

INTERNATIONAL POLICIES IN COUNTERING EXTREMISM: FRAMEWORKS, MECHANISMS, AND CHALLENGES

POLÍTICAS INTERNACIONAIS DE COMBATE AO EXTREMISMO: ESTRUTURAS, MECANISMOS E DESAFIOS

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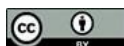
Abstract

This study deals with the topic of international policies in combating extremism, as one of the most prominent contemporary issues facing the international community, as the phenomenon of extremism represents a direct threat to international peace and security. The study aims to analyze the nature of these policies, review their theoretical frameworks and various mechanisms, assess their effectiveness in confronting extremism, and highlight the most important challenges that hinder their implementation at the practical level. The study relied on a descriptive-analytical approach, through the analysis of international documents and reports issued by international organizations, in addition to the use of relevant academic studies. The comparative approach was also employed when necessary, with the aim of highlighting the differences in international approaches to countering extremism. The study concluded that international policies in countering extremism have witnessed remarkable development, especially in terms of adopting a comprehensive approach that combines security, intellectual, social and preventive dimensions. However, these policies still suffer from a number of challenges, most notably the lack of a unified international definition of the concept of extremism, the dominance of the security dimension in practical application, the weakness of international binding mechanisms, as well as problems related to human rights and the politicization of the concept of countering extremism.

Keywords: International Politics. Extremism. Countering Extremism. International Security. Human Rights.

Resumo

Este estudo aborda o tema das políticas internacionais de combate ao extremismo, uma das questões contemporâneas mais proeminentes enfrentadas pela comunidade internacional, uma vez que o fenômeno do extremismo representa uma ameaça direta à paz e à segurança internacionais. O estudo tem como objetivo analisar a natureza dessas políticas, examinar seus marcos teóricos e diversos mecanismos, avaliar sua eficácia no combate ao extremismo e destacar os principais desafios que dificultam sua implementação na prática. O estudo baseou-se em uma abordagem descritivo-analítica, por meio da análise de documentos e relatórios internacionais emitidos por organizações internacionais, além do uso de estudos acadêmicos relevantes. A abordagem comparativa também foi empregada quando necessário, com o objetivo de destacar as diferenças nas abordagens internacionais para combater o extremismo. O estudo concluiu que as políticas internacionais de combate ao extremismo testemunharam um desenvolvimento notável, especialmente no que diz respeito à adoção de uma abordagem abrangente que combina as dimensões de segurança, intelectual, social e preventiva. No entanto, essas políticas ainda enfrentam uma série de desafios, principalmente a falta de uma definição internacional unificada do conceito de extremismo, o predomínio da dimensão de segurança na aplicação prática, a fragilidade dos mecanismos internacionais vinculativos, bem como problemas relacionados aos direitos humanos e à politização do conceito de combate ao extremismo.



Palavras-chave: Política Internacional. Extremismo. Combate ao Extremismo. Segurança Internacional. Direitos Humanos.

1 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is witnessing a remarkable escalation in the phenomenon of extremism in its various intellectual, religious and political forms, which has made it one of the most prominent challenges to international peace and security. Extremism is no longer a local phenomenon, but has become transnational, fueled by political, economic, social and cultural factors, taking advantage of technological development and modern means of communication to spread its ideas and attract individuals, especially young people.

Experience has shown the limitations of traditional security approaches to this phenomenon, which has prompted the international community to adopt comprehensive policies based on the integration of security, intellectual, social and economic dimensions, with a focus on prevention as well as treatment. However, while diverse, these policies face challenges related to effective implementation, international coordination, and the balance between security requirements and respect for human rights.

The importance of studying international policies in countering extremism stems from the fact that they represent a basic framework for understanding the nature of international responses to this phenomenon, and assessing their success in moving from the logic of narrow security confrontation to the logic of comprehensive and sustainable treatment. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the theoretical frameworks of these policies, review their mechanisms, and evaluate their effectiveness and the challenges they face, based on the descriptive-analytical approach based on international documents and relevant academic studies.

