

Socio-Political Factors Fueling Violent Extremism in North Africa: A Multidimensional Analytical Approach

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Abstract

The Maghreb and North Africa are undergoing profound socio-political and economic transformations that have directly impacted the dynamics of violence and violent extremism. This study aims to provide a multidimensional analysis of the structural factors that fuel this phenomenon, employing a sociological, political, and psychological approach. The findings confirm that violent extremism is not the product of a single factor, but rather the result of a complex interplay between social fragility, the breakdown of the social contract, identity shifts, weak trust in institutions, and the effects of digital globalization. The study concludes that it is essential to adopt comprehensive, preventive policies with a developmental, cultural, and institutional focus, instead of relying solely on a security-based approach.

Keywords: Violent extremism - North Africa - social fragility - political transformation -, identity - violence - preventive policies.

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Introduction

In recent years, North African countries have faced growing challenges related to the spread of violence and extremist behavior among certain social groups. These phenomena are inseparable from the structural transformations taking place in Maghreb societies at the economic, social, political, and cultural levels. Profound economic changes, accompanied by rising unemployment, declining purchasing power, and widespread poverty, have created fragile social environments that generate a growing sense of exclusion and futility among large segments of the youth, making them more susceptible to extremist behaviors and radical rhetoric. The decline in social justice indicators and the widening spatial disparities between major cities and peripheral regions have also contributed to weakening traditional social bonds and dismantling the mechanisms of social control that once played a crucial role in containing deviant behavior.

Alongside this, the effects of the digital space and social media have emerged as a decisive factor in reshaping patterns of social interaction. The spread of extremist ideas and the circulation of violent content have become faster and more impactful thanks to the open borders of the virtual world. This space has enabled extremist groups to penetrate the mindsets of young people through systematic mobilization that exploits feelings of anger, despair, and frustration. The picture is further complicated by the regional context, characterized by political tensions, border disputes, and security crises in Libya and the Sahel region. This has led to influxes of weapons and mercenaries, contributing to the creation of volatile environments conducive to the spread of violence and extremism. Added to this is the inadequacy of public policies in some countries of the region to meet genuine development needs, weak coordination among state institutions, and declining trust in formal mechanisms for political participation and social justice, all of which have exacerbated the sense of hopelessness among young people.

This complex and interconnected situation necessitates an in-depth analytical study that considers the interrelationships between sociological, demographic, political, institutional, cultural, and identity

dimensions. Such a study is crucial to understanding whether the current wave of behavioral extremism is merely a reflection of transient crises, or whether it stems from deep-seated structural problems requiring a comprehensive reassessment of development models and the social and cultural policies adopted in North African countries.

The importance of this topic stems from its focus on one of the most sensitive issues in human security and sustainable development in North African countries, where manifestations of violence and extremism threaten social stability, impact the course of political reform, and limit the economic and social integration of young people. Analyzing the root causes of this phenomenon allows for the formulation of effective and integrated preventive policies that enhance the capacity of the state and society to confront these challenges and contribute to building a development model capable of mitigating the causes of extremism.

This study employs a multidimensional analytical approach that combines a sociological approach to understand the dynamics of the family and society, a political and institutional approach to examine governance patterns and trust in the state, and a cultural and identity-based approach to analyze the symbolic and discursive structures exploited by extremist movements. The analysis is based on a synthetic reading of the literature, a review of social and demographic indicators, and consideration of the broader regional context.

Based on the foregoing, the central problem addressed by this study revolves around the following question: what extent do social, demographic, political, institutional, cultural, and identity-related factors contribute to explaining the rise of violence and behavioral extremism in North African societies?

As a preliminary answer to this problem, we propose two possible hypotheses:

First, there is a direct correlation between social and demographic fragility and the rise in indicators of behavioral extremism among youth in North Africa.

Second, weak political governance and declining trust in institutions promote the spread of extremist rhetoric and create an environment conducive to violence.

