of recommendations concerning the enhancement of migration control

mechanisms, the strengthening of regional legal cooperation, and the implementation of preventive measures designed to reduce the risks of radicalization.

The research also incorporates elements of document analysis, including the examination of official reports, statistical data, strategic policy documents, and analytical materials published by governmental institutions, international organizations, and research centers. Such materials were used to assess contemporary trends in migration processes, regional security dynamics, and the evolution of extremist threats in Central Asia.

The combination of the aforementioned methods ensured a comprehensive and objective examination of the legal support for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism and allowed for the formulation of scientifically grounded conclusions regarding the further development of national and regional legal mechanisms in this field.

4. Results

4.1. Cross-Border Migration and the Dissemination of Radical Religious Ideologies in Central Asia

The issues of migrants and their rights are actively addressed in contemporary research and require a holistic understanding of the development of social processes in a rapidly changing world influenced by socio-political events, as well as analysis of possible futures or forecasts that could lead to global transformations and changes in both political and cultural-civilizational realities. The cultural-civilizational foundation of any society is also based on religious values. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which unfolded in recent months of this year, is triggering new waves of migration worldwide, along with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and is highlighting several civilizational fault lines, posing a number of risks for states hosting migrants (forced migrants) with diverse political and religious beliefs. In the current context, Kazakhstan faces a number of challenges related to certain global socio-political and humanitarian crises (e.g., the events in Afghanistan in 2021, the military conflict in Ukraine, and the Middle East conflict), which will have certain consequences related to both illegal and forced migration, along with the spread of destructive religious movements. Previously, in addressing the threat of the spread of destructive religious beliefs, there was experience associated with the war in Syria, which led to the migration of a number of radicalized Kazakhstani and their families to the conflict zone, followed by their subsequent return to the country, followed by rehabilitation for family members (usually women and children), and criminal punishment for participants in the hostilities (Radio Azattyq, 2022). In the context of the risks of cross-border threats, the President of Kazakhstan, in his 2021 Address to the Nation, expressed concern about the situation in Afghanistan and globally: "...We must prepare for external shocks and the worst-case scenario." Modeling external risks has become extremely relevant...", which prompts a reconsideration of the issues of the danger of illegal migration with the timely adoption of a set of measures to prevent the risks and penetration of destructive elements into the region (Krivtsanova, 2021). It should be emphasized that the identified risks are of a pan-regional nature: the Central Asian states – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – face, to varying degrees, similar threats of cross-border penetration of destructive religious ideas (Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2014). The experience of Central Asian countries in countering radicalization and reintegration of citizens returning from conflict zones can serve as a source of comparative analysis and the development of coordinated regional security mechanisms (Lemon, 2019).

The security implications of contemporary migration processes cannot be assessed exclusively through demographic, economic, or humanitarian perspectives. In recent decades, migration has increasingly become associated with a wide spectrum of transnational security challenges, including organized crime, human trafficking,

illicit financial flows, terrorism, and the dissemination of extremist ideologies. Although the overwhelming majority of migrants do not pose any threat to public security and contribute positively to the economic and social development of host societies, the growing scale of cross-border mobility has created additional opportunities for extremist actors to exploit migration routes, migrant communities, and transnational social networks for ideological and organizational purposes.

The states of Central Asia are particularly vulnerable to such risks due to their geographical location, extensive land borders, historical interconnections, and intensive migration exchanges. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are situated at the crossroads of several major migration corridors linking East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and Europe. These migration routes facilitate legitimate economic and cultural exchanges; however, they may also be utilized by individuals and groups seeking to disseminate radical religious narratives or establish links with extremist organizations operating beyond national borders.

An important characteristic of contemporary extremist movements is their ability to adapt rapidly to changing political and social conditions. Unlike traditional extremist organizations that relied primarily on hierarchical structures and territorial control, modern extremist networks increasingly operate through decentralized mechanisms. They actively use migration channels, family ties, religious communities, educational exchanges, and digital communication technologies to spread ideological influence. As a result, the threat posed by religious extremism can no longer be understood solely as a domestic issue confined within the territorial boundaries of a particular state (Levecque and Van Rossem, 2015).

