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**PROBLEMS OF COUNTERING THE IDEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS  
EXTREMISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE**

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***Abstract***

The article is devoted to the problem of countering the religious extremism ideology among new generation of the North Caucasus region and particularly the Chechen Republic. In modern conditions of contradictions aggravation in the spiritual geostrategic space for the national security of Russia and its regions, the threats in the spiritual sphere are the most dangerous. Among them acts of religious extremism are very serious, whose young adherents use the Islamist ideology in their criminal practices. In order to increase the effectiveness of the struggle against this religious-extremist ideology in the youth environment, new approaches, forms and methods are required that are adequate to the dynamics of modern spiritual and religious expansion. The subject of the article is the countering system analysis of religious extremism ideology among young people. On the basis of empirical studies of various levels, the authors try to reveal the problem of spiritual, ideological and theoretical opposition to extremism and terrorism. According to the authors, an important factor in countering the ideology of youth religious extremism is the revelation of its reactionary essence, the entire complex of religious-dogmatic, political and legal ideas, views based on an alternative ideological system of traditional religious trends and particularly Sufi dogma and cult practice. The article analyzes the general and specific reasons for replenishing the ranks of extremist organizations with modern youth, and reveals some tasks of spiritual and moral education aimed at ensuring the spiritual security of new generation and protecting its traditional spiritual, moral and religious values.

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**Keywords:** Extremism, ideology, spiritual opposition, spiritual sphere, Sufism, Salafism.



## 1. Introduction

Among the acute problems specific to modern Russia, and particularly for North Caucasian regions, the problem of youth religious extremism under the ideology of Islam is referred, in which Eastern-Western and local spiritual and political influences, social and economic interests, moral and legal attitudes are fancifully intertwined. The effectiveness of the fight against this negative social phenomenon, the definition of preventive countering measures it should be based on the correct, scientific understanding of its inner nature, the reasons for its formation, and development laws. This implies a deep analysis of the socio-psychological, moral, ideological and especially religious and dogmatic, as well as political and legal basis of religious extremism, but should not be limited to a superficial, purely criminological approach in its explanation, where the external, most visible, violent side of this phenomenon is mainly described and considered. It is precisely such a deep scientific and theoretical approach to the disclosure of religious extremism essence, especially in the North Caucasus is reflected in the following scientific papers of Akhaev V.Kh., Bilalov M.I., Gadzhiyev R.G., Ignatenko A.A., Lukashev A.A., Muslimov S.Sh., Syukiyainen L.R., Khanbabaev K.M., Yakhyaev M.Ya. (Akayev, 2011; Bilalov, 2017; Gadzhyev, 2004; Ignatenko, 2000; Lukashev, 2017; Muslimov, 2011; Syukiyainen, 2008; Khanbabaev, 2011, Yakhyaev, 2017). The authors were guided by this approach when writing the article.

## 2. Problem Statement

The religious extremism problem poses a serious threat of the spiritual security for the Russian state and society as a whole, especially its manifestation under the ideology of Islamism, whose carriers are mostly a part of the young generation. The relevance of this problem is caused, first of all, by the scale of this ideology distribution, which carriers constitute a serious menace to our society, its cultural and spiritual being. This ideology is especially dangerous for the subjects of the South of Russia, who in the recent years experienced terrorist attacks under religious separatist banners, and their centers still continue to gnaw and can reignite in crisis conditions. Widescale ethno sociological studies held in 2016 in the North Caucasus have shown that religious extremism and Wahhabism followers still exist in this region. (Khanbabaev, & Yakubov, 2008). Their presence in their subjects is recognized by young people: the Kabardians and Balkars-66.2%, the Karachai and Circassians-46.6%, Dagestan peoples-82.1%, the Ingushes-22.9%, the Ossetians-42.6%, the Chechens-14.4% (Dzutsev & Betilmerzaeva, 2016). Periodically, they remind about themselves by dint of their sinister terrorist actions, for instance, in the Kizlyar district, Dagestan (July, 2018) or the attack on Michael the Archangel Orthodox church, Grozny. It should be noted that the North Caucasus region has its features, the most important can be identified as polyethnicity, polyconfessionalism and multiculturalism. However, the fact that the given region is also a youth one especially affects the actualization of the indicated problem. For example, young people up to 35 years old inclusively as of January 1, 2010 comprise 67.3% in the Chechen Republic. (Gadayev, 2017). In this regard, it can be argued that religious extremism in the North Caucasus is essentially youth, which makes it necessary to study this social negative phenomenon thoroughly and consider the countering problems of religious extremism ideology among young people.

