



COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Extremist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda restrict access to information, instill fear, intimidate local populations, and propagate disinformation. These groups threaten lives and the core U.S. values of freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights. Violent extremist groups invest heavily in state-of-the-art misinformation campaigns, sophisticated media production skills, and social media engagement to dominate regional discourse and push their own narrative. They are quick to use violence to silence dissent. For those living under their control, access to credible news and information is more important than ever.



USAGM OBJECTIVES

The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) approach to countering violent extremism (CVE) is grounded in our mission and role as an independent media organization. The long-term USAGM goal of supporting free, open, and democratic societies serves U.S. interests around the world because these societies tend to be more peaceful and prosperous and are less likely to threaten their neighbors or harbor extremists. At times, USAGM network programming toward certain vulnerable communities also has the effect of supporting short-term U.S. foreign policy goals, by providing an alternative to propaganda or violent extremism.

USAGM networks aim to achieve these goals through programming and efforts which prevent radicalization, build resilience within communities, engage audiences, establish platforms for their voices to be heard, and disrupt extremist narratives through credible, fact-based journalism. Violent extremism is covered as a news topic, but USAGM also works to engage and connect audiences, getting at some of the root causes of extremism – a sense of voicelessness and disenfranchisement.

USAGM networks rely on credibility with audiences, an essential attribute built through proactive, long-term presence; engagement and avenues for discussion; a broad range of programming; and global scale. USAGM emphasizes reaching strategic audiences, especially young people, in places threatened by extremist rhetoric and violence.

PROGRAMMING AND INITIATIVES

Four USAGM networks develop CVE-related programming – the Voice of America (VOA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and Radio Free Asia (RFA). They produce Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish content for the Middle East and North Africa; Dari, Pashto, and Urdu programming for South Asia; Hausa and Somali for Africa; and many other vernacular languages of Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans.

USAGM reaches large audiences in many of these target languages. For example, on a weekly basis, USAGM networks reach more than one third of Iraqis, 42 percent of young men in the FATA region of Pakistan, and one in five Nigerians (including 54 percent of Hausa speakers, who largely reside in the northern region of the country under the greatest threat from Boko Haram). USAGM is also reaching out to vulnerable populations, such as Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, to fill the vacuum for news and information.

MBN

New Voices in the Middle East Media: MBN's Alhurra has opened the door to moderate and independent voices talking about topics not covered in the mainstream press. Online, in 2017, Alhurra.com created an op-ed section entitled, "From a Different Angle", bringing together noted and outspoken journalists, intellectuals, and human rights advocates from the Middle East and the United States to share their thoughts on political, social, and cultural issues without limits and provoking discussion and debate on reformist topics. On its television network, in early 2018, MBN launched two programs that provide a distinctive voice to the crowded media marketplace *Sam and Ammar*, which takes on news and current events from the region and around the world, with the hosts providing their thoughts in a witty debate, with a reformist, independent slant; and *Mokhtalaf Alayh* ("Debatable") in which Egyptian luminary and respected author Ibrahim Essa brings his provocative commentary and insights regarding controversial political and ideological issues in the region, especially those that are related to political Islam and jihadism.

Raise Your Voice: In 2015, MBN launched “Raise Your Voice” - a multi-platform campaign on radio, television and digital platforms to encourage Iraqi citizens to speak. As part of the campaign, MBN’s Alhurra-Iraq created three television programs dedicated to highlighting the causes of violent extremism, offering a view on local challenges confronting populations, and showcasing local acts of heroism in addressing these challenges. Additionally, MBN’s Radio Sawa program *What’s Your Opinion* serves as a platform to discuss and debate the effects of terrorism, extremism, and intolerance, and invites listeners to call in and engage with hosts, guests and each other. The hour-long daily show hosts calls from throughout Iraq, as well as SMS messages. calls from throughout Iraq, as well as SMS messages.

The “Raise Your Voice” website and social media properties host weekly theme discussions on areas such as unemployment, religious intolerance, and lack of rights for women and minorities and they serve as a primary forum where readers can express their opinions and engage in discussions on topics that directly impact them. In less than six months following its launch, the Raise Your Voice Facebook page attracted nearly 3 million followers, registered more than two million comments, and recorded more than 100 million video views.

