

## **Counteracting Religious Extremism in Youth Environments: World Experience and Kazakhstan**

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### **Abstract**

In the 21st century, the imperative to combat extremism and terrorism has risen to the forefront of global and regional agendas, becoming an indispensable condition for fostering the secure and prosperous development of states amidst the formation of a new strategic order. This study aims to examine the peculiarities of combating religious extremism among the youth demographic, drawing insights from global experiences aimed at minimizing terrorist threats within this sphere. Two primary methodologies were adopted in this study: the comparative analysis method, which compares the factors contributing to youth extremism, and the descriptive method, which identifies the main features of radicalization processes across diverse countries worldwide. Examining the landscape of modern youth movements in Kazakhstan and their affiliations with various religious beliefs, it becomes evident that developing a comprehensive and cohesive legal framework is imperative to curtail the emergence of aggressive groups and address the root causes of student radicalization. Moreover, our study underscores the predominant reliance of modern youth on social networks as conduits for accessing information pertaining to mental health, traditional beliefs, and psychological support. Analysis of counter-radicalization efforts across nations reveals a spectrum of approaches adopted by state entities tasked with addressing this issue, often contingent upon the prevailing religious context. In Muslim-majority nations, scholars and public figures championing traditional values emerge as key agents in educating young people on the imperative of participating in radical groups. Conversely, in Western European countries, public organizations and institutions of higher learning emerge as pivotal actors in fostering effective counter-radicalization measures. The findings and insights gleaned from this study are poised to furnish a practical foundation for future research endeavors in this realm. Furthermore, they hold promise in informing the development of youth policies and the resolution of issues pertinent to religious dynamics within advanced societies.

**Keywords:** *Religious extremism, radical currents, global terrorism index, youth, religious education, intolerance.*

### **Introduction**

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Religious extremism poses an important threat to peace and security, particularly as it affects the younger generation, who represent the future of society. Vulnerable to the propaganda of radical ideologies, including religious extremism, young people grappling with questions of identity and purpose are particularly susceptible. This peril transcends geographical confines and impacts numerous nations, including Kazakhstan. It constitutes a growing global apprehension, carrying profound social and political ramifications. Extremist entities frequently direct their efforts toward indoctrinating and enlisting youth, underscoring the pressing need for robust measures to prevent the spread of religious extremism.

The objective of this study is to analyze successful practices and strategies employed across diverse nations in combating religious extremism among young individuals and to contextualize these approaches within the framework of Kazakhstan. Central to this endeavor is the identification of pivotal mechanisms and underlying causes of religious extremism among youth, with the aim of formulating actionable recommendations for its effective mitigation. Implicit in this study is the acknowledgment that establishing a robust system for youth prevention and deradicalization necessitates collaborative efforts among governmental bodies, public organizations, educational institutions, and religious entities. To comprehensively address religious extremism among youth in Kazakhstan, we conduct a thorough analysis of scholarly literature and practical experiences, culminating in the proposal of targeted recommendations and strategies.

In the 21st century, combating terrorism, extremism, and radical ideologies has emerged as a primary imperative for nations worldwide. State strategies and initiatives are increasingly geared toward fostering national development within environments characterized by peace, tolerance, and social harmony. Over several decades, countries, including the United States, European Union members, and Asian states, have grappled with extremist religious factions. Situated as a pivotal hub in the Central Asian region, the Republic of Kazakhstan contends with pockets of intolerance, often rooted in religious factors, exacerbated by migration patterns, transit routes, and a diverse populace. The study of extremism within society, particularly among young people, and the implementation of effective countermeasures represent a pertinent and pressing subject. Historically, the younger generation has served as a catalyst for progress and societal advancement yet has also been susceptible to the sway of radical ideologies. It is imperative to approach this issue with objectivity and impartiality. Amidst contemporary geopolitical shifts and the evolution of the global order, the responsibility lies with the younger generation and students to navigate

their nation toward development, shaping the requisite national trajectory for the future. In this context, the preservation of national identity and the cultivation of a neutral stance toward radical and extremist doctrines among youth stand as critical components in the holistic formation of the state as an independent entity within the new global landscape.

In the Middle East and Central Asia, countries have developed distinct national security strategies with a pronounced emphasis on preventing extremism and radicalization. An important consequence of radicalism is the emergence of youth radicalization. Research on religious radicalism has primarily centered on adherents of Islamic radical movements, revealing an underlying ethnopolitical dimension within religious extremism. Notably, a group of scholars conducted a study predicated on interviews with foreign affiliates of radical movements (Ashraf & Aslanova, 2021). Their findings underscored religious identification as the primary impetus driving youth to join extremist groups, with social and psychological factors also playing pivotal roles. Moreover, the study highlighted a relationship between religious illiteracy and the proliferation of religious extremism among youth, noting that a majority of the militants interviewed possessed only secondary-level education (Ashraf & Aslanova, 2021). However, it is worth noting that some scholars contend that an important portion of ostensibly less-educated radicals exhibit a high level of education and sophistication in their understanding of extremist ideologies.

During their study, the authors undertook several analytical approaches. They assessed countries' rankings based on terrorism levels and peacefulness using data from the Global Terrorism Index and the Global Peacefulness Index for the year 2023. Additionally, the authors conducted an analysis of global Muslim populations, including those within the European Union and Central Asia, for both 2022 and 2023 (measured in individuals). Furthermore, a comprehensive study was conducted to quantify terrorist attacks on religious grounds spanning the period from 2007 to 2022, categorized by region (measured by frequency). Moreover, the authors examined fatal incidents driven by religious extremism within the United States from 2013 to the first half of 2023 (measured by frequency). These meticulously gathered datasets facilitated a nuanced exploration aimed at identifying key factors essential for countering religious extremism among young individuals.

As part of the study, a comparative analysis was conducted encompassing the United States, Europe, and Central Asia. This analysis aimed to delineate the nuances of countering religious

extremism within youth demographics and examined the normative-legal frameworks of these regions. This methodological approach proved instrumental in elucidating specific features and identifying optimal strategies applicable within the Kazakhstani context. This study presents Kazakhstani legislation regarding countering religious extremism among young people. The research and comparative analysis yielded both scholarly insights and practical recommendations tailored for the state institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The vulnerability of young people to extremist and radical ideologies is often associated with social, legal, and sometimes ethnic considerations. Furthermore, the prevalence of online radicalization underscores the imperative of addressing digital spaces in contemporary discourse on youth radicalization, emphasizing the importance of factors conducive to deradicalization and societal cohesion.

### **Literature Review**

Preventing religious extremism among young people is a subject of extensive research, with studies underscoring the pivotal roles of education, upbringing, and intercultural dialogue in countering radicalization. The effective utilization of the Internet and social media platforms to monitor and combat extremist propaganda is equally imperative. Engaging with youth at the grassroots level through educational initiatives, workshops, and preventive measures constitutes a cornerstone of these efforts. Moreover, certain studies emphasize the psychological and sociological dimensions influencing youth radicalization, emphasizing the necessity of comprehending the underlying motivations prompting young individuals to affiliate with extremist groups. Furthermore, the literature discusses the realm of prevention and deradicalization programs, stressing the importance of tailored approaches and psychological support for individuals grappling with the specter of religious extremism (Hertanto et al., 2022; Muhaemin et al., 2023).