### 3. Research Questions

Religious extremist ideology in the form of Wahhabism (Salafism) penetrated the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, at the end of the 20th century, after the dismantling of the USSR. Extremist groups under Islamist flags launched fierce attacks on traditional Islam of the Sufi direction under the specious pretext of cleansing Islam from all sinful, superficial, untrue, destructive for the true believers. Until now, the tragic confrontation between Sufism and Salafism continues to be, claiming a huge number of young lives. Since many young people are adherents of the religious extremism ideology, we can speak about youth religious extremism. Its essential characteristics are: a) the predominance of the younger generation in it; b) installation on the statement by violent methods; c) the presence of irrational extremism principles, which are logically difficult to explain behavioral acts that have emotional and psychopathic manifestations, seeking to achieve instant results, the rejection of democratic, compromise solutions; d) the tendency of young adepts to self-excitement, loss of control over their actions, readiness for any actions, as well as violations of the traditional norms of society, the credulity in the truth proposed by the ideologue, the creation of an infallible charismatic image of their leaders, as well as the image of an ideal world pattern in the future, etc.

Today it has become obvious that solving the problem of youth religious extremism by violent methods is impossible, the issues should not be focused on violent methods, but on spiritual, theoretical and ideological ways of solutions between Sufism and Salafism. It is about the ideological component of extremism, around which the whole bloody drama unfolds, about the problem of ideological opposition to youth religious extremism, where the focus is on aqyda issues (dogma and creed). Among a number of dogmatic issues (aqyda) on which since the distant past heated debates still take place among theologians, questions on the problems of qualities – the sifates (attributes) of Allah and their correspondence to his essence exist (Gadayev, 2016). Salafism adherents demand accepting the references about Allah qualities in the Qur'an without reasoning, in the literal sense, that is anthropomorphic (similar to man), and in traditional Islam and moderate Muslim theology anthropomorphic ideas about Allah are absent or the attributes are not literally, but symbolically or metaphorically interpreted.

Another important position in the ideological arsenal of Wahhabism followers is the Prophet Muhammad doctrine. In Salafism teachings he appears only as an agent. “Muhammad is already dead and there is no longer any benefit from him, he is only an agent who leaves, having conveyed the message,” is the keynote of their relationship to the Prophet. In traditional Islam and moderate Muslim theology, the image of the last Prophet (“the seal of the prophets”) is shrouded in a halo of universal veneration, his birthdays are solemnly celebrated, prayers are read (Mavlyud), they ask him to intercede in Ahirath for their Ummah before Allah, etc.

Sharp discussions take place between Salafism and Sufism in understanding the nature of the Quran. Modern Salafism representatives (Wahhabism) believe that the Quran and the Prophet statements can be interpreted literally, guided by their own understanding, without taking into account the historical and sociopolitical context, with an emphasis on the times “long gone”. Moderate Islam representatives admit a symbolic allegorical understanding of the Quran content and its ideas adaptation to the rapid dynamics of modern geopolitical life.

Sufism followers, who are distinguished not only with Allah sincere love and worship, but also with assiduous reverence for the great teachers of the faithfuls (ustaz), are particularly attacked in the dogma of Salafism (Wahhabism). Such worship of godly orthodox believers in Wahhabism is condemned, and equated with idol worship (shirk). Contrary to the radical Salafists assertions, Sufism followers do not worship their sheikhs – ustazes, but sincerely honor them, because by their righteous deeds they deserved the special goodness of the Almighty God and universal gratitude and reverence of the faithfuls. Radical Salafists are not also tolerant to the Sufi followers traditions to visit their spiritual mentors graves. They believe that the Sufis worship graves, call them contemptuously “corpse prayers”, “grave worshippers”, violating the tawhid principle (monotheism), which is categorically rejected by Sufism followers.

An important place is occupied by not only religious and dogmatic, but political and legal concepts in the ideological baggage of Salafi-Wahhabis, in particular, the interpretations of power and law foundations, the relationship between the state and individuals, the concept of acceptable political struggle, the legitimacy of the state power, attitude to non-Muslims, the concept of “shahid” and so on. Thus, in order to justify terrorism, Islamic extremists refer to the well-known verses of the Qur'an, which are often called “sword ayats”. There are also views in the ideological platform of new Salafists, that allow them to commit violence against everybody who does not allegedly obey the Creator orders, and even over Muslims who do not admit their views. In Salafi-Wahhabis political and legal concepts, one of the central places is occupied by the concept of non-recognition of any authority, which, in their opinion, deviates from the established Shariah tenets. It should be added that Wahhabism’s ideology adherents refuse to recognize not only the power of the infidels, but the power of Islamic rulers, who, to their mind, deviate from Shariah tenets.

As can be seen, the above political and legal concepts of radical Salafists are based on certain literally understood provisions of the Quran, Sunnah, Shariah and some famous theologians, based on their tendentious reading and interpretation and being adapted to their splitting aspirations. Nevertheless, they appeal to the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, therefore, religious extremism, Wahhabism cannot simply be turned away, claiming that they are usually lost believers: firstly, they mostly consider themselves to be genuine Muslims, and secondly they proceed, even formally, from the provisions of the Quran, Sunnah and Shariah, although in their tendentious interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to put forward convincing, logically verified, demonstrative counter reasons to their arguments, which is done by moderate Muslim theologians and jurists. In contrast to the militant and aggressive tenets of radical Salafists, they put forward concepts whose important principles are moderation (the principle of “Vasytiya”), the search for compromises, loyalty to the authorities, gradualness, extremes and risk avoidance, person liberation from excessive stress, harm elimination (Syukiyainen, 2008). These general principles are not tied to specific historical eras, they are universal and follow from the very nature of Islam. Modern Muslim jurists do not focus on blindly following Shariah letter, but on comprehending its main goals in their interpretation of Shariah, on comparing the damage and benefits that the practical implementation of Shariah specific regulations can bring.