In order to answer the problem posed and arrive at conclusions through the proposed hypotheses, **Four axes** were adopted as the design of the article's topic:

First axis: Social and demographic factors of the phenomenon of extremism in North Africa;

Second axis: Political and institutional factors of extremism in North Africa;

Third axis: Cultural and identity factors of the phenomenon;

Fourth axis: Possible solutions to reduce the phenomenon of extremism in North Africa.

First Axis: Socio-Demographic Factors

Socio-demographic factors constitute one of the fundamental pillars for understanding the dynamics of violence and behavioral extremism in North Africa. This phenomenon is closely linked to the overall social structure and the profound transformations the region has witnessed in recent decades. Rapid population growth, coupled with a high proportion of young people within the population pyramid, has created increasing pressure on education, health, housing, and employment systems, resulting in widespread vulnerability and social exclusion. Structural shifts in the family structure and the decline of traditional socialization and solidarity institutions have also contributed to weakening mechanisms of social control, leaving large segments of youth susceptible to the influence of violent and rejectionist rhetoric.¹

1- Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996, p. 22.

These problems are exacerbated by the stark spatial disparities between urban areas, rich in institutions and services, and peripheral areas suffering from underdevelopment and long-standing marginalization, generating a growing sense of social injustice and inequality of opportunity. Furthermore, the economic pressures resulting from unemployment and the lack of job market opportunities make young people fertile ground for the reception of extremist rhetoric, which they see as a psychological or symbolic outlet from their frustration².

From this perspective, analyzing social and demographic factors becomes essential for understanding the roots of the phenomenon, as it reveals the structural nature of violence and extremism as products of complex interactions between economic, social, and living conditions that collectively contribute to shaping extremist behaviors in the region.

The first requirement: The structural social factor that produces extremism

The structural social factor is one of the most important determinants influencing the formation of behavioral extremism within North African societies. The profound social transformations that the region has witnessed in recent decades have produced a volatile social reality characterized by economic vulnerability, the decline of family functions, and the weakening of socialization institutions. The rapid pace of urbanization, accompanied by the ruralization of cities and the emergence of overcrowded marginalized neighborhoods, has led to the erosion of traditional solidarity networks that once served as a safety valve for balanced social behavior. Due to the decline in basic social services and the increasing pressure on education, health, and housing, many individuals-especially young people have found themselves in environments characterized by instability and diminished opportunities for positive integration³.

2- Ibid.

3- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, p. 41.

Furthermore, the weakness of policies targeting youth and the decline of mechanisms for social participation have generated a general feeling of exclusion and a sense of hopelessness. This creates a psychological and social entry point for adopting violent behaviors or responding to extremist rhetoric that offers simplistic solutions to complex social problems⁴. Furthermore, the family has transformed from an institution of care and upbringing into a unit affected by economic pressures and instability, thus diminishing its capacity to fulfill its protective roles. These structural factors, when combined with economic and demographic fragility, create a fertile social environment for the spread of behavioral extremism as an unbalanced response to accumulated social tensions⁵.

Second Requirement: Features of Class Structure that Produce Extremism

The class structure in North African countries exhibits clear features of social inequality, manifested in the wide gap between the affluent and lower classes. This constitutes an additional structural factor in the production of violence and behavioral extremism. The persistence of economic disparities, the concentration of wealth in the upper classes, and the decline in social mobility all fuel a sense of injustice and create among marginalized groups the conviction that the social system is incapable of guaranteeing equal opportunities or achieving social advancement⁶.

The class divisions that breed extremism are particularly pronounced in marginalized areas suffering from underdevelopment and a lack of infrastructure and basic services. In these areas, the manifestations of marginalization become more visible, and the feeling

4- Crenshaw, Martha. *Explaining Terrorism : Causes, Processes, and Consequences*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p. 67.

5- Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society : Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, 1992, p. 119.