The literature underscores the paramount importance of collaborative efforts among governmental agencies, community organizations, religious leaders, and educational institutions in effectively countering religious extremism among youth. It advocates for the formulation of comprehensive strategies that amalgamate diverse prevention, surveillance, and deradicalization methodologies, coupled with rigorous evaluation of intervention efficacy. Moreover, there is a recognition of the necessity to contextualize program development in light of sociocultural factors and the distinct characteristics of religious communities. Indeed, tailoring counter-radicalization strategies to

accommodate sociocultural nuances and religious community specifics can yield greater success. This approach facilitates the development of personalized strategies that address the unique needs of various youth cohorts confronting religious challenges.

The literature highlights the importance of actively involving young people in discussions and promoting their participation in educational, cultural, and social initiatives to cultivate resilient anti-extremist beliefs. Furthermore, fostering the active civic engagement of youth and promoting the development of their critical thinking and analytical skills are crucial in effectively countering religious extremism among them (Ruslan & Irham 2022; Suntana & Tresnawaty, 2021).

Addressing terrorism, particularly among younger demographics, stands as a pivotal endeavor in crafting robust strategies for future advancement and prosperity, extending beyond the confines of individual nations to encompass the purview of international organizations. Zakurlaev (2020) underscores this as indicative of the commitment of global players to the preservation and reinforcing of principles such as equality and tolerance. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the author did not explore methods to mitigate instances of extremist explosions in non-Muslim countries, possibly owing to the absence of a pronounced issue within this particular context.

Tungatova et al. (2023) highlight that the practical directions of state activity exhibit a degree of inconsistency and even contradiction, which constitutes a primary factor contributing to the somewhat unfavorable outcomes in the battle against radical movements within the state. However, the experts noted a notable absence of analysis pertaining to the theoretical dimensions of the issue under study.

Iskakov et al. (2023) discovered that addressing youth extremism within the country poses an important challenge. The authors pinpointed the imperfect strategy surrounding the reintegration of former prisoners into society as a primary concern. This issue is exacerbated by the prevalence of unemployment, lack of prospects, and absence of social support among individuals involved in terrorist groups (Iskakov et al., 2023). Notably, there has been a dearth of examination into the involvement of affluent and prosperous members of society in extremist activities.

Textual formats, videos, and visuals wield important influence over the psychological well-being of young individuals. Regrettably, recruiters from extremist factions exploit this influence by actively leveraging social media platforms. Mussiraliyeva et al. (2022) underscore this as a grave yet remediable issue, necessitating urgent attention to forestall further harm. In their analysis of strategies to combat the dissemination of terrorist propaganda online, Sharipova and

Beissembayev (2021) advocate for the establishment of a robust monitoring and control system for social media content, enabling swift removal of any references to incendiary topics. However, the researchers did not examine the potential efficacy of fostering online communities for disseminating positive messages as a countermeasure against extremism.

The study by Alava et al. analyzes the relationship between youth and religious extremism on social media platforms. Providing a comprehensive global analysis, the study presents experiences and recommendations for combatting religious extremism (Alava et al., 2017). Similarly, the study titled "Countering Violent Extremism and the Role of Education in Humanitarian Action" (2017) offers an insightful overview of effective methods to counter religious extremism through youth education and training. This study holds promise in developing strategies tailored to Kazakhstan's context. In a related vein, Ahmed et al. (2022) explore methodologies for preventing religious extremism by supporting youth and fostering community engagement in their study. The authors delve into the theme of preventing violent extremism through the empowerment of youth and active involvement of communities.

In a complementary study, Adam-Troian et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive review of literature concerning youth radicalization, recruitment tactics, extremist ideology, and deradicalization, shedding light on the mechanisms underlying religious extremism. Similarly, Pedahzur and Perliger (2011) contribute to the discourse with their research on youth radicalization and religious extremism, offering actionable proposals for combatting this phenomenon. These works encompass a wide array of aspects related to the issue of religious extremism among young individuals, rendering them valuable resources for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners dealing with this topic in Kazakhstan and beyond (Assyltayeva et al., 2024).

Alajmi (2021) identified the form of violent extremism among students within the College of Education at Kuwait University while also probing the underlying factors driving young individuals towards such ideologies. Employing a cross-sectional design, the study utilized MANOVA analysis to analyze the data at hand. The sample encompassed 192 teachers and 426 students from Kuwait University. Data collection relied on three standardized questionnaires designed to examine the various forms and causative factors of violent extremism, as well as the role of teachers in its mitigation. Descriptive analyses were conducted to identify indicators of violent extremism and ascertain their statistical significance concerning variables such as occupation, gender, age, and experience in countering violent extremism.

The study titled "The Relationship between Different Social Factors and the Intensity of Student Radicalism" explores the correlation between four distinct social factors - religiosity, religious tolerance, relative deprivation, and social capital (serving as independent variables) - and the intensity of student radicalism (dependent variable) in Lampung, Indonesia. The research samples were drawn from three public schools and three madrasas. Data collection was conducted through a literature-based questionnaire, and subsequent analysis employed chi-square and correspondence analysis techniques. The findings revealed significant relationships between each variable and the intensity of student radicalization. Notably, religiosity and religious tolerance emerged as the factors with the most pronounced correlation to radicalism intensity (Hertanto et al., 2022).

Seitakhmetova et al. (2021) discovered that engaging in the study of Islamic sciences, encompassing disciplines like theology, history, philosophy, and culture, can augment young individuals' understanding of Islam. This enhanced comprehension serves as a bulwark against the misinterpretation of religious teachings and extremist ideologies. Additionally, the authors advocate for the organization of educational initiatives, seminars, and dialogical discussions centered on Islamic studies. These platforms offer young people the opportunity to deliberate on pressing issues related to radicalization and collaboratively devise constructive solutions.

## **Materials and methods**

### **Research Design**

This study holds importance as religious extremism presents a pervasive global threat spanning diverse countries and cultures. Conducting a comparative analysis of global experiences alongside the context in Kazakhstan facilitates the identification of common trends and effective countermeasures. Given young people's susceptibility to religious extremism, attributed to their quest for identity, grasping the nuances of this demographic and implementing preventive measures becomes paramount for safeguarding societal security and stability. Furthermore, leveraging global experiences to tailor interventions to local conditions enhances the effectiveness of efforts to counter religious extremism, considering Kazakhstan's unique cultural and socio-political landscape. Understanding the mechanisms and root causes of religious extremism among youth is pivotal for formulating effective preventive measures and improving public safety. Research in this domain assumes paramount importance for societal well-being, as it furnishes

insights crucial for devising strategies to combat religious extremism, thereby fostering a safer environment for young individuals and society at large.

To uphold objectivity in their study, the authors employed a diverse array of information sources, including academic articles, statistical data, expert opinions, and interviews with participants engaged in countering religious extremism initiatives. Adopting a critical stance toward data analysis and interpretation, the researchers sidestepped biases and embraced varied viewpoints on the subject matter. Throughout the preparation of the article, ethical principles such as protecting the confidentiality of research participants, nondiscrimination, and respect for diverse perspectives were meticulously observed.