Particular concern arises from the fact that radical ideologies frequently exploit existing social vulnerabilities among migrant populations. Difficulties associated with social integration, economic uncertainty, language barriers, discrimination, and identity crises may create favorable conditions for ideological manipulation. Individuals experiencing social exclusion or marginalization can become more susceptible to narratives that offer simplified explanations of complex social problems and provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and purpose. In this context, extremist organizations often present themselves as alternative communities capable of addressing the psychological and social needs of vulnerable individuals.

At the same time, it would be methodologically incorrect to establish a direct causal relationship between migration and extremism. Such an approach risks stigmatizing migrant communities and oversimplifying a highly complex social phenomenon. Contemporary research increasingly demonstrates that radicalization is influenced by a combination of political, social, economic, cultural, psychological, and ideological factors. Therefore, migration should be viewed not as a direct cause of extremism but rather as one of several contextual factors that may interact with other vulnerabilities and facilitate the cross-border transmission of radical ideas under certain circumstances.

The legal dimension of this issue deserves particular attention. Existing migration legislation in many states was primarily designed to regulate population movements, labor migration, residence permits, and border control procedures. However, the emergence of transnational extremist threats has demonstrated that traditional migration governance mechanisms may be insufficient for addressing contemporary security challenges (Toselli, et al., 2014). The increasing complexity of migration flows requires the development of integrated legal frameworks capable of simultaneously protecting human rights, facilitating lawful mobility, and preventing the exploitation of migration channels by extremist actors.

The experience of Central Asian states illustrates this challenge. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, governments throughout the region have undertaken significant efforts to strengthen border security, improve migration management systems, and modernize anti-extremism legislation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of

these measures is often constrained by the transnational nature of extremist activities. Radical organizations frequently operate across multiple jurisdictions, taking advantage of legal differences among states, gaps in information exchange mechanisms, and inconsistencies in national regulatory approaches. Consequently, isolated domestic measures may prove insufficient in responding to threats that transcend national boundaries.

An additional factor contributing to the complexity of the problem is the increasing role of information and communication technologies. The dissemination of extremist ideologies no longer depends exclusively on physical migration or direct interpersonal contacts. Digital platforms, social media networks, encrypted messaging applications, and online religious forums have significantly expanded the reach of extremist propaganda. Today, radical narratives can be transmitted across borders instantaneously, reaching audiences regardless of their geographical location. Consequently, the phenomenon of cross-border extremist influence increasingly combines both physical and virtual dimensions. (Penninx, 2019)

This transformation has important implications for legal regulation. Traditional border-control measures are designed primarily to monitor the movement of persons and goods. However, the contemporary security environment requires legal instruments capable of addressing the transnational circulation of extremist content, online recruitment practices, and digital radicalization processes while maintaining compliance with internationally recognized standards of freedom of expression and access to information. The challenge therefore lies in balancing legitimate security interests with the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. (Kogan et al., 2020)

The return of individuals from conflict zones in the Middle East has further intensified discussions regarding the relationship between migration and security. Several Central Asian states have implemented repatriation and reintegration programs for citizens who had resided in territories previously controlled by extremist organizations. These initiatives demonstrated that security-oriented responses alone are insufficient for addressing the long-term consequences of radicalization. Rehabilitation measures, educational programs, psychological support, and social reintegration mechanisms constitute essential components of a comprehensive strategy aimed at preventing the re-emergence of extremist influence (Hickman and Ryan, 2020).

Another important finding emerging from recent regional developments is that effective counter-extremism policies cannot be based solely on repression and criminal-law enforcement. Preventive approaches focused on education, social inclusion, community resilience, and intercultural dialogue have increasingly become central elements of contemporary security strategies. This shift reflects a broader understanding that sustainable prevention of radicalization requires addressing the underlying social conditions that may contribute to the attractiveness of extremist ideologies.