6- Bourguignon, François. *The Globalization of Inequality*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, p. 58.

that the state is absent or incapable of improving living conditions takes root. Conversely, the excessive focus on development in major cities deepens the sense of inequality, pushing some individuals to seek symbolic alternatives that grant them a sense of belonging or power. This is exploited by extremist movements to promote a discourse that legitimizes rejection, protest, and violence⁷.

Furthermore, the economic transformations associated with globalization and the informal labor market have contributed to the emergence of new “vulnerable classes,” living in a state of limbo between unemployment and precarious work, without social protection or job security. This class, burdened by existential anxiety and a sense of alienation, is often the most susceptible to adopting extremist behaviors as an expression of protest against a social structure perceived as unjust and exclusionary⁸.

Analysis of social and demographic factors reveals that behavioral extremism in North African countries is not merely an isolated individual phenomenon, but rather a product of fragile social structures where family transformations, the pressures of urban life, and widening class and spatial disparities intersect. Economic vulnerability, lack of social mobility, and the decline of socialization institutions all contribute to a fertile environment that reinforces individuals’ susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Therefore, addressing this phenomenon requires profound social reforms that reduce exclusion and rebuild mechanisms for social integration.

The second axis: Political and institutional factors

Political and institutional factors constitute one of the key elements for understanding the roots of behavioral extremism in North African countries. The level of societal stability is directly linked to the effectiveness of the state and its ability to produce fair and transparent

7- Bourdieu, Pierre. *La Misère du monde*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1993, p. 121.

8- Standing, Guy. *The Precariat : The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2011, p. 7.

public policies capable of building trust between citizens and institutions. The political transformations the region has experienced over the past two decades, along with the accompanying governance crises, weak institutional efficiency, and fluctuating reform paths, have created a widening gap between society and the state. This gap manifests primarily in declining trust in institutions, weak mechanisms for political participation, and the spread of bureaucracy and corruption, which weakens the sense of belonging and increases susceptibility to unorganized protest behaviors⁹.

Furthermore, the limitations of development policies in achieving spatial and social justice lead individuals to feel that the state is either incapable of responding to their aspirations or unwilling to do so, thus opening the door to counter-narratives that seek to undermine the legitimacy of existing institutions. In this context, behavioral extremism becomes an expression of political deadlock exploited by radical actors who present themselves as an alternative to formal institutions. Therefore, analyzing political and institutional factors allows us to understand how weak governance transforms into a fertile ground for rejection and violence, enabling the spread of extremism within society¹⁰.

The first requirement: Power dynamics and weak governance and their role in producing political fragility and fueling extremism

The power structure in North African countries, with its centralized decision-making and weak mechanisms for participation and transparency, is among the factors that profoundly contribute to the emergence of manifestations of behavioral extremism. Political institutions often operate according to a traditional bureaucratic logic that fails to keep pace with social transformations, and they frequently

9- Fukuyama, Francis. *Political Order and Political Decay : From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2014, p. 89.

10- Diamond, Larry. *The Spirit of Democracy : The Struggle to Build Free Societies in an Undemocratic World*, Times Books, New York, 2008, p. 112.

lack strategic planning based on citizen participation and addressing their demands. These dynamics create a state of political fragility, the effects of which are evident in the imbalance between the state and society, and in the reinforcement of a sense of exclusion among broad segments of the population, especially young people¹¹.

Furthermore, weak governance, whether at the local or central level, entrenches a culture of distrust in institutions. The inability to implement public policies, weak accountability, and the accumulation of mismanagement all lead citizens to view the state as a distant entity incapable of responding to their expectations¹². This disconnect between rulers and the ruled opens the door for extremist rhetoric that seeks to fill the void of legitimacy and legality, exploiting discontent to generate unorganized protest behaviors that may, in some cases, escalate into violence or symbolic extremism¹³.

Moreover, the persistence of traditional patterns of power exercise, and the reliance of some elites on networks of loyalty rather than competence, leads to weak institutional competitiveness and a lack of equal political opportunities, thus reinforcing a sense of institutional injustice. These feelings constitute the primary entry point for fueling behavioral extremism by creating a collective consciousness that is tense and alienated from the state. Therefore, it appears that the relationship between weak governance and the spread of extremism is not circumstantial, but rather structural, stemming from deep-seated imbalances in governance patterns and methods of managing public affairs¹⁴.