By maintaining objectivity in their research endeavors, the authors ensured the provision of reliable and unbiased data crucial for the development of effective strategies to combat religious extremism among youth.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The methodology employed in researching religious extremism typically encompasses a range of general scientific methods, including deduction, phenomenological analysis, and extrapolation. Foreign studies often integrate psychological methods to discern trends and latent manifestations of extremism across various societal spheres, including groups, organizations, movements, and individuals. Despite the complexity inherent in psychological research on extremism, established methods and recommendations exist for identifying extremist inclinations, intentions, capabilities, and readiness for extremist actions. For instance, the Militant Extremism Mindset (MEM) Scale, as proposed by Furnham et al. (2020), stands out as an effective methodology for identifying individuals exhibiting extremist thought patterns and behavioral tendencies. Additionally, Williams and Ahmed (JTFS) have introduced a technique for identifying fundamental material in textual analyses, while Putra and Sukardi's Islamic Fundamentalism Scale (IFS) enjoys widespread usage in judicial processes (Hammer & Lazar, 2019). These methodologies serve as valuable resources for researchers aiming to delve into the intricate dynamics of religious extremism.

Yet, a shortage persists in scientific research regarding the conceptual distinction between extremism and radicalism. Furthermore, empirical data indicates that the queries incorporated into scales aimed at gauging extremist values in individuals frequently harbor ambiguity, thus permitting a variety of potential responses.

## **Data Analysis**

While promising research exists on pinpointing extremist and radical inclinations, there remains a necessity for a more encompassing methodology capable of discerning both individual and collective factors contributing to the emergence of radicalism and extremism. Throughout the investigation into countering religious extremism among youth and the examination of foreign experiences, the following research methods were employed:

1. At the beginning of the study on countering religious extremism among young people, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. This encompassed academic literature, scientific articles, and relevant research publications, all pertaining to the subject matter. The aim of this review was to familiarize oneself with global experiences and various approaches toward countering religious extremism among young people. A multitude of information sources were analyzed to obtain a holistic understanding of the issue and discern the primary approaches to addressing it. This preliminary stage laid the groundwork for further research endeavors, aiding in the identification of research directions and methodologies.
2. Analysis of legal documents and legislation: The analysis of legal norms and legislation pertaining to countering religious extremism was conducted. This encompassed the study of international conventions, national laws, regulations and concerning extremism, as well as programs and initiatives targeting the prevention and mitigation of religious extremism among young people.
3. The historical research method was employed to illustrate the evolution and intricacies of legislative changes pertaining to normative-legal regulations in the context of countering extremist trends within the local population. This facilitated the identification of key characteristics of such endeavors across various historical stages, shedding light on the historical trajectory of this activity.
4. The research applied the case study method to examine the proliferation of religious extremism among young people. It entailed an analysis of successful practices and strategies employed in foreign countries to counter religious extremism among youth. Through this approach, effective methods and mechanisms were identified, which could be tailored to suit the specific context of Kazakhstan.
5. Additionally, the method of comparative analysis was employed to juxtapose global experiences with the situation in Kazakhstan. This comparative study facilitated the identification of common

trends, disparities, and unique aspects in approaches to countering religious extremism among young people.

6. Additionally, the SWOT analysis method was utilized. Throughout the research, a SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the factors affecting policy formation and the implementation of its components in countering religious extremism among young individuals. This study employed the method to identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of adopting particular approaches toward terrorists and extremists. Moreover, it aimed to outline potential opportunities and risks associated with implementing specific principles for engaging with young individuals influenced by extremist ideologies.

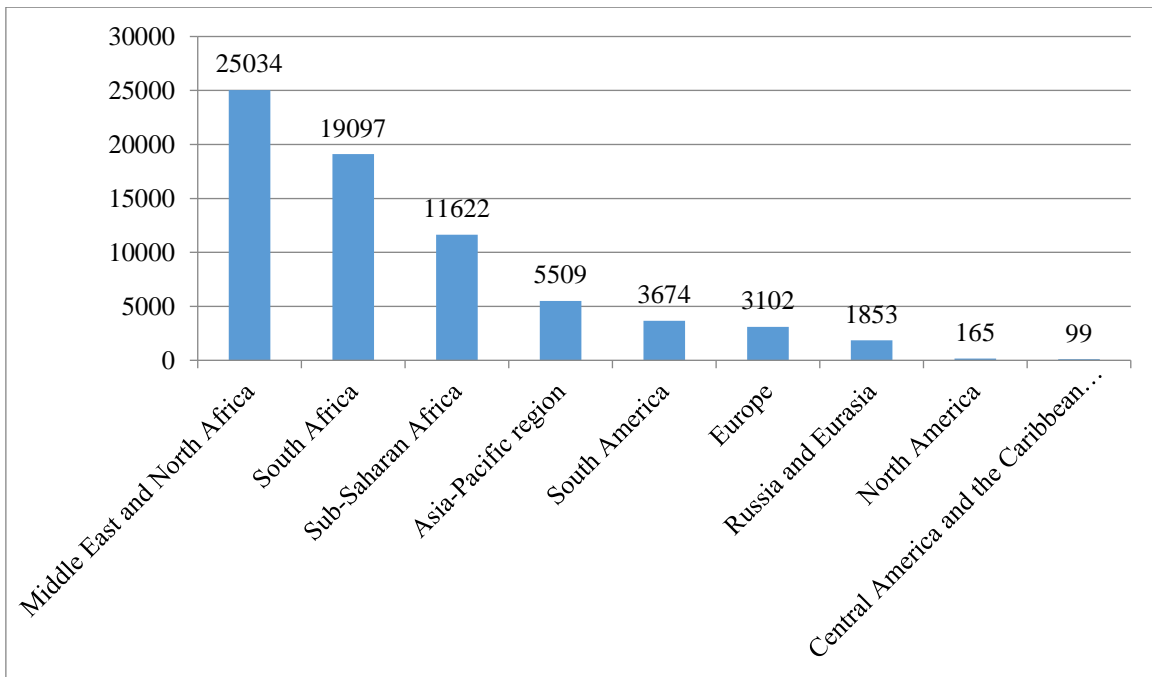
7. Analysis of regulatory and legal documents: To comprehensively examine the fundamental characteristics and pivotal components of countering youth radicalization in Kazakhstan and globally, several normative and legal documents were analyzed. Among these documents is the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Combating Extremist Activity” (2004). Furthermore, this study incorporates official reports and strategies from international organizations, such as the Global Terrorism Index for 2023 by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2023) and the Global Counterterrorism Strategy of the United Nations (2020).

## **Results**

Religious extremism poses an important contemporary challenge, especially among young people. Effectively addressing this issue necessitates a strategic examination of countermeasures, incorporating insights from both global experiences and the unique context of Kazakhstan. This section presents the key findings and scientific conclusions regarding countering religious extremism among youth, derived from the analysis of international practices and the national context. The findings will help identify key factors, methodologies, and approaches, thereby providing recommendations for the formulation of effective strategies and programs in this domain.