The transboundary nature of migration and religious interaction also underscores the importance of regional cooperation. The states of Central Asia share common historical experiences, cultural traditions, and security concerns. Migration flows frequently involve movements between neighboring countries rather than exclusively external migration from distant regions. As a result, the effectiveness of national legal measures depends substantially on the degree of interstate coordination (Ryan, 2018). Enhanced cooperation in areas such as information exchange, border management, law-enforcement collaboration, judicial assistance, and harmonization of anti-extremism legislation may significantly improve the capacity of states to counter transnational extremist threats.

Furthermore, the legal regulation of religious activities occupies a particularly sensitive position within this broader framework. Democratic constitutional systems must ensure freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and equality of religious communities before the law. At the same time, states possess a legitimate interest in

preventing the use of religious institutions, organizations, and educational structures for the dissemination of extremist ideologies. The resulting tension between religious freedom and security considerations represents one of the most complex legal challenges confronting contemporary policymakers and legal scholars. Against this background, the study of the relationship between migration processes and the spread of religious extremism acquires special significance for Central Asian states. The analysis of existing legal mechanisms demonstrates that contemporary security threats require multidimensional responses combining migration governance, counter-extremism legislation, international cooperation, educational initiatives, and preventive social policies. Only a comprehensive legal approach that integrates national security objectives with the protection of constitutional rights and freedoms can provide a sustainable foundation for countering the cross-border dissemination of destructive religious ideologies in the modern world

The foregoing considerations demonstrate that migration and religious security should not be examined as isolated policy domains. Rather, they constitute interconnected components of a broader legal and institutional framework aimed at ensuring social stability, protecting constitutional order, and safeguarding national security. It is therefore necessary to examine how contemporary scholarship conceptualizes these relationships and evaluates the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for preventing radicalization and religious extremism. This requires a review of the relevant scientific literature addressing migration, integration, religious identity, and the legal dimensions of countering extremist activities.

4.2. Legal Conceptualization of Religious Extremism and Counter-Extremism Legislation in Kazakhstan

Religious extremism represents one of the most significant contemporary challenges to national security, constitutional order, and social stability in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In the context of ongoing geopolitical instability, armed conflicts, increasing migration flows, and the growing influence of transnational radical movements, the prevention of extremist activity has become a key priority of state policy. The threat posed by religious extremism extends beyond individual criminal acts, affecting the broader foundations of public order, interfaith harmony, and national cohesion. (Bosso, 2022)

The relevance of this issue has increased considerably in recent years due to the changing nature of contemporary security threats. Extremist organizations increasingly operate through transnational networks, exploit digital communication technologies, and utilize migration channels to disseminate radical ideologies. Consequently, the effectiveness of state countermeasures depends not only on law-enforcement capabilities but also on the existence of a coherent legal framework capable of identifying, preventing, and suppressing extremist activities while simultaneously safeguarding constitutional rights and freedoms (Alicino, 2022). A prerequisite for effective counter-extremism policy is a clear understanding of the legal nature and conceptual foundations of extremism. As many scholars have observed, successful prevention and suppression of extremist activities require precise legal definitions and consistent doctrinal interpretations. The absence of conceptual clarity may hinder law-enforcement practice, create inconsistencies in judicial decision-making, and complicate the development of preventive measures. Therefore, the legal regulation of extremism occupies a central position within the broader system of national security governance.

The concept of extremism originates from the Latin term *extremus*, meaning "extreme," "outermost," or "beyond limits." In its broadest sense, extremism may be understood as adherence to radical views or positions that substantially depart from socially accepted norms (Karimova, 2020). However, such a general interpretation is insufficient for legal purposes because it encompasses a wide spectrum of beliefs

and behaviors that do not necessarily constitute unlawful conduct. For this reason, contemporary legal systems seek to establish more precise definitions that distinguish between legitimate expressions of opinion and activities that threaten public security, constitutional order, or the rights of others.

Kazakhstan has developed a relatively comprehensive legislative framework for addressing extremist threats. A key element of this framework is the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Countering Extremism” of 18 February 2005. This legislation provides the principal legal foundation for counter-extremism policy and establishes the conceptual boundaries of extremist activity. Importantly, the law differentiates among political, national, and religious extremism, thereby recognizing the multidimensional character of the phenomenon and allowing state institutions to apply specialized preventive and enforcement measures depending on the nature of the threat.