The research problem: International policies in countering extremism are one of the most prominent tools of the international community in the face of increasing threats to international peace and security. However, the multiplicity of these policies and the diversity of their mechanisms raises fundamental questions about their effectiveness and ability to achieve their desired goals, especially in light of the persistence and renewal of

manifestations of extremism in different contexts. The problem of balance between the security approach and the intellectual and social approaches is also highlighted, in addition to the legal and political challenges associated with the implementation of these policies. Based on this, the research problem revolves around the following main question: "To what extent have international policies in combating extremism contributed to reducing this phenomenon, and what are the most prominent challenges they face in practice?"

Research Hypothesis: This research is based on a major assumption that international policies in countering extremism are based on a multidimensional approach that combines security, intellectual, and social aspects, but the security dimension still occupies a leading position in practical application at the expense of preventive and intellectual dimensions. The research also assumes that these policies face legal, political, and cultural challenges that limit their effectiveness and hinder the achievement of their stated goals. It also argues that the weak focus on addressing the root causes of extremism contributes to limiting of the ability of international policies to achieve sustainable results in the long term.

Research Objectives: This research aims to clarify the conceptual and theoretical framework of extremism and the international policies related to combating it, and to analyze the nature of the international policies adopted in confronting this phenomenon and the mechanisms of their implementation. It also seeks to assess the effectiveness of these policies in reducing extremism at the international level, while highlighting the most prominent challenges facing their implementation in practice. In light of this, the research aims to provide a set of conclusions and recommendations that can contribute to the development of future international policies and enhance their ability to achieve More sustainable and effective results.

Research Methodology: The research relies on the descriptive-analytical method, through the description and analysis of international policies in countering extremism, based on international documents, official reports issued by international organizations, and related academic studies. The research also employs a comparative approach where appropriate, particularly in comparing the different approaches adopted by some international organizations in the field of countering extremism.

Research Structure: The research consists of an introduction, two main researches, and a conclusion, as follows:

1. International Frameworks and Approaches to Countering Extremism

International policies in countering extremism have witnessed remarkable development in recent decades, as a result of shifts in the nature of security threats in the international system. With the growth of the phenomenon of extremism, especially in its transnational forms, it can no longer be addressed through single national policies or traditional security approaches alone, which has prompted the international community to adopt collective multidimensional policies, co-formulated and implemented by states and international and regional organizations.

This paper aims to analyze the nature of the international approaches adopted in combating extremism by highlighting the role of international organizations, and reviewing security and legal mechanisms, in addition to the intellectual, social and preventive mechanisms that constitute the essence of the comprehensive approach in this field.

1.1 The role of international organizations in formulating and coordinating counter-extremism policies

International organizations play a pivotal role in shaping and coordinating international counter-extremism policies, given their international legitimacy and ability to bring countries together around common goals. This role has become increasingly evident as the international community becomes increasingly aware of the transnational nature of extremism.¹

The tasks of international organizations in this area are to develop general strategic frameworks, coordinate efforts among States, provide technical support and capacity-building, as well as follow up on the implementation of international commitments.² They also contribute to the development of common concepts to counter extremism, and to

¹ Alex P. Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-radicalisation, Counter-radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review”, (The Hague: ICCT, 2013), 10.

² Marwa Ibrahim Mohammed, *The Role of the United Nations in Combating Extremism*, The Fourteenth Scientific Conference, *Confronting Extremism in Light of the Current Global Crises*, Al-Mustansiriya Center for Arab and International Studies, No. 7, p. 605.

distinguish it from other concepts such as terrorism or political opposition, thus helping to reduce the political misuse of this concept.³

In recent years, international organizations have tended to adopt more comprehensive approaches, focusing on preventing extremism before it becomes a security threat, by addressing factors such as poor education, the spread of hate speech, and social marginalization. They have also paid special attention to the issue of violent extremism, as one of the most serious forms of extremism that threatens international security.⁴

However, the role of international organizations is not without challenges, most notably the limited mechanisms of coercion, their dependence in the implementation of their policies on the will of member states, in addition to the divergence of political interests among countries, which is sometimes reflected in the effectiveness of these policies in practical implementation.⁵

1.2 Security and legal mechanisms in international policies to combat extremism

Security and legal mechanisms are one of the most prominent tools of international policies in combating extremism and have long been the backbone of the international response to this phenomenon. These mechanisms are a series of measures aimed at preventing extremist activities, prosecuting individuals and groups involved in them, and drying up their sources of funding.