There is a common belief in society (Zakurlaev, 2020; Shonhayi et al., 2019) that the development of information technologies and new communication methods has mitigated conflicts among individuals by reducing competition for resources, particularly in medium- and highly-developed states. However, this belief is not entirely accurate. The incidence of conflicts, armed confrontations, and military engagements has been on the rise annually (Sasangka & Syauqillah,

2023). These conflicts often stem from social instability, gender inequality, persecution based on gender or physical disabilities, economic struggles, financial difficulties, and an upsurge in criminal activities. In 2022 alone, there were over 65,000 terrorists incidents globally fueled by intolerance and extremist ideologies (Eraliev, 2022) (Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates terrorist attacks across regions from 2007 to 2022.



**Figure 1. Regional Distribution of Sectarian Group Terrorist Attacks: 2007-2022**

(Terrorist Attacks from 2007 to 2022, The 50 Countries Where it’s Hardest to Follow Jesus in 2023)

Establishing clear criteria to unequivocally elucidate the current ranking of a specific state in terms of the intensity of influence by terrorist groups or the prevalence of certain extremist movements proves challenging when considering individual geographical regions and continents. It can be argued that the growing influence of aggressive radicalized factions arises from various factors. These include notably liberal legislation concerning migrants and refugees in developed democracies like France or the United States (Sommers, 2019), controlled with stringent control over social and private life among citizens in nations such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan (Aimaganbetova et al., 2023). The conducive environment for the proliferation of radical

ideologies diminishes when legislation aligns with the needs of the local population and supports national interests (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Ranking of Countries by Terrorism and Peace Levels: Global Terrorism Index and Global Peace Index (2023)*

The most terroristic				The most peaceful			
№	Country	Overall score in 2023 *	Overall score and ranking in 2022	№	Country	Overall score in 2023 **	Overall score and ranking in 2022
1	Afghanistan	8.822	9.109 / 1	1	Iceland	1.124	1.107 / 1
2	Burkina Faso	8.564	8.270 / 4	2	Denmark	1.310	1.296 / 4
3	Somalia	8.463	8.398 / 3	3	Ireland	1.312	1.288 / 3
4	Mali	8.412	8.152 / 7	4	New Zealand	1.313	1.269 / 2
5	Syria	8.161	8.250 / 5	5	Austria	1.316	1.300 / 5
6	Pakistan	8.160	7.825 / 10	6	Singapore	1.332	1.326 / 9
7	Iraq	8.139	8.511 / 2	7	Portugal	1.333	1.301 / 6
8	Nigeria	8.055	8.233 / 6	8	Slovenia	1.334	1.316 / 7
9	Myanmar (Burma)	7.977	- / 9	9	Japan	1.336	1.336 / 10
10	Niger	7.616	7.856 / 8	10	Switzerland	1.339	1.357 / 11
30	United States	4.799	4.961 / 28	15	Germany	1.456	1.462 / 16
34	France	4.419	4.562 / 35	67	France	1.939	1.895 / 65
35	Germany	4.242	4.729 / 33	76	Kazakhstan	1.980	2.071 / 97
50	Tajikistan	3.438	3.988 / 47	86	Uzbekistan	2.033	2.001 / 86
70	Uzbekistan	1.731	-	100	Turkmenistan	2.107	2.116 / 104
-	Kazakhstan	-	-	101	Kyrgyzstan	2.110	2.028 / 94
-	Kyrgyzstan	-	-	102	Tajikistan	2.114	2.031 / 92
-	Turkmenistan	-	-	131	United States	2.448	2.440 / 129

*Source: This information was compiled by the author based on sources (Global Terrorism Index 2022, 2023, Global Peace Index 2022, 2023).*

*Note:*

\* - *The total score encompasses incidents, hostage-taking incidents, as well as injuries and fatalities resulting from terrorist attacks.*

\*\* – *The overall score considers tolerance, loyalty to representatives of from all societal segments, and the frequency of armed confrontations and conflicts.*

Studying the experiences of the United States, the European Union, and Central Asia in preventing the spread of religious extremism among youth holds critical importance for several reasons. Firstly, it enables other countries to understand the methods and strategies employed in these

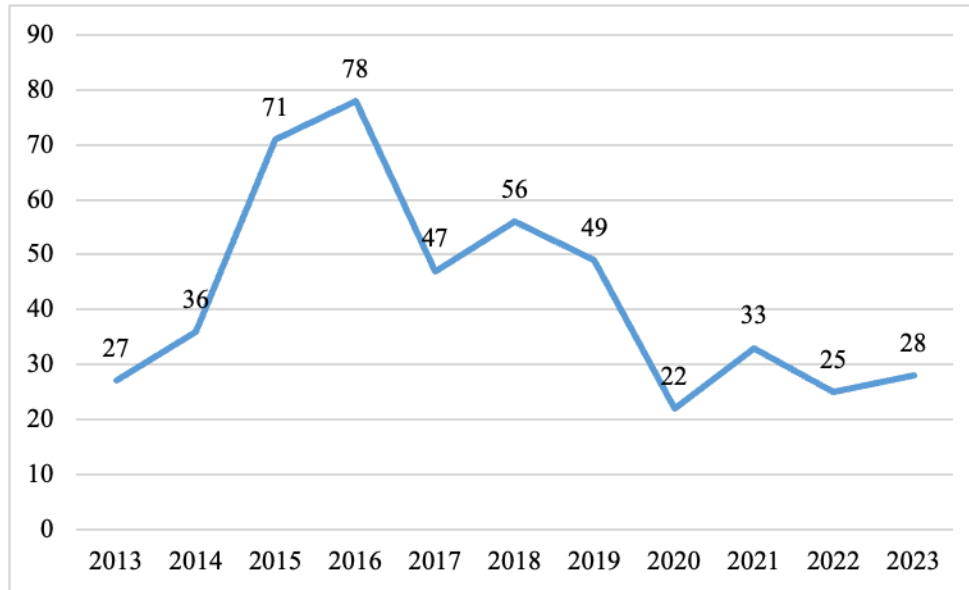
regions to counter religious extremism, thereby aiding in the development of effective measures on a national scale. Secondly, this exchange of experiences facilitates the identification of effective and ineffective approaches.

Religious extremism transcends borders, impacting numerous countries across the globe rather than being confined to a single region. To devise an inclusive strategy for countering this phenomenon, it is important to learn from different parts of the world. Young people frequently find themselves susceptible to religious extremism, underscoring the importance of leveraging lessons from various countries' experiences in engaging with youth. These insights can inform the creation of programs and activities geared toward preempting radicalization. By analyzing the efforts of the United States, the European Union, and Central Asian states in mitigating the spread of religious extremism among young people, a deeper comprehension of this issue can be attained. Consequently, this understanding facilitates the development of efficacious strategies to combat the scourge of extremism.

#### *United States of America*

For years, the United States has been a key player in combating terrorism, extremism, and radical movements. Military interventions initiated by Washington in countries like Syria and Libya have showcased a resolute stance against these threats, albeit with varying levels of intensity and dynamics (Smith, 2018). The imperative to counter extremism grew considerably following the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which resulted in the loss of over 3,000 lives (Phillips, 2021).