RFE/RL

Not In Our Name: In 2018, RFE/RL launched “Not in Our Name,” a comprehensive regional counter-extremism project, with the goal to empower communities to stand up to violent extremist recruiters that claim to represent them. RFE/RL traveled to several regions of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, exploring how residents can work together on the local and national levels to prevent the spread of violence and extremism via town halls, facilitated discussions, and video portraits of those who had lost loved ones. The resulting documentary video series will be distributed and screened throughout the region and online. A partner project to the documentary series is an online initiative with the same title in the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages, wherein digital media teams directly engage with social media audiences in a dialogue about hot-button extremism-related topics and events.

In the Western Balkans, a region beset with political, security and economic challenges, RFE/RL’s Balkan Service engages young audiences in conversations regarding the harmful effects of radicalization within their societies. In 2018, RFE/RL created a Balkans-oriented digital media team, as well as a campaign entitled “Not in My Name” for Bosnia and Kosovo that directly engages social media audiences in responsible dialogue about issues surrounding extremism and risks in their countries. These projects seek to explore the root causes of extremism and by extension to dissuade those vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: RFE/RL’s bilingual Radio Azadi, which broadcasts to Afghanistan, and Pashto-language Radio Mashaal, which targets Pakistan’s Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, provide audiences comprehensive news coverage and analysis of conflict in the area, and the devastation wrought by extremist forces. In April 2018, two RFE/RL Afghan Service journalists and one trainee of the Service were tragically killed in a targeted attack against journalists in the country, reinforcing the message that the country has a long way to go until all Afghan citizens can live freely without fear of violence from terrorist forces.

IRAQ

42.6%

AUDIENCE REACH

NIGERIA

21.0%

AUDIENCE REACH

AFGHANISTAN

38.5%

AUDIENCE REACH

FATA REGION

26.4%

AUDIENCE REACH

Mashaal reports on topics that local press in Pakistan will not cover out of fear of violent retribution. These fears are not unfounded, as in 2017, no fewer than four Radio Mashaal journalists have been threatened, stalked, kidnapped for up to 72 hours, shot at, or otherwise harassed, both by the Taliban and by Pakistani intelligence agency officials. In January 2018, Pakistan's Interior Ministry shut down Radio Mashaal's offices in Islamabad, on orders from the country's spy agency, the ISI.

VOA

Extremism Watch Desk: In 2015, VOA established the Extremism Watch Desk to curate vernacular content from VOA language services and USAGM entities focused on ISIL and various other terror groups around the world. The best of that content is translated into English for a wider audience, video is added when available, and it is shared with the USAGM networks. USAGM qualitative research has shown that information about how diverse communities respond to the challenges of violent extremism often resonates with audiences far outside the country where the story was originally reported.

Boko Haram and Al Shabaab: Africa's extremist groups have destabilized major African states, including parts of Nigeria, Mali and Somalia, and the USAGM provides audiences in these countries accurate, unbiased news and information. VOA's documentary "Boko Haram: Journey from Evil" delivers an unprecedented examination of the terror group Boko Haram. Drawing on 18 hours of secret video obtained exclusively by VOA, the documentary reveals a hidden world of torture and executions. It also profiles Nigerian citizens who are resisting the terrorists and are working to bring about change. In addition, VOA launched a series of fast-paced youth oriented programs like Taskar VOA, a 15-minute weekly television program; and Yao Da Gobe (Today and Tomorrow), a 30-minute daily youth radio program, both in Hausa; as well as Dhalinyarada Maanta ("Today's Youth") in Somali.

RFA

BenarNews: In March 2015, RFA launched BenarNews, an online news service which serves under-served and vulnerable audiences in Southeast and South Asia by publishing news and content in five languages: Bengali, Thai, Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia, and English. The operation has documented the effects and impact of radicalization on communities in the region through projects such as "Torn Lives," which highlights the human cost of extremist violence and "Dangerous Words," which focuses on recent blogger murders in Bangladesh, where fundamentalism has all but stamped out space for secular thought and free speech. With RFA, BenarNews has also documented the persecution and plight of the Rohingya in Bangladesh and Burma with award-winning coverage.

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