The adoption of a specialized anti-extremism law reflects an important development in Kazakhstan’s legal response to emerging security challenges. (Pravovyye mery protivodeystviya ekstremizmu, 2012) By establishing a unified legal framework, the legislature created the basis for coordinated action by law-enforcement agencies, judicial institutions, and other state bodies responsible for protecting national security. The existence of a clear legal definition also contributes to greater consistency in law-enforcement practice and facilitates the implementation of preventive measures aimed at countering radicalization.

At the same time, the legal understanding of extremism remains the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Contemporary research demonstrates that extremism cannot be reduced solely to criminal behavior. Rather, it constitutes a complex social, political, ideological, and legal phenomenon characterized by hostility toward democratic values, constitutional principles, and the rule of law. Many scholars emphasize that extremist movements frequently pursue political objectives or seek to produce political consequences through the use of violence, intimidation, or ideological manipulation (Azilkhanov, 2022).

From a socio-legal perspective, extremism is often interpreted as a form of rejection of established mechanisms of social and political governance. Extremist violence differs from ordinary criminal violence because it is usually supported by a specific ideological framework that seeks to justify unlawful actions and promote alternative social or political orders. Consequently, extremist activity combines ideological, organizational, and operational dimensions that require a multidimensional legal response (Lazarev, 2017).

Particular attention should be paid to the distinction between legitimate political dissent and extremist activity. Democratic constitutional systems recognize the right of individuals to criticize public authorities, advocate political change, and participate in public affairs. Moreover, legal theory acknowledges the existence of a broader concept of resistance to oppression under exceptional circumstances involving serious violations of fundamental rights and constitutional principles. Therefore, not every act of political opposition or protest may be classified as extremist. The critical distinction lies in the use or advocacy of violence, coercion, hatred, or unconstitutional means aimed at undermining democratic institutions and public security (Kolokolov, 2015).

The events of January 2022 in Kazakhstan significantly intensified public and academic discussions regarding the manifestations of extremism and radicalization. These events demonstrated how social tensions, political grievances, and organized extremist activities may interact to produce serious threats to public order and national stability. The January crisis highlighted the necessity of strengthening both preventive and legal mechanisms aimed at identifying and neutralizing extremist risks before they escalate into large-scale disturbances.

According to official assessments, a number of extremist organizations remain prohibited within the territory of Kazakhstan. Among the most widely known are

organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, At-Takfir wal-Hijra, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Islamic State. The activities of such organizations illustrate the transnational nature of contemporary extremist threats and the challenges associated with preventing the dissemination of radical ideologies across state borders.

The relationship between migration processes and the spread of extremist ideas requires careful legal assessment. It would be inappropriate to conclude that migration itself causes extremism (Oros, 2018). Nevertheless, historical experience demonstrates that periods of intensive migration, weak institutional oversight, and socio-economic instability may create opportunities for the penetration of radical ideological influences. During the early years of Kazakhstan's independence, economic difficulties, institutional transformation, and the relative openness of the religious sphere facilitated the activities of foreign missionaries representing a variety of religious movements, including some with radical orientations. In addition, educational migration to foreign religious institutions occasionally exposed certain individuals to extremist interpretations of religion.

These developments illustrate the importance of maintaining an effective balance between freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and national security interests. Contemporary migration governance therefore requires not only administrative control mechanisms but also educational, informational, and preventive measures aimed at strengthening social resilience against extremist influences.

The multidimensional nature of extremism has led scholars to propose various theoretical models explaining its structure (Sergun, 2018). One influential approach conceptualizes extremism as consisting of four interconnected elements: a specific state of consciousness, an ideological system, a set of practical actions aimed at implementing that ideology, and an organizational structure supporting such activities. This framework is particularly useful because it demonstrates that extremist activity extends beyond isolated criminal acts and includes broader processes of ideological formation, recruitment, mobilization, and organizational development.