In 2021, the United States witnessed over 1000 reported incidents of religious prejudice targeting certain groups and nationalities. Among these, anti-Semitism emerged as the most prevalent, with 321 reported cases. These incidents encompassed various forms of aggression including blackmail, kidnapping, arson, murder, and terrorist attacks. Law enforcement authorities detained over 200 individuals, primarily comprising young Muslim adults aged 18 to 25, as a result of investigations (Number of Anti-Religion Hate Crime Incidents in the United States in 2022). In 2022, this trend persisted, with a notable reduction in the overall number of fatalities resulting from terrorist acts compared to preceding years (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Temporal Trends of Fatal Incidents Motivated by Religious Extremism in the U.S.: 2013 - First Half of 2023**

(Source: Phillips, 2021; Jones et al., 2020; Pitcavage, 2022; US Sets Grim Mass Killings Record in First Half of 2023)

Extremist movements have emerged as a notable concern for Washington, particularly owing to the allure they hold for the younger generation. In 2022, individuals aged 18 to 25 were involved in 21 out of 25 recorded murders, underscoring the gravity of the situation. This poses a substantial challenge for the United States, prompting authorities to take robust measures to address and mitigate its adverse repercussions. As a global leader in safeguarding human rights and freedoms, the United States is committed to combating discrimination based on religion, race, and other factors, which frequently serve as underlying catalysts for aggression.

Important changes occurred in the American legal landscape toward the end of 2001, notably in October, with the adoption of the federal legislation known as the “Patriot Act of the United States of America.” This legislation substantially broadened the responsibilities and authority of authorities tasked with countering terrorism and extremism within the country (Phillips, 2021). The act authorized the use of various surveillance methods, including mobile listening, electronic surveillance, and secret searches. Mobile listening entailed the installation of listening and recording devices in vehicles, while electronic surveillance permitted monitoring and regulating all correspondence of suspects on social networks. Clandestine searches involved thorough

inspections of residences and other premises without notifying the owners. The country established dedicated agencies and units, such as the Bureau for Countering Terrorism and Extremism, to combat extremism. Additionally, a specialized counterterrorism system was developed and implemented, encompassing both mitigative efforts and preventive initiatives targeting young individuals (Smith, 2018). In June 2015, a new Act (Hutson, 2021) was introduced, which marginally eased restrictive measures against migrants, Muslims, and individuals deemed unreliable. However, this did not substantially change the overarching framework within the extremism counteraction system.

The United States has established a unique framework for combating terrorism and extremism, incorporating diverse components. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that practices such as the employment of torture to save American lives, as permitted in the US, are deemed unacceptable measures in the majority of European nations (Jones et al., 2020). Departments and divisions tasked with countering radical groups often operate as independent analytical centers, enhancing the effectiveness of their endeavors. Moreover, numerous programs and initiatives aimed at combating extremism have been initiated and are operational. Non-governmental organizations such as the Institute of Peace and the Southern Center for Human Rights also play important roles in these efforts.

To prevent young people from being drawn to ideologies of Islamization and radicalism, specialized support groups operate locally across diverse educational and cultural institutions, and public places. Their primary objective is to help individuals who may potentially be enticed by radical groups, including troubled teenagers, unemployed individuals, and those with psychological challenges (Hutson, 2021). Furthermore, to oversee and regulate online activities of young people, the social media correspondence of nearly every youth in the United States is closely monitored. Although this policy may be perceived as excessively stringent and encroaching on personal freedoms, its practical efficacy has been substantiated.

#### *European Union Member States*

Extremist activity, particularly within the religious realm, stands as a pressing concern across several European Union (EU) member states. Acknowledging this challenge, leaders of these countries are actively pursuing measures to address it, including normative-legal regulation and the harmonization of methodologies to counter extremism, often in collaboration with international organizations such as the UN. The adoption of key international conventions, such as the

International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings in 1997 and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism in 2005, alongside additional normative documents targeting religious extremism and radical movements, underscores the concerted efforts in this domain. Moreover, the Council of Europe's endorsement of the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism in 1977, followed by the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism in 2005, further signifies the collective commitment to combatting extremism (Bourekba, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the existence of numerous legislative acts at both EU and national levels, the absence of clear definitions for extremism, terrorism, and associated concepts poses challenges in coordinating actions and attaining effective outcomes in this area.

The country's Criminal Code defines extremist activities as those encompassing aggressive and counterproductive actions that threaten the state system, national security, and the lives of the population, prescribing specific penalties (Kurtenbach et al., 2021). In recent years, Germany has witnessed a surge in crimes motivated by anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Right-wing radical groups accounted for 21,514 crimes in 2022, with over 3,000 instances of anti-Semitism occurring in educational institutions and religious establishments, resulting in 63 fatalities (Başay & Asgarli, 2022). Regarding countermeasures, Germany has implemented a system of preventive measures targeting young people and adolescents within educational settings. This system aims to deliver educational sessions and lectures emphasizing the impermissibility of radical behavior in society, presenting alternative pathways and delineating repressive measures in cases of legal violations. However, it's important to note that severe measures such as freedom restrictions or deportation are viewed as a last resort (Koehler, 2021). This factor may embolden radical extremists, who could interpret Germany's liberal laws as insufficient deterrents against their actions.

In the legislative arena, German authorities have been actively involved in combating terrorism. The enactment of the Law on Combating Terrorism in 1986 provided a foundational definition of terrorism and delineated primary methods for its prevention. Subsequently, in 2002, the adoption of the Law on Combating International Terrorism (Kurtenbach et al., 2021) substantially broadened the scope of anti-terrorism legislation. A specialized task force was established in 2003 to collect and analyze data on radical extremist activities within the country, accompanied by important amendments to interim statutes (Kurtenbach et al., 2021). Moreover, in 2016, the country introduced the Strategy for the Prevention of Extremism and Promotion of Democracy

(Sjoen, 2023). This strategy is geared toward fostering democratic development, thwarting radicalization among young people, fortifying the protection of the most vulnerable population segments, and upholding national ideals and values.

According to a report (Maraj et al., 2021), a considerable proportion of terrorist acts motivated by religious extremism in the country are perpetrated by young individuals, including teenagers, from the Muslim population, encompassing both local indigenous residents and migrants. Notably, this analysis abstains from subjective assessments. Furthermore, there is a growing narrative in the media regarding the potential “Islamization” of the European continent by 2050, prompting specific actions in some nations. For instance, in France, municipal-level initiatives offer support to Muslim teenagers previously convicted of religious extremism and nearing release. These initiatives include provisions for free housing, job opportunities, and educational pathways, aimed at facilitating their reintegration into society. However, challenges persist, particularly in isolated towns and villages in France, where these efforts often encounter limited success.