11- Hibou, Béatrice. *La bureaucratisation du monde à l'ère néolibérale*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 2012, p. 43.

12- Heydemann, Steven. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East : Regimes and Resistance*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 45–48.

13- Lynch, Marc. *The Arab Uprisings : The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, PublicAffairs, 2013, p. 22–30.

14- Hibou, Béatrice. *Anatomie de la domination*, La Découverte, 2011, p. 89–97.

The second requirement: The impact of political and regional transformations on shaping society's susceptibility to behavioral extremism. Since the beginning of the third millennium, North African countries have witnessed a broad wave of political transformations, most notably social protests, the faltering democratic transition, shifting international alliances, and escalating tensions in their regional environment, such as the conflicts in the Sahel and Sahara and Libya. These changes have contributed to a volatile political environment that has made society more susceptible to extremist rhetoric¹⁵.

Domestically, the post-protest era has failed to produce a stable political model. Political reforms have remained incomplete and hesitant, perpetuating a climate of political uncertainty. This charged atmosphere encourages some groups to adopt radical positions, either as a means of expressing political anger or in search of alternatives outside traditional institutions. Furthermore, the weak democratization of political life and the ongoing crises of party representation have created a vacuum in political mediation, which extremism exploits to strengthen its presence among marginalized groups¹⁶.

Regionally, the proliferation of armed groups in the Sahel and Sahara, the rise of irregular migration, and the intensification of geopolitical competition among international powers have placed additional pressure on North African states. This pressure weakens the ability of states to control the security and political landscape and fuels a populist discourse that blames others for internal crises, thereby increasing the level of extremist behavior within society. The crisis-

15- Bellin, Eva. *The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective*, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2004, p. 143–150.

16- Lynch, Marc. *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 65-72.

- Hamzawy, Amr. *Arab Politics beyond the Uprisings: Experiments in an Era of Resurgent Authoritarianism*, Carnegie Endowment, 2017, p. 14-22.

driven media coverage prevalent in the region has also contributed to fueling feelings of fear and vulnerability, making it easier for extremist ideologies to recruit individuals¹⁷.

The interplay of these internal and regional transformations leaves society increasingly susceptible to radicalization, as the fragility of political institutions intersects with the unstable regional environment. This explains a significant portion of the tendency toward radical behavior in North African countries.

Analysis of political and institutional factors reveals that fragile governance and ineffective public policies, coupled with the dynamics of political and regional transformation, directly contribute to increasing societal susceptibility to various forms of behavioral extremism. A lack of trust in institutions, inconsistent reforms, and a widening representation gap all fuel political frustration and create a vacuum that allows radical discourse to flourish. Thus, the political factor, in all its facets, becomes a pivotal element in explaining the spread of this phenomenon within North African societies.

Third Axis: Cultural and Identity Factors

Cultural and identity factors constitute one of the fundamental pillars in understanding the dynamics of violence and behavioral extremism within North African societies. These factors are linked to the value system, patterns of socialization, and collective symbols that define an individual's perceptions of themselves and others. In light of the rapid transformations the region is experiencing, identity tensions have emerged as a result of conflicting cultural references, the decline of traditional frameworks for social control, and the growing influence of the digital sphere in reshaping collective consciousness. Furthermore, the friction between local and imported values, and the multiplicity of external influences, have contributed to a state of cultural confusion that

- International Crisis Group. Addressing the Rise of Armed Groups in the Sahel, ICG Report, 2021, p. 4-9.
- Zoubir, Yahia. Global Rivalries and North Africa, Routledge, 2021, p. 77-85.

has made some groups more susceptible to attraction to extremist rhetoric or radical behaviors¹⁸.