Religious extremism constitutes a particularly dangerous form of extremist activity because it often seeks to exploit deeply held beliefs and identities (Vorobyev, 2015). The dissemination of destructive religious narratives may contribute to the emergence of intolerance, social polarization, and hostility toward other religious or ethnic groups. In its most dangerous manifestations, religious extremism promotes hatred, justifies violence, and encourages actions directed against individuals or communities perceived as ideological opponents.

The analysis conducted in this study demonstrates that contemporary manifestations of religious extremism increasingly combine offline and online methods of influence. Radical actors actively employ social media platforms, encrypted communication channels, online publications, and digital propaganda to recruit supporters and disseminate extremist content. Consequently, effective counter-extremism legislation must address not only traditional forms of extremist activity but also emerging digital threats.

The current legal framework of Kazakhstan provides a substantial basis for combating extremist activity. Nevertheless, the evolving character of contemporary security threats requires the continuous modernization of legislation, enhanced coordination among state institutions, and the development of preventive strategies focused on education, social inclusion, and community resilience. Experience demonstrates that reliance solely on criminal-law measures is insufficient for addressing the root causes of radicalization.

Therefore, effective counteraction to religious extremism requires a comprehensive approach integrating legal regulation, migration governance, educational initiatives, information security measures, and international cooperation. Such an approach is particularly important for Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states, where migration dynamics, religious transformation, and regional security challenges increasingly

intersect within a shared geopolitical environment.

4.3. Regional Legal Mechanisms for Countering Cross-Border Religious Extremism in Central Asia

The growing transnational character of religious extremism has demonstrated the limitations of purely domestic approaches to national security. Contemporary extremist organizations increasingly operate beyond state borders, utilizing migration routes, digital communication technologies, financial networks, and transnational ideological platforms. Under such circumstances, effective counteraction to religious extremism requires not only the development of national legal instruments but also the establishment of coordinated regional mechanisms capable of addressing common security threats. (Burkovskaya, 2006)

The states of Central Asia face similar challenges associated with the cross-border dissemination of extremist ideologies. Common historical experiences, geographical proximity, intensive migration exchanges, and shared security concerns create conditions in which extremist threats affecting one state may rapidly influence neighboring countries. Consequently, the effectiveness of national counter-extremism policies depends significantly on the level of regional cooperation and the degree of harmonization among legal systems.

A comparative analysis of the legislation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan demonstrates the existence of common approaches to combating extremism. All states of the region recognize extremism as a threat to constitutional order, public security, and national sovereignty. National legal systems generally provide criminal liability for participation in extremist organizations, financing extremist activities, dissemination of extremist materials, incitement of religious hatred, and recruitment for terrorist or extremist purposes. Nevertheless, despite these similarities, substantial differences remain regarding legal definitions, procedural mechanisms, and institutional arrangements responsible for countering extremist threats. (Oros, 2018)

One of the principal challenges affecting regional cooperation is the absence of fully harmonized legal definitions of extremism and related concepts. Differences in the interpretation of religious extremism, radicalization, extremist propaganda, and extremist organizations may complicate interstate cooperation in criminal investigations, extradition procedures, and information exchange. In practice, activities classified as extremist in one jurisdiction may not always receive identical legal treatment in another. Therefore, further harmonization of legal terminology represents an important prerequisite for strengthening regional security mechanisms (Lisovskaya, 2019).

Particular importance is attached to the development of effective systems of information exchange among law-enforcement agencies, intelligence services, border authorities, and migration institutions. The transnational nature of contemporary extremist networks requires timely identification of individuals involved in radical activities, recruitment operations, financing schemes, and cross-border movements associated with extremist organizations. In this regard, information-sharing mechanisms constitute one of the most effective preventive instruments available to national governments.

Border security remains another critical component of regional counter-extremism strategies. The geographical characteristics of Central Asia, including extensive land borders and remote territories, create significant challenges for migration management and security monitoring. While the vast majority of cross-border movements are legitimate, state authorities must simultaneously prevent the movement of individuals associated with extremist organizations, foreign terrorist fighters, and transnational criminal groups. Consequently, modern border management increasingly combines

traditional control measures with advanced risk-assessment systems, biometric technologies, digital databases, and interagency cooperation mechanisms (Penninx, 2019).