**Table 2**

*Estimated Muslim Population in the World, European Union, and Central Asia: 2022-2023*

World	Percentage of the total population	EU	Percentage of the total population	Central Asia	Percentage of the total population
Pakistan	- (98) * 240,760,000 (96.46) **	France	- (6) 5,720,000 (8.54)	Uzbekistan	- (86) 29,920,000 (87.9)
Indonesia	- (89) 236,000,000 (85.82)	Germany	- (4) 5,720,000 (8.54)	Kazakhstan	- (71) 13,158,672 (70.2)
India	- (10) 200,000,000 (14.6)	Italy	- (2) 2,987,840 (4.8)	Tajikistan	- (98) 9,253,000 (96.99)
Bangladesh	- (89) 150,800,000 (91.28)	Spain	- (1) 1,180,000 (2.53)	Kyrgyzstan	- (88) 5,850,000 (90)
Nigeria	- (49) 97,000,000 (48.5)	Belgium	- (4) 879,377 (7.6)	Turkmenistan	- (93) 5,610,000 (93.02)
Egypt	- (93) 90,000,000 (94.74)	Bulgaria	- (14) 861,015 (12.2)		
Turkey	- (83) 84,400,000 (98.14)	Austria	- (5) 720,000 (8)		
Iran	- (97) 82,500,000 (99.4)	Sweden	- (4) 700,000 (6.87)		
China	- (1) 50,000,000 (3.6)	Netherlands	- (2) 387,000 (2.22)		
Algeria	- (99) 43,737,096 (99)	Denmark	- (5) 313,713 (5.4)		
United States	- (2) 3,450,000 (1.05)				

*(Source: Top 25 Countries with the Largest Number of Muslims in 2022, Muslim Population by Country 2023, Two Global Religious Divides: Geographic and Generational 2023, Measuring*

*Religion in China. Islam, 2023, Political, Social and Economic Background and Trends, 2023, Kiyagan, 2023)*

*Note:*

\* - Preliminary figures based on total primary data provide the information for the first quarter of 2023 in percentages.

\*\* - in 2022

There is no specific legislation explicitly targeting religious extremism in the state. However, several laws address pertinent aspects of this concern. For instance, the Migration Act of 1981 outlines criteria that disqualify individuals from obtaining French citizenship, notably involvement in radical or terrorist activities. Similarly, the 1986 Law on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Foreigners in France provides grounds for the deportation of individuals whose actions imperil national security. In 2001, the Abu Picard Law concerning the activities of religious sects, as cited by Zinigrad and Sawyer (2023), was enacted. Although this legislation does not outrightly ban sects, it enumerates circumstances necessitating the immediate cessation of their activities, such as engaging in aggressive acts against authorities and citizens, threatening national security, and involvement in criminal activities targeting young individuals. Moreover, the 2021 enactment of the Law “On Strengthening Republican Principles,” also referred to as the “law against separatism.” (Maraj et al., 2021), warrants attention. Analysts have critiqued this legislation for potentially infringing upon the rights and freedoms of the Muslim populace, particularly concerning religious practices. Notably, this law introduces the notions of “counter-society” and “Islamic separatism,” emphasizing the pivotal role of education in combatting extremist ideologies among youths of all religious affiliations.

#### *Central Asian countries*

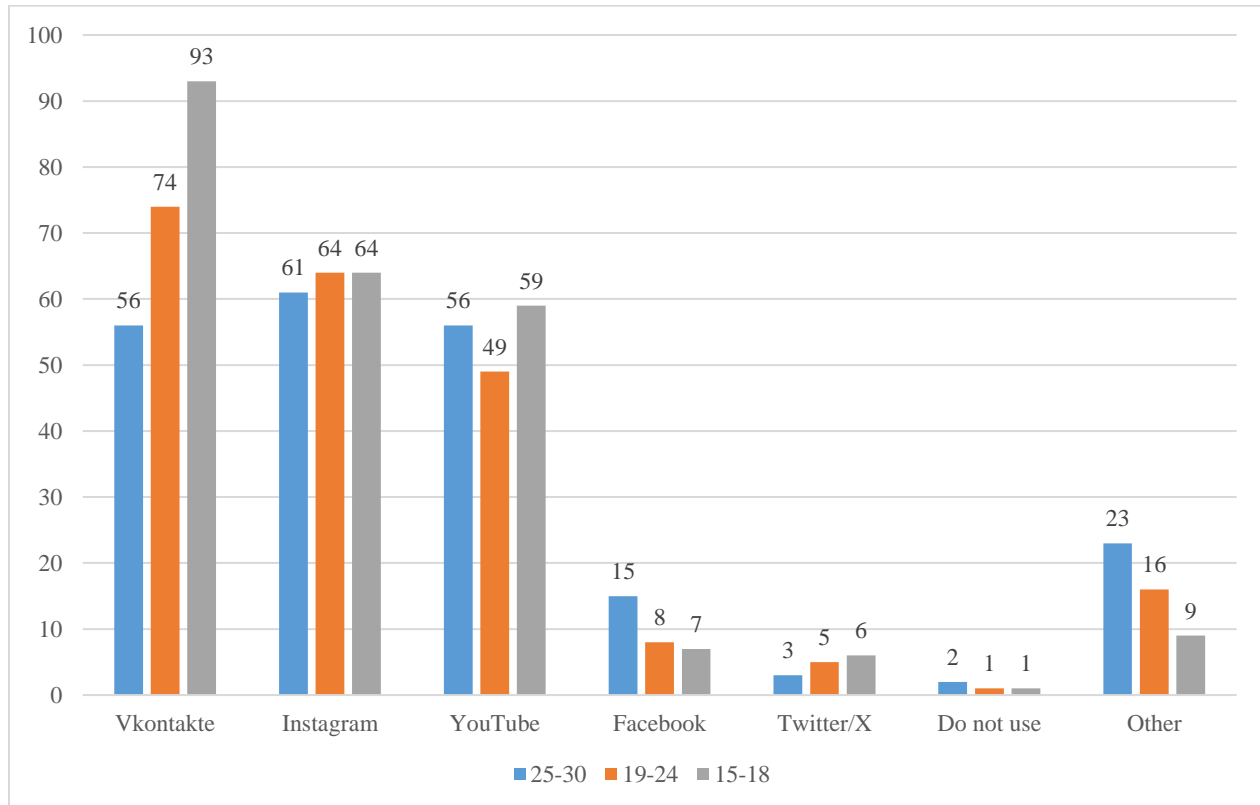
The roots of religious extremism in Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) can be traced back to the early 1990s. During this period, the region experienced an immature political system, deteriorating economic indicators, falling living standards, and escalating corruption and criminality. These factors contributed to a surge in radicalism. According to several researchers (Mussiraliyeva et al., 2022; Salimov, 2019; Nuradinov & Jumageldinov, 2022), heightened unemployment rates and a lack of prospects among young people have fueled their increasing interest in extremist ideologies. Furthermore, neighboring countries historically invested in fostering radical viewpoints among Central Asian youth to manipulate power dynamics in the region. Consequently, radicalization and Islamization

have become entrenched in the societal fabric of nations like Iran and Syria. Notably, terrorist organizations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, al-Qaeda, and ISIS have exhibited important activity in the region (Tungatova et al., 2023; Iskakov et al., 2023).