On the security front, these mechanisms include strengthening intelligence cooperation between States, sharing information on extremist networks, and coordinating efforts in border control and combating cross-border crime. They also include strengthening the capacity of States in the field of law enforcement, especially in States suffering from institutional fragility or internal conflicts.⁶

³ United Nations, “United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, (New York: UN General Assembly, 2006), 5.

⁴ Abdullah Kamal Fadel Al-Tikriti, *International Non-Military Contexts in Combating International Terrorism*, Arab Center, Cairo, 2023, p. 99.

⁵ Mustafa Salama Hassan, *Duplication of Treatment in Public International Law*, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Cairo, 1987, p. 72.

⁶ International Commission of Jurists, “Assessing Damage, Urging Action”, (Geneva: ICJ, 2009), 45.

At the legal level, the international community has worked to develop legal frameworks aimed at criminalizing acts associated with violent extremism and establishing rules for prosecuting perpetrators, both nationally and internationally. These efforts include the adoption of international conventions, the issuance of binding resolutions, and the standardization of certain legal standards related to countering extremism and its financing.⁷

While these mechanisms are important in reducing immediate security risks, they have been widely criticized, especially with regard to their potential to conflict with human rights and fundamental freedoms. Too much focus on the security approach can be counterproductive, by fostering feelings of exclusion or injustice, which are factors that contribute to fueling rather than reducing extremism.

1.3 Intellectual, social and preventive mechanisms within the comprehensive approach

Recognizing the limitations of security approaches alone, international policies in recent years have tended to adopt intellectual, social, and preventive mechanisms aimed at addressing the root causes of extremism and preventing its spread in the long term. These mechanisms are an essential part of a comprehensive approach that seeks to sustain international efforts to counter extremism.

Intellectual mechanisms are represented in countering extremist discourses by promoting the values of tolerance, dialogue and acceptance of the other, supporting education based on critical thinking, in addition to disseminating counter-discourse that limits the attractiveness of extremist ideas. It also includes working to correct misconceptions that extremist groups exploit to justify their practices.⁸

Social mechanisms focus on addressing the social and economic conditions that contribute to the spread of extremism, such as poverty, unemployment, marginalization, and poor social integration. This includes supporting development programmes,

⁷ David Gurski, "Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2015): 124.

⁸ Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011), 13.

empowering youth, and promoting community participation, as key elements in the prevention of extremism.⁹

In the preventive framework, de-radicalization programmes targeting those most vulnerable to extremist ideologies have emerged, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for individuals who have been involved in previous radicalisation trajectories. These programmes are indicative of a shift in international thinking, from the logic of punishment and confrontation to the logic of prevention and reintegration.¹⁰

While these mechanisms have positive potential, their implementation faces challenges related to the difficulty of measuring their results, the length of time required for their effects to appear, and the need for effective coordination between various international and national actors.

2 ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNATIONAL POLICIES IN COUNTERING EXTREMISM

The evaluation of international policies in countering extremism is one of the most important topics in this study, as it moves the research from the descriptive and analytical level to the critical and evaluative level. The real challenge is not to present or characterize policies, but to test their effectiveness, reveal their ability to achieve their stated goals, and analyze the factors that enhance their success or hinder their implementation.

Despite the remarkable development in the international discourse on countering extremism and the increasing number of international strategies and initiatives, the persistence of this phenomenon and its transformation into more complex forms raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the international policies adopted. It also imposes the need for these policies to be subjected to a scientific assessment that takes into account the political, legal and social contexts in which they are applied.

⁹ Arun Kundnani, "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept," *Race & Class* 54, no. 2 (2012), 15.

¹⁰ Kaveh Gohar Darwish, *The United Nations Legal Mechanisms in Combating Terrorism*, Arab Center, Cairo, 2022, p. 220.