At the same time, contemporary security threats cannot be addressed exclusively through border-control measures. The increasing role of digital communication technologies has transformed the methods through which extremist ideologies are disseminated. Social media platforms, encrypted messaging applications, video-sharing services, and online religious forums enable extremist actors to reach audiences across national borders without any physical movement of persons. As a result, legal responses to religious extremism must increasingly address cyberspace as an important arena of ideological influence and recruitment.

The legal regulation of online extremist activity presents a particularly complex challenge for democratic states. On the one hand, governments possess a legitimate interest in preventing the dissemination of materials promoting violence, hatred, or terrorist activities. On the other hand, restrictions imposed on digital content must remain consistent with constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and access to information. Therefore, the development of legal mechanisms aimed at combating online radicalization requires a careful balance between security considerations and the protection of fundamental human rights.

Recent experience in Central Asia also demonstrates the growing importance of preventive approaches to countering extremism (Karimova, 2020). Traditional law-enforcement measures remain necessary; however, contemporary research increasingly confirms that criminal sanctions alone cannot eliminate the social, ideological, and psychological factors contributing to radicalization. Consequently, governments throughout the region have begun to place greater emphasis on educational initiatives, public-awareness campaigns, community engagement programs, and the promotion of religious literacy.

Particularly noteworthy are efforts aimed at preventing the radicalization of vulnerable social groups. Young people, migrants, socially marginalized individuals, and persons experiencing identity-related challenges may be especially susceptible to extremist narratives under certain conditions. Preventive strategies therefore seek to strengthen social inclusion, improve access to education, promote critical thinking skills, and enhance resilience against manipulative ideological influences. Such measures complement traditional law-enforcement activities and contribute to the long-term prevention of extremist recruitment.

Another significant dimension of regional counter-extremism policy concerns the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from conflict zones. The experience of Kazakhstan and several neighboring states demonstrates that comprehensive reintegration programs may serve as effective tools for reducing future security risks (Azil Khanov, 2022). These initiatives typically combine legal accountability with psychological assistance, educational support, vocational training, and social adaptation measures. The underlying rationale is that sustainable security outcomes require not only punishment for unlawful conduct but also the successful reintegration of individuals capable of abandoning extremist beliefs.

From a legal perspective, the rehabilitation of returnees reflects a broader shift toward preventive and human-centered approaches within contemporary security policy. Rather than focusing exclusively on repression, governments increasingly recognize the importance of addressing the root causes of radicalization and creating conditions that reduce the likelihood of re-engagement in extremist activities. Such approaches are consistent with international trends in countering violent extremism and demonstrate the growing importance of multidisciplinary strategies.

An additional challenge facing Central Asian states concerns the relationship between migration governance and security policy. As discussed in the previous sections,

migration itself should not be viewed as a direct cause of extremism. Nevertheless, inadequate migration management may create opportunities for the cross-border dissemination of radical ideologies and facilitate the activities of extremist networks. Consequently, legal frameworks regulating migration should be integrated into broader national security strategies while maintaining compliance with international human rights obligations.

The findings of this study indicate that effective counteraction to cross-border religious extremism requires the interaction of four interconnected components. First, states must maintain effective criminal-law mechanisms capable of suppressing extremist activities and ensuring accountability for unlawful conduct. Second, migration-control and border-management systems should prevent the exploitation of migration channels by extremist actors. Third, preventive measures aimed at reducing the social and ideological causes of radicalization must receive greater institutional support. Fourth, regional and international cooperation should be strengthened through enhanced information exchange, legal harmonization, and coordinated security policies.

Therefore, the future development of legal mechanisms in Central Asia should be oriented toward greater regional integration in the field of security governance. Harmonization of anti-extremism legislation, modernization of digital-security frameworks, expansion of preventive programs, and strengthening of interstate cooperation may significantly improve the capacity of states to address emerging transnational threats. Given the shared security challenges confronting the region, no single state can effectively counter cross-border religious extremism in isolation. Sustainable solutions require coordinated legal responses based on common principles, mutual trust, and long-term regional partnership.