The importance of this cultural and identity dimension is amplified by its role in shaping patterns of social representation, formulating individuals' attitudes toward authority and society, and providing fertile ground for fostering feelings of exclusion or belonging. Hence it is clear that understanding the phenomenon of behavioral extremism is incomplete without analyzing the symbolic and cultural structures that determine power relations within society and influence the orientations of individuals, making this axis essential in analyzing the integration of factors that produce violence and extremism in North African countries¹⁹.

The first requirement: Identity issues, the conflict of cultural references, and their role in shaping susceptibility to extremism

Identity issues are among the most important factors influencing the structure of social behavior in North African countries, where multiple and intertwined identities interact: national identity, religious identity, Amazigh heritage, Arab-Islamic heritage, and historical ties to the Mediterranean and African spheres. This diversity of identities, in the absence of effective public policies for its management, sometimes becomes a source of tension and the reproduction of symbolic conflicts. Instead of cultural diversity serving as a catalyst for integration, it becomes an arena of conflict between groups seeking recognition or fearing marginalization²⁰.

This situation often stems from a lack of cultural justice, where not all cultural expressions are integrated into the state project with the same level of recognition. With the decline in the role of educational and cultural institutions in promoting the values of coexistence and openness,

18- Roy, Olivier. *La Sainte Ignorance : Le temps de la religion sans culture*, Éditions du Seuil, 2008, p. 41-55.

19- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, 1996, p. 58-72.

20- Azzedine, Layachi. *Political Identity in North Africa : Pluralism, Nationalism, and State Formation*, Routledge, 2018, p. 41-55.

a closed identity-based discourse emerges, offering a singular definition of self and other, and tending to reject those who are different or blame them for social and political frustrations. Here, the susceptibility to extremism emerges as a direct extension of identity tension, where the individual seeks to rely on a discourse that provides a sense of belonging, protection, and symbolic certainty²¹.

This problem is exacerbated by the clash between local identity and imported values, particularly through global media and the digital sphere, creating something akin to “culture shock” for certain groups. In this context of upheaval, behavioral extremism becomes an attempt to compensate for the identity void, resorting to rigid narratives that divide the world into good and evil, friend and enemy, believer and traitor. In this case, identity transforms into a symbolic weapon that justifies radical behavior and bestows upon it psychological and social legitimacy²².

The second requirement: The impact of value patterns and the digital sphere on reshaping awareness and extremist behavior

Over the past two decades, North African societies have witnessed profound value shifts as a result of cultural globalization and technological openness, where traditional values associated with family, tribe, and religion are now confronted by new patterns of individualistic and consumerist values. This shift has led to a disruption in the social control system, as the ability of traditional institutions (family, school, mosque) to guide behavior has diminished, while the influence of digital influencers, virtual platforms, and invisible digital groups has increased²³.

Thanks to its rapid dissemination and ease of access, the digital space has become a pivotal arena for reshaping consciousness, where extremist rhetoric is disseminated in the form of impactful and emotionally charged visual content. This content exploits the value vacuum among

21- Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1994, p. 222-237.

22- Schein, Louisa. *Virtual Encounters: Culture, Identity, and the Global Media Landscape*, Routledge, 2003, p. 147-165.

23- Giddens, Anthony. *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*, Routledge, 2002, p. 35-52.

certain groups, particularly young people experiencing psychological and social instability, directing them toward adopting protest or radical behaviors presented as “courageous stances” or “restoring lost dignity²⁴.”

These digital transformations have also contributed to the creation of alternative virtual communities that share common values and stances, providing their members with a sense of belonging and appreciation—something many segments of society lack in the real world. These digital groups can become breeding grounds for extremism, where violence is justified, frustrations are amplified, and simplistic interpretations of reality are offered. This gradually reshapes individual behavior, steering it toward more extreme patterns of thought and action²⁵.

Given the limited media and digital literacy among a large segment of the population, the digital space becomes fertile ground for the adoption of extremist behavior, especially when it intersects with economic and social vulnerability and the weakened educational role of traditional institutions²⁶.