Based on this, this topic seeks to evaluate international policies in countering extremism through three main demands, which address strengths, weaknesses, and challenges, then the problems related to human rights and the politicization of the concept of countering extremism.

2.1 Manifestations of power in the international approach to countering extremism

1. The evolution of the international approach from security to inclusiveness:

One of the most prominent strengths that can be observed in international counter-extremism policies is the gradual shift from a narrow security approach to a comprehensive, multidimensional approach. The international community has realized, after long experience, that the exclusive reliance on security and military force does not necessarily lead to the elimination of extremism, but can sometimes contribute to its reproduction in new forms.¹¹

This shift has been reflected in the integration of intellectual, social and economic dimensions into international strategies, through a focus on prevention, education, combating hate speech, and promoting social integration. This shift is an indication of a relative maturity in international thinking, and a recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon and its causes.¹²

2. Strengthening international cooperation and coordination: The cooperative nature of international policies is a key strength, as these policies are based on the principle of shared responsibility in countering extremism as a transnational threat. This cooperation has contributed to enhancing the exchange of information and experience, coordinating intelligence and security efforts, and building the institutional capacities of States, especially those with limited capabilities.

International cooperation has also made it possible to develop common normative frameworks, which have contributed to the relative unification of international

¹¹ Peter R. Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013), 875.

¹² Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Terrorism Ends", (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 13.

discourse and the reduction of sharp variation in national responses, although this variation continues to be applied in practice.¹³

- 3. Integrating the preventive dimension and involving non-state actors:** An important strength is also the recognition by international policies of the importance of prevention, by working to prevent the emergence of extremism rather than just confronting it after it has become a security threat. This has been reflected in the growing interest in the role of education, media, civil society, religious institutions, and youth in countering extremist ideology. The involvement of non-state actors represents a qualitative development in international politics, reflecting an awareness that the state alone cannot confront extremism and that society is the first line of defense against its spread.¹⁴

2.2 Structural shortcomings and challenges in international policies

- 1. The Problem of the Concept and the Absence of a Unified International Definition:** The absence of a precise and unified international definition of the concept of extremism is one of the most prominent structural weaknesses in international politics. The difference in political and cultural contexts leads to a difference in the understanding of extremism and in the distinction between it and other concepts such as political opposition or ideological difference. This conceptual ambiguity makes it difficult to formulate precise policies and opens the door to the misuse of the concept of counter-extremism to justify repressive or exclusionary policies, which negatively affects the credibility of international efforts;
- 2. The dominance of the security approach in practice:** Despite the official discourse that emphasizes the adoption of a comprehensive approach, the practical application of international policies still witnesses a clear dominance of the security dimension. This contradiction between discourse and practice is evident in the allocation of resources and in the nature of the measures taken, which often

¹³ Abdul-Hussein Salman Al-Abousi, *Counter-Terrorism in the Stages of International Law Mechanisms*, Dar Al-Sanhouri, 1st Edition, Baghdad, 2023, p. 173.

¹⁴ Abdullah Kamal Fadel Al-Tikriti, previous source, p. 88.

focus on deterrence and prosecution rather than prevention and structural remediation. This dominance weakens the effectiveness of preventive policies and may contribute to feelings of injustice and exclusion, especially in fragile environments, which constitute a breeding ground for the spread of extremism.¹⁵

3. **Weakness of binding mechanisms and disparities between countries:** International policies face a fundamental challenge represented by the limited binding mechanisms of international organizations, and their dependence in implementation on the will of member states. The large disparity in economic and institutional capacities between countries also leads to a clear disparity in the level of implementation of these policies¹⁶. In addition, the influence of national political interests may lead some countries to adopt selective or formal policies, without a real commitment to the essence of the comprehensive approach;
4. **Difficulty in measuring effectiveness and sustainability:** The difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of international policies, especially those of an intellectual and preventive nature, is one of the most prominent methodological challenges. The lack of clear indicators to measure success, and the length of time required for results to emerge, makes the evaluation process complex and limits the possibility of developing policies based on rigorous scientific evidence.

