

Central Asia Trade Policy Uncertainty Index (CA-TPU)

Monthly Report: February 2026

School of Economics and Management, Xinjiang University
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Executive Summary

In February 2026, the CA-TPU Index recorded **140.11**, retreating 20.1% from the previous month (175.43) and ending January's extreme peak. However, the three-month trailing moving average (MA3) continued to rise, from 131.60 to **138.56**, setting a new multi-year high. This indicates that while monthly-level intensity has moderated, medium-term trade policy uncertainty pressure continues to accumulate. Year-on-year, the index rose 41.6% compared to February 2025 (98.93), remaining in the "elevated, warrants attention" range (120–150).

1. Index Overview

Indicator	Feb 2026	Jan 2026	MoM Change	Feb 2025	YoY Change
CA-TPU Raw Index	140.11	175.43	-35.32 (-20.1%)	98.93	+41.18 (+41.6%)
MA3 (Moving Avg.)	138.56	131.60	+6.96 (+5.3%)	94.58	+43.98 (+46.5%)

While the February index declined 35.32 points from January, it remains 40.1% above the baseline (100), far from normal territory. More importantly, the MA3 rose from 131.60 to 138.56, indicating that after removing monthly volatility, the medium-term level of trade policy uncertainty continues to increase.

This divergence between a declining raw index and a rising MA3 is noteworthy: it means that although February's single-month shock intensity weakened, the average uncertainty level over the preceding three months (December 2025 through February 2026) remains higher than any previous three-month window.

2. Trend Analysis

February's decline represents a technical correction following January's historically high reading (175.43, the fourth-highest on record), rather than a substantive retreat in uncertainty. The six-month trajectory reveals:

Month	CA-TPU Raw Index	MA3	Trend Characterization
2025-09	132.84	119.81	Start of upward channel
2025-10	124.98	123.84	Elevated oscillation
2025-11	119.22	125.68	Elevated oscillation
2025-12	100.13	114.78	Brief retreat (policy wait-and-see)
2026-01	175.43	131.60	Extreme surge (policy implementation)
2026-02	140.11	138.56	High-level pullback; MA3 continues rising

The overall trajectory forms a "W-pattern": a first wave of elevated readings (September–November 2025) → brief December retreat → retaliatory January rebound → February pullback. The MA3's continuously rising trajectory throughout confirms that fundamental uncertainty pressures have not dissipated.

3. News Data Overview

In February 2026, a total of **10,671 news articles** were collected across the four countries, with 5,635 OR hits and **267 AND hits**. Compared to January (10,380 articles / 336 AND), total news volume increased slightly while AND hits declined 20.5%, consistent with the raw index's retreat.

News Collection Statistics by Country

Country	Total News	OR Hits	AND Hits	TPU Ratio (f)	OR Coverage
Kazakhstan	3,346	2,004	111	5.54%	59.9%
Uzbekistan	1,737	976	74	7.58%	56.2%
Kyrgyzstan	4,758	2,156	59	2.74%	45.3%
Tajikistan	830	499	23	4.61%	60.1%

- **Kazakhstan** AND hits fell from 173 to 111 (-35.8%), a significant decline. After the initial shock wave of tariff implementation in January, February media coverage shifted from "policy taking effect" to "impact assessment" and "response discussions," with the thematic focus becoming more dispersed. However, at 111 AND hits, Kazakhstan still leads the four countries, and combined with its 57.18% trade weight, remains the primary contributor to the regional index.
- **Uzbekistan** continued to record the highest TPU ratio (7.58%) among the four countries, down from January's 9.59% but still reflecting sustained media attention to trade policy uncertainty. AND hits declined marginally from 78 to 74.
- **Kyrgyzstan** AND hits remained flat at 59 (same as January), with the TPU ratio edging down to 2.74%. Despite the largest news volume (4,758 articles), trade policy uncertainty remains a low-weight item in its media agenda.
- **Tajikistan** OR coverage decreased from 64.9% to 60.1%, with AND hits declining from 26 to 23 — no significant change overall.

4. Driving Factors

4.1 Tariff Shock Enters "Digestion Phase"

The concentrated wave of reporting triggered by the formal implementation of US tariff measures in January subsided in February. As policy execution entered a normalized phase, media attention shifted from "tariff activation" to medium-term topics such as business adaptation and trade flow redirection. This transition from "shock coverage" to "adaptation coverage" is the primary reason for the decline in TPU ratios and AND hits.

4.2 Continued Uncertainty in Tariff Negotiations and Exemptions

Despite the weakening of single-month shock intensity, uncertainty persists around tariff exemption approvals, bilateral negotiations, and potential policy adjustments. The progress of Kazakhstan's consultations with the US side remains unclear, and Uzbekistan similarly faces pressure to assess indirect impacts.

4.3 Ongoing Regional Trade Restructuring

Central Asian countries are accelerating adjustments to trade cooperation with China, Russia, and regional partners in response to US tariff shocks. Discussions on EAEU tariff coordination and China–Central Asia trade corridor capacity expansion continue to inject new uncertainty variables into the regional trade policy environment.

5. Trend Outlook

The CA-TPU Index has remained above 100 for six consecutive months since September 2025, forming a clear "elevated plateau." While February's 140.11 declined from January, the MA3's rise to 138.56 confirms that the central level of uncertainty continues to increase.

From a historical perspective, the current trajectory bears similarity to the "slow fade" pattern following the 2022 Russia–Ukraine conflict — after the March 2022 shock peak of 171.07, the index oscillated in the 110–140 range for several subsequent months. The current MA3 (138.56) already exceeds the post-conflict MA3 peak of that period (139.61), suggesting the current cycle's persistence may be stronger. Key factors to monitor:

- Whether Kazakhstan's tariff exemption negotiations achieve substantive progress
- Whether the US introduces new tariff or sanctions measures
- Effectiveness of Central Asian countries' trade diversification strategies
- Negotiation dynamics on regional trade agreements

6. Data Appendix

CA-TPU Index — Last 12 Months

Month	CA-TPU Raw Index	MA3
2025-03	101.90	95.56
2025-04	118.14	106.32
2025-05	117.71	112.58
2025-06	107.84	114.56
2025-07	112.89	112.81
2025-08	113.70	111.48
2025-09	132.84	119.81
2025-10	124.98	123.84
2025-11	119.22	125.68
2025-12	100.13	114.78
2026-01	175.43	131.60
2026-02	140.11	138.56

About the CA-TPU Index

The CA-TPU (Central Asia Trade Policy Uncertainty Index) is developed by Prof. Zhang Lijie's team at the School of Economics and Management, Xinjiang University, based on Baker, Bloom & Davis (2016). It covers Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. For details, see catpu.caiees.cn

Published by the CA-TPU Index Project Team.

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