An analysis of cultural and identity factors reveals that identity tensions, value system disruptions, conflicting points of reference, and the accelerating influence of the digital sphere all contribute to strengthening individual and collective susceptibility to behavioral extremism within North African societies. The absence of cultural policies that support diversity, weak social control, and the declining role of educational institutions transform identity from a framework for integration into an arena of conflict. Furthermore, unregulated digital content contributes to reshaping consciousness in ways that fuel radical behaviors. Thus, it becomes clear that the cultural and identity dimension constitutes one of the key elements for understanding the dynamics of extremism in the region.

24- Conway, Maura. Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis, 2017, p. 74-98.

25- Ibid.

26- Livingstone, Sonia & Helsper, Ellen. Parental Mediation, Online Skills, and Digital Literacy Among Youth, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 12–29.

Fourth Axis: Efforts and Opportunities to Reduce Extremism in North African Countries

Faced with the growing risks of violence and extremist behavior, and the accompanying threat to social and political stability, North African countries have launched a series of initiatives and reforms in recent years aimed at addressing the root causes of the phenomenon and strengthening societal resilience. These efforts have ranged from cultural and educational programs and security and legal policies to development and social strategies, in addition to regional and international cooperation projects. Despite the structural challenges that continue to hinder the full effectiveness of these policies, the region possesses promising opportunities to establish a comprehensive approach capable of reducing extremism and addressing its underlying causes. The importance of this axis lies in revealing the nature of these efforts and highlighting the available potential that can contribute to building strong societal immunity against the phenomenon²⁷.

The first requirement: National initiatives and institutional reforms in confronting extremism

North African countries have witnessed the launch of a series of national reforms and initiatives aimed at curbing extremism, focusing on the security, religious, educational, and social dimensions. Morocco, for example, adopted the “Reconciliation” program in 2017, which has benefited approximately 290–390 inmates convicted of extremism-related offenses, including the release of 288 inmates after completing intellectual, psychological, and legal rehabilitation programs. This program demonstrates the state’s ability to combine punishment and rehabilitation, contributing to the effective reintegration of individuals into society and reducing the likelihood of relapse into extremist behavior²⁸.

27- Hafez, Mohammed M., & Mullins, Christopher. *Radicalisation in the Maghreb: Dynamics, Drivers, and Responses*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020.

28- Délégation Générale à l’Administration Pénitentiaire et à la Réinsertion (DGAPR). *Rapport annuel sur le programme “Moussalah”: Réhabilitation, Réinsertion et Lutte contre l’Extrémisme Violent*. Rabat: DGAPR, 2019.

At the level of preventative security, security services have dismantled hundreds of terrorist cells since the beginning of the millennium, thus reducing the scope of action for extremist groups and limiting their recruitment capabilities. Furthermore, international terrorism indicators have recorded that Morocco has maintained zero terrorist attacks over the past five years, reflecting the success of its preventative policies²⁹.

The reforms also included modernizing religious discourse, training imams and religious guides in the values of moderation and tolerance, integrating citizenship and tolerance education programs into schools, and implementing social reintegration programs for released prisoners. These efforts are part of a comprehensive system that seeks to address the root causes of extremism, rather than relying solely on security measures.

The second requirement: Opportunities to enhance extremism prevention and strengthen community resilience

In addition to national initiatives, North Africa offers numerous opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of extremism prevention. The first is the human capital of its youth, which can be invested in through education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs to promote their social and economic integration and prevent extremist groups from exploiting their intellectual vulnerability.

The digital space also presents a dual opportunity. Despite its risks, it can be used to disseminate a moderate and appealing discourse to young people through educational content and awareness campaigns, thus countering the negative influence of extremist platforms. Regional and international partnerships also present an opportunity to strengthen institutional capacities, particularly in the areas of digital security,

29- Ministère de l'Intérieur du Royaume du Maroc. Rapport sur la Sécurité et la Lutte contre le Terrorisme au Maroc, 2000–2023. Rabat: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2023.

countering extremist propaganda, reintegration programs, and learning from successful international experiences³⁰.