To address the escalating threat of religious extremism and mitigate the harm inflicted by terrorist groups, the leaders of the five Central Asian states have embarked on a concerted effort to implement region-wide measures. This initiative involves collaborative actions within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization to strengthen cooperation and establish a robust framework for combating terrorism. An important milestone in this endeavor was the signing of the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism in Central Asia in 2001 under the auspices of the SCO (Nuradinov & Jumageldinov, 2022). This convention mandates the exchange of classified information vital for national security, facilitates regular meetings to address pressing issues, and coordinates preventive initiatives targeting youth to mitigate the risks of radicalization. Serving as the cornerstone normative document in this domain, the convention underscores the region's commitment to confronting extremism effectively. Active engagement in international organizations' activities by religious leaders, public figures, and other influential individuals is pivotal in Central Asian Muslim countries. Additionally, the SCO plays a crucial role in gathering intelligence on individuals involved in terrorism and extremism. As of 2020, the SCO database contains over 8,000 names, including approximately 700 Kazakhstani citizens, as reported by the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan (Tungatova et al., 2023).

As a prominent regional leader and active participant in global affairs, the Republic of Kazakhstan bears an important responsibility to uphold security and stability within Central Asia. This commitment entails addressing pressing issues such as religious extremism, terrorism, and acts of aggression, which have garnered increased attention from the Republic. In 2021, Kazakhstan took a decisive step by adopting an Action Plan aimed at monitoring and controlling efforts related to the implementation of state policy in the religious sphere (Sharipova & Beissebayev, 2021). This plan adheres strictly to the principles of the rule of law and the nation's legislative framework. It is important to note that Kazakhstan's authorities are placing particular emphasis on combating religious extremism propagated through online platforms. Multiple studies (Salimov, 2019; Mawlood, 2023) underscore the pivotal role of the younger generation, typically aged between 35 and 45 years old, in the nation's development. As the most dynamic segment of society, they

constitute the primary consumers of various resources and services. In Kazakhstan, students and young people emerge as the most active users of the Internet and social networking platforms, as illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Leading Social Media Channels in Kazakhstan from January to September 2023**

With the advent of new information resources, the public now has access to a vast array of information encompassing news, entertainment, and informative content. Furthermore, religious ideas and issues have become increasingly accessible through these channels. However, alongside the positive dissemination of religious messages, there is also a negative side to it - the aggressive promotion of highly radical ideas by certain individuals pursuing selfish objectives.

To deter young individuals from engaging with radical and terrorist organizations, specialized documents have been formulated, such as the Cyber Security Concept aimed at combating extremist recruitment and propaganda online. The implementation of the “Cyber Shield of Kazakhstan” system (Mussiraliyeva et al., 2022) has been instrumental in curbing religious extremism within social networks. By the conclusion of 2020, over 21,000 entries featuring

extremist materials and calls to violence were successfully eradicated from the Kazakhstani segments of prominent social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

When examining Kazakhstan's legal framework concerning the counteraction of terrorism and religious extremism, it is important to highlight several key laws: the Law “On Combating Terrorism” (1999), the Law “On Countering Extremism” (2005), and the Law “On Religious Activity and Religious Associations” (2011). Additionally, several presidential decrees and strategic documents are pertinent to this domain, including the Presidential Decree “On Measures to Prevent and Suppress Manifestations of Terrorism and Extremism” (2000), the Presidential Decree “On Approval of the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan” (2018), and the National Security Strategy for 2021–2025 (Tungatova et al., 2023). These legal instruments aim to regulate the activities of religious associations, oversee their interactions with the younger generation, impose partial restrictions to safeguard national interests, and foster collaboration among national, regional, and global stakeholders to combat terrorism and extremism on a global scale (Countering international terrorism and extremism, 2022).

In 2006, Kazakhstan introduced a list of prohibited organizations (Iskakov et al., 2023) to protect the population from terrorism and extremism. The list primarily comprises Islamic extremist groups such as the Taliban, Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qaeda. While Salafi (Wahhabi) jamaats are not officially prohibited in the country, they are known to propagate the dissemination of religious extremism. For instance, in 2004, individuals who had received education from the Ubay ibn Kaab madrassa were implicated in terrorist activities in Uzbekistan (Koehler, 2021).

Upon analyzing state policies across different nations aimed at combating religious extremism and radicalized youth groups, it becomes apparent that approaches to controlling behavior and participation in such associations vary markedly. The United States and some European countries such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom predominantly address youth extremism through the educational system, employing methods such as indoctrination, informative discussions, and analogous tools. In contrast, in Muslim-majority nations, religious leaders, imams, public figures, and scholars assume pivotal roles in educating students and adolescents, alongside engaging in preventive initiatives within educational institutions.

In many countries, particularly in Europe, legislation often lacks a precise definition of “extremism.” Nevertheless, it typically offers interpretations of extremist activities and

behaviors, along with outlining approaches and measures to address such actions. The ambiguity surrounding this phenomenon suggests a lack of a clearly defined strategy to combat extremism in these countries. Consequently, this ambiguity may result in the implementation of measures that restrict human rights and freedoms, thereby conflicting with liberal national legislation. In contrast, the United States has developed and effectively implemented a comprehensive system to counter extremism in all its manifestations since the early 21st century.

### **Discussion**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand, it is crucial to comprehend the fundamental terms and concepts. The term “extremism” made its debut in the United Nations (UN) Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism in 1994 (Pistone et al., 2019). It was recognized as a novel threat to the modern world, emerging at the nexus of centuries. In Kazakhstan, the normative framework does not explicitly define “extremism.” However, the Law “On Countering Extremist Activity” delineates extremist activity as a combination of violent and/or coercive actions with the intent to achieve specific outcomes, such as altering the constitutional order, infringing upon sovereignty and national integrity, seizing power, establishing an illegal paramilitary entity, inciting armed rebellion, or fostering social discord (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Combating Extremist Activity,” 2004). Similarly, the Law of Kyrgyzstan, 'On Combating Extremist Activity,' does not provide a standalone definition of extremism. Nevertheless, it outlines extremist activity, closely mirroring the interpretation provided by the Kazakh law. Extremist activity in Kyrgyzstan encompasses violent acts intended to destabilize the country (Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Combating Extremist Activities,” 2023).

In the United States, the term “extremism” is not as prevalent in political and academic discourse. Instead, terms such as “terrorism,” “radicalism,” “acts of aggression,” and “Islamization” are commonly employed. Extremist offenses are frequently linked with hate crimes, which can stem from various motivations, including religion, politics, race, or sexual orientation (Jones et al., 2020). Official definitions of extremism are more commonly found within the legislative frameworks of European nations. The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy characterizes extremism as activities aimed at undermining the democratic principles of lawful states, disregarding societal norms and regulations, and pursuing self-serving objectives at the expense

of citizens' well-being and lives. Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary defines extremism as any activity aimed at maximizing specific political or religious views (Pastuovic et al., 2020).