5. Conclusions

The conducted study demonstrates that the cross-border dissemination of religious extremism represents one of the most complex contemporary security challenges facing the states of Central Asia. The transnational nature of modern extremist activity, facilitated by migration processes, digital communication technologies, and international ideological networks, requires a comprehensive legal response that extends beyond traditional law-enforcement measures and incorporates preventive, educational, and regional cooperation mechanisms.

The findings of the research indicate that migration should not be regarded as a direct cause of religious extremism. Rather, migration constitutes a multifaceted social phenomenon that, under certain conditions, may facilitate the transmission of radical ideological influences across state borders. Factors such as social exclusion, inadequate integration policies, economic vulnerability, identity-related challenges, and limited access to educational opportunities may increase susceptibility to extremist narratives among certain individuals and groups. Consequently, effective migration governance should be viewed as an important component of broader national security strategies aimed at preventing radicalization while simultaneously protecting the rights and freedoms of migrants.

The study further demonstrates that religious extremism represents a multidimensional legal and social phenomenon that cannot be reduced exclusively to criminal conduct. Contemporary manifestations of extremism combine ideological, organizational, informational, and operational components that require corresponding multidimensional legal responses. The analysis confirms that the effectiveness of counter-extremism policies largely depends on the existence of clear legal definitions, coherent legislative frameworks, and institutional mechanisms capable of addressing both traditional and emerging forms of extremist activity.

The analysis of Kazakhstan's legislative framework indicates that the Republic of Kazakhstan has established a relatively comprehensive system of legal regulation in the field of countering extremism. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Countering Extremism," together with related criminal, administrative, and migration legislation, provides an important legal foundation for preventing and suppressing extremist activities. At the same time, the evolving character of contemporary security threats necessitates the continuous modernization of legal instruments, particularly in relation to online radicalization, transnational recruitment networks, and the dissemination of extremist content through digital platforms.

A significant finding of the study concerns the growing importance of preventive approaches in contemporary counter-extremism policy. The research confirms that reliance solely on punitive and coercive measures is insufficient for addressing the underlying causes of radicalization. Sustainable prevention requires the implementation of educational initiatives, programs aimed at strengthening religious literacy, community engagement mechanisms, social inclusion policies, and rehabilitation measures for individuals vulnerable to extremist influence. Such approaches contribute to increasing societal resilience and reducing the attractiveness of radical ideologies.

The comparative analysis of regional developments reveals that the effectiveness of national counter-extremism policies is closely connected to the level of interstate cooperation. Given the shared security challenges confronting Central Asian states, isolated domestic measures cannot fully address the transnational character of contemporary extremist threats. The study therefore substantiates the necessity of strengthening regional legal cooperation through enhanced information exchange, coordinated border-management mechanisms, mutual legal assistance procedures, and greater harmonization of anti-extremism legislation.

Particular attention should be devoted to the development of legal mechanisms for countering online radicalization and extremist propaganda. The increasing use of digital technologies by extremist organizations requires the modernization of national legal frameworks and the adoption of regulatory approaches capable of preventing the dissemination of extremist content while preserving fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by constitutional and international legal standards.

Based on the conducted analysis, it is concluded that the effectiveness of legal support for countering the cross-border spread of religious extremism depends upon the interaction of four interconnected elements: effective criminal-law regulation, efficient migration and border-management systems, comprehensive preventive and educational measures, and sustained regional cooperation. The absence or weakness of any of these components substantially reduces the overall capacity of states to respond to contemporary extremist threats.

The scientific significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of the relationship between migration processes, religious policy, and the cross-border dissemination of extremist ideologies within the Central Asian region. Unlike approaches that consider these issues separately, the present research demonstrates their interdependence and highlights the necessity of integrated legal solutions capable of addressing both security concerns and the protection of fundamental human rights.

In view of the findings obtained, further improvement of national and regional legal mechanisms should be directed toward the harmonization of anti-extremism legislation

within Central Asia, the strengthening of interstate cooperation, the modernization of digital-security regulation, and the expansion of preventive measures focused on social integration and resilience against radicalization. The implementation of such measures may contribute to enhancing regional security, protecting constitutional order, and ensuring sustainable social development throughout the region.

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