2.3 The problem of balance between security and human rights requirements and the politicization of the concept

1. **Tension between security and human rights:** International counter-extremism policies raise an ongoing problem of balancing security requirements with respect for human rights. Certain security measures, such as extensive surveillance or restrictions on freedom of expression, may contravene international human rights standards and lead to violations that undermine the legitimacy of these policies.¹⁷

¹⁵ John Horgan, “Deradicalization or Disengagement?” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4 (2008), 5.

¹⁶ Ahmed Abdel Azim Khalil, *Terrorism between Religious Extremism and Regional and International Mechanisms*, Dar Al-Wafa for Printing and Publishing, Alexandria, 2019, p. 296.

¹⁷ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism”, (United Nations, 2016), 10.

Experience has shown that ignoring the human rights dimension does not lead to enhanced security, but may even contribute to undermining trust between the state and society, and fueling the frustration that extremist groups exploit for recruitment.

- 2. Dangers of feeding extremist narratives:** One of the serious problems in some international policies is the association of extremism with certain religious or cultural identities, leading to a collective stigma that undermines social peace and reinforces the narratives of "oppression" fed by extremist groups. This stigma is a factor that weakens the effectiveness of international policies, as it transforms countering extremism from a tool of protection into an additional factor for its production.¹⁸
- 3. Politicization of the concept of counter-extremism:** The politicization of the concept of counter-extremism is one of the most serious challenges facing international politics, as some countries use this concept to restrict freedoms, suppress political dissent, or close down civic space. This selective use undermines international trust and deprives policies of their preventive and moral content.

3 CONCLUSION

This research sought to study international policies in countering extremism by analyzing their conceptual and theoretical frameworks, reviewing their most prominent mechanisms, and evaluating their effectiveness in confronting this complex phenomenon, which has become one of the most important challenges to international peace and security. The research was based on the basic hypothesis that international policies in countering extremism, despite their development and multiplicity of tools, still suffer from structural imbalances that limit their ability to achieve sustainable results. In light of the analysis included in the research chapters, it was possible to reach to a number of results, as follows:

¹⁸ Anwar Farhan Mashaan, *Combating Terrorism and its Impact on Civil and Political Rights*, National Center for Legal Issues, 2025, p. 139.

1. **The multidimensionality and complexity of the phenomenon of extremism:** The research concluded that extremism is a complex phenomenon in which intellectual, religious, political, social, and economic factors overlap, which makes it futile to address it through a unilateral approach. International experience has proven that focusing on the security dimension alone does not lead to the elimination of extremism, but may contribute to its reproduction in new contexts;
2. **The development of international discourse versus limited practical application:** The research showed that there has been a remarkable development in the international discourse related to countering extremism, through the adoption of the concepts of prevention and a comprehensive approach. However, this development is not always paralleled by effective practical application, as implemented policies often tend to prioritize the security dimension over the intellectual and social dimensions;
3. **Lack of a unified international definition of the concept of extremism:** The research concluded that the absence of a precise and unified definition of the concept of extremism represents one of the most prominent challenges facing international policies, as it opens the way for divergent interpretations and political abuse, and negatively affects the effectiveness of international coordination;
4. **The limitations of coercive mechanisms in the international system:** The research showed that international policies in combating extremism suffer from the weakness of coercive mechanisms, as they depend on the will of member states in their implementation, as well as the impact of political interests and the disparity in economic and institutional capacities between countries;
5. **Human rights-related problems:** The research showed that some international policies in countering extremism raise serious problems related to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that ignoring the human rights dimension does not lead to enhancing security, but may contribute to fueling extremism and undermining trust between the state and society;
6. **The importance of the preventive and societal dimension:** The research concluded that the integration of the preventive dimension and the involvement of non-state actors, such as civil society, educational institutions, and media

institutions, is a key element in achieving sustainable results in countering extremism, as opposed to policies that focus solely on addressing security.

Overall, the research concludes that international counter-extremism policies are a necessary framework to address one of today's most serious challenges, but their success depends on their ability to move from security responses to comprehensive and sustainable policies based on prevention, respect for human rights, and genuine international cooperation.

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Authors’ Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study’s findings are fully available within the article.

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