For instance, in Germany, the absence of a legal definition for extremism implies a lack of direct guidelines or governmental rules to address youth radicalism effectively. Similarly, in France and Germany, while terrorism is construed as an act of aggression, the concept of extremism is not explicitly codified in legislation. However, certain legislative provisions stipulate that if a criminal act is motivated by religious bias, the punishment should be more severe (Ragazzi et al., 2019). Moreover, within the normative-legal framework of the country, law enforcement agencies and courts make a distinction between extremist crimes of a political nature, typically perpetrated by state representatives, and those of a religious nature, often committed by followers of specific faiths. Analysts suggest that this differentiation aids in tailoring preventive measures to mitigate the recurrence of such crimes (Bourekba, 2019; Ragazzi et al., 2019).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the concepts of "extremism" and "extremist activity" are closely intertwined, and in this study, they are utilized interchangeably to denote the same phenomenon. By examining the specifics of extremist activity and amalgamating distinct features of extremism, several distinct categories of extremism can be discerned. Notably, these encompass political extremism, characterized by actions ostensibly aimed at safeguarding national interests or economic gains but ultimately serving self-interests; social extremism, involving deliberate actions to violate the rights and freedoms of specific social groups with the aim of destabilizing the state; and religious extremism, which entails the manifestation of aggression against the state (Ali, 2021). Today, the issue of religious extremism is particularly pressing, given its allure to many young individuals, and the activities of radical groups pose threats to the security of numerous states worldwide.

In ancient times, it became evident that religion, spiritual ideas, and experiences could serve as potent tools for shaping societal attitudes and aspirations. The roots of religious extremism can be traced back to pivotal historical events such as the Inquisition, which commenced in the 12th century and involved the Catholic Church's efforts to combat heresy. Bartholomew's Night in 1572 in France, marked by the mass persecution of Huguenots by radical Catholics, stands as another grim example. Additionally, conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites in Iran and Saudi Arabia, along with the Crusades, exemplify the longstanding history of religious strife (Svennevig et al., 2021; Amit & Al Kafy, 2022).

In line with Kazakhstani legislation, religious extremism is characterized by a propensity within religious beliefs toward radical ideologies, which can manifest in behaviors including inciting disputes, causing harm to individuals, and threatening lives (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Combating Extremist Activity,” 2004).

Multiple studies show that religious extremism, radical ideologies, and terrorist activities are particularly prominent within the Muslim population (Pistone et al., 2019; Zinigrad & Sawyer, 2023). The incidence of crimes motivated by religious factors is observed to be on the rise annually (Koncak & Isra, 2022). These trends are notably pronounced in countries with substantial Muslim populations in the region (see Table 2). However, it's important to note that this factor should not be regarded as the exclusive or sole condition for the escalation of crimes motivated by religious intolerance.

### **Conclusions**

Upon analyzing the historical, legislative, and contemporary facets shaping the issue, notable insights emerged regarding the examination of religious extremism and its mitigation, particularly within the youth demographic. Since the 1990s, numerous nations have attained independence, confronting widespread poverty and a dearth of opportunities. Consequently, this socio-economic landscape has fostered the proliferation of radical religious factions and other manifestations of societal fragmentation. This observation is particularly salient in Central Asia, where young republics have encountered an unparalleled rise in terrorism and religious extremism emanating from neighboring states. The study showed that while developed nations generally traverse akin evolutionary trajectories, their approaches to combating radical groups vary. For instance, the United States predominantly emphasizes stringent preemptive measures, including surveillance, wiretapping, and sporadic employment of coercive interrogation tactics. Conversely, the European Union prioritizes preventive strategies, notably through educational initiatives tailored to dissuade the genesis of terrorist inclinations among young individuals.

The study findings revealed that despite Washington's adoption of stringent measures to counter extremist activities, it has effectively implemented an anti-terrorist policy that has effectively mitigated the threat posed by religious radicals. Conversely, in Europe, certain regions have witnessed remarkable levels of policy liberalization. However, the humanization of penalties for extremism has yielded unfortunate consequences, particularly evident in Germany and France. In Central Asia, terrorism and youth extremism have persistently plagued the region. While recent

efforts to address these issues have gained traction, primarily through international organizational platforms, productive endeavors in this regard are relatively nascent. Kazakhstan, within this framework, aspires to assert independence while fostering collaboration with fellow Central Asian nations.

Youth radicalism emerges as a consequence of legal illiteracy, pervasive negativism, erosion of trust in institutional authority, and the deconstruction of worldview frameworks. Particularly in Central Asian and Middle Eastern nations, youth radicalism intertwines with ongoing political, economic, and social transformations, detrimentally affecting the social cohesion of younger generations. These transformations engender societal fragmentation, fostering cultural, political, and social alienation among youth and prompting the quest for alternative ideological avenues of protest. Addressing youth radicalism necessitates systemic interventions. Prioritizing religious education and enlightenment emerges as a paramount strategy in this endeavor.

The analysis of global trends alongside Kazakhstan's local circumstances underscores the formidable challenge of combating religious extremism among youth. Consequently, it is imperative to acknowledge that religious extremism constitutes a grave threat to young individuals, both on a global scale and within the specific context of Kazakhstan.

Addressing this issue is paramount for safeguarding the security and stability of society. Global experience underscores that effectively countering religious extremism demands a multifaceted approach encompassing social, educational, informational, and religious initiatives.

When formulating strategies and programs to prevent radicalization and mitigate the involvement of young individuals in extremist groups, it is essential to consider the unique characteristics of the Kazakhstani youth environment, cultural heritage, and religious traditions. Educational institutions, youth organizations, spiritual leaders, and governmental entities each wield considerable influence in combating religious extremism. Upholding a neutral tone and adhering to a formal register throughout the discourse is crucial. The content remains unchanged. The effective execution of anti-extremism endeavors hinges on collaboration and synchronization among all involved parties. Moreover, meticulous selection of words and adherence to grammatical correctness are essential.

Enhancing strategies to combat religious extremism and ensure the well-being of youth and society requires continuous research and meticulous monitoring of the outcomes of implemented measures.

### **Recommendations**

Following an in-depth examination of strategies to counter religious extremism among youth in diverse countries, we have formulated practical recommendations tailored specifically for Kazakhstan.

To establish a robust legal framework, it is important to integrate both punitive measures and incentivization strategies. This comprehensive approach aims not only to deter criminal behavior but also to foster a culture of harmonious coexistence among diverse religious and belief systems. Moreover, proactive steps need to be taken to safeguard teenagers' online experiences, including the implementation of cyber-protection protocols for websites, blogs, and other online platforms. In the field of education, it is crucial to involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote safe and peaceful living under Muslim customs, proper reading of the Quran, and tolerance toward people of diverse backgrounds. NGOs should conduct preventive classes focused on these topics. Additionally, a comprehensive information policy should be implemented to cover events in the lives of adolescents of all religions and political views. This policy should provide guidance on how to solve their problems without resorting to dangerous groups or connections. Finally, it is recommended that these topics be integrated into the educational curriculum of schools, universities, and other educational institutions.

It is recommended that the authorities establish a system to combat radicalism among young people with the involvement of both state and public figures. They should conduct an analysis of the issues outlined in the current National Strategy on Countering Extremism and develop a new document based on their findings. This new document should not only address the current state of the sphere but also predict the situation for the near future. Furthermore, the authorities should initiate various humanitarian projects to promote peace and reconciliation among young people.

### **Acknowledgment**

This research has received funding from the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan under Grant No. BR21882428, titled "The influence and prospects of Islam as a spiritual, cultural, political, and social phenomenon in postnormal times: the experience of the countries of the Middle East and Central Asia".

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