At the cultural and identity level, heritage and authentic local values serve as tools to promote belonging and a positive identity, and to reduce the symbolic appeal of radical discourse. Civil society and local media are also effective tools for fostering dialogue, encouraging community participation, and monitoring the impact of extremism within neighborhoods and cities³¹.

Therefore, integrating institutional reforms with social and cultural programs, and leveraging youth and regional opportunities, constitutes a comprehensive and promising strategy for reducing extremism and promoting social stability in North African countries³².

An analysis of the efforts undertaken and the opportunities available reveals that North African countries have made tangible progress in countering extremism through rehabilitation and reintegration programs, modernizing religious discourse, and strengthening security and social prevention measures. Statistics also show a decrease in terrorist attacks and the dismantling of hundreds of cells, reflecting the effectiveness of these integrated approaches. At the same time, opportunities related to youth, the digital space, regional and international partnerships, and the revival of cultural values provide powerful tools for strengthening societal resilience against extremism. Therefore, it is clear that integrating institutional reform with human and cultural development is the optimal path to achieving stability and curbing the spread of radical behaviors.

30- United Nations Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). *Youth, Digital Media, and Preventing Violent Extremism: Case Studies from North Africa*. New York: UNOCT, 2022.

31- Ibid.

32- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Preventing Violent Extremism Through Inclusive Development in North Africa: Policy Recommendations and Lessons Learned*. New York: UNDP, 2021, p. 18–36.

Conclusion

The growing challenges facing North African countries related to the phenomenon of violence and extremist behavior, where social, demographic, political, institutional, cultural, and identity-related factors intersect, have shown that the causes of this phenomenon are not limited to a single dimension. Rather, they are the product of a complex interaction between the fragility of the social structure, weak trust in institutions, conflicting cultural references, and the openness of societies to the influences of the digital sphere. Furthermore, economic and social inequalities and class disparities play a pivotal role in reinforcing feelings of exclusion, thus increasing the susceptibility of vulnerable groups to extremist behaviors.

Despite these challenges, national and regional experiences, particularly reintegration and rehabilitation programs in Morocco, the modernization of religious discourse, and proactive security efforts, indicate a clear political will to address the phenomenon. Data also confirms the decrease in the number of terrorist attacks and the dismantling of hundreds of cells, reflecting the effectiveness of integrated approaches that combine security, educational, social, and cultural dimensions. This reinforces the idea that confronting extremism requires comprehensive and sustainable strategies that are not limited to repressive measures alone. Analyzing the various dimensions reveals that success in reducing violence and extremism is directly linked to a country's ability to implement institutional reforms, develop human capital, leverage the digital space, and foster a shared national culture. Therefore, countering extremism requires coordination among security, social, cultural, and educational policies to ensure the strengthening of societal resilience and the building of more stable and inclusive societies.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration programs:** Expand reconciliation and rehabilitation programs for released prisoners, with long-term follow-up to ensure their successful social and economic reintegration.
- **Develop social and economic policies:** Reduce class disparities and provide educational and employment opportunities for youth and vulnerable groups to lessen the economic appeal of extremism.
- **Improve governance and institutionalization:** Enhance transparency and accountability, and develop trust between citizens and the state, thereby reducing feelings of exclusion and limiting their political exploitation.
- **Modernize religious and cultural discourse:** Train imams and educators on the values of moderation and tolerance, and support citizenship and tolerance education programs within schools and cultural institutions.
- **Use the digital space positively:** Launch awareness campaigns and create engaging digital content targeting youth, countering extremist propaganda with innovative and appealing methods.
- **Strengthen regional and international partnerships:** Leverage global expertise in combating extremism and develop the capacities of security and social institutions through joint cooperation. **Activating civil society and local media:** Supporting community and media initiatives that promote dialogue, provide platforms for youth participation, and break down the social and intellectual isolation that fuels extremism.

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