When considering the problem of youth religious extremism (Salafism-Wahhabism) in the North Caucasus, its qualitative characteristic is necessary. According to many researchers, it is impossible for all young people who critically perceive local Sufism and consider themselves to be Salafis, to be considered

them as Wahhabists, extremists and terrorists (Yakhyayev, 2017). In this regard, we consider rational, ideologically and politically acceptable concept of “moderate Salafism”, which to some extent reduces the passions around the problem of Salafism and allows adherents of this trend seamlessly integrate into the social life of many countries not only in the East, but also in the West. Such integration is also relevant in the North Caucasus, especially with regard to its younger generation. The most important in the concept of “moderate Salafism” is the priority changes from theological, religious and dogmatic, to social economic and political in the life of Salafis. Without changing the strategic goals (building a world caliphate, operating on the basis of Shariah), the real practical “moderate Salafism” allows: 1. Limited application of Shariah tenets in non-Muslim countries and in secular states. 2. Legitimate forms and methods of public self-expression of Muslims in accordance with the laws of the country of residence. 3. Loyalty to secular principles of state political structure with the reorientation of Ummah’s efforts to the moral issues, family values, life challenges, etc. 4. Social construction of the Muslim Ummah through legal social projects. 5. Installation on intellectualism and understanding of the Islamic past of the modern world order from the scientific theoretical and methodological positions. In our opinion, moderate Salafis are the majority in the total mass of anti Sufists. Those young believers who consider it unnecessary to appeal to God through religious leaders or clergymen can be attributed to them. Conducted widescale sociological studies in the North Caucasus showed that only 26.7% of young Muslims consider it important or desirable to appeal to God through religious leaders or clergymen, which suggests that some young people are indifferent to an important Sufi principle (Dzutsev & Betilmerzaeva, 2016).

To reduce the confrontation tension between Salafism and Sufism, it seems to be relevant to the opposing sides adopt the principle of “Irjah”. In its time, trying to overcome the emerging confrontation among Muslims, the founder of Islam’s first mazhab, Imam Abu Hanifa, put forward the humanistic tolerant principle of “Irjah”, according to which, the controversy subjects, in the absence of reliable knowledge, should refrain from making a categorical decision. Also, the verdict about the truth of a person faith should be postponed to the Court of Allah, while hoping for his mercy. In modern conditions, when the problem of searching for ways to unite various Muslim sentiments and ideological currents has become topical, the concept of “Irjah” hides the still invaluable potential. “Irjah” could be an effective mechanism for intra Muslim dialogue and an effective factor in opposing religious extremism under Islamic banners.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this article is not only to reveal the opposite approaches in the interpretation of the religious dogmatic and political legal principles of Salafism and Sufism, in the context of neutralizing the ideology of religious extremism, but also to identify the true reasons for the transition of the part of young people to the influence of this ideology. Let us name some of them: 1. According to the ideologists of radical Islam, the modern world is completely mired in terrible sins: social injustice, lies, hypocrisy, debauchery, same-sex marriage, corruption, military intervention. At the same time, they consider themselves to be uncompromising actors in the conflict between fundamentalism, seeking to clear their own tradition of foreign culture influence, and cosmopolitan tolerance, welcoming cultural diversity (Apollonov & Tarba, 2017). The whole point of their stubborn and uncompromising struggle is quite professionally designed into a humane patriotic ideological structure: a great god-pleasing work is being

accomplished, the age old dream of true Muslims is being affirmed - to cleanse the world of vices and establish the world order on earth based on the principals of Allah Almighty, which was successfully realized by the Prophet in early years of the Caliphate. These optimistic plans for building a brighter future for all faithful find a response in the minds of young people who “either have not found themselves, or have already lost themselves.” 2. The ultimate dream of any Muslim is to go to heaven. Paradise is guaranteed to all participants in the movement for establishing a new Caliphate, while destroying apostates from the true faith. Supporters of this movement will inevitably be happy, rewarded both on earth and in heaven, and opponents will be destroyed on earth and will be tormented in hell forever. In any case, this true Muslim remains the winner: if the Caliphate wins, he is guaranteed a paradise on earth, if he perishes - paradise in heaven. 3. To a greater extent, young people are keenly responding to the social property stratification of modern society. Young people, as you know, have a heightened sense of sincerity, justice, sacrifice, honesty, and therefore, they manifest social protest more clearly against social and property stratification. 5. Material, social and economic reasons take not the last place among the motives pushing young people into religious extremist groups. 6. It is well known that the female youth also enter extremist organizations, having their own reasons and motives. These include conflicting relationships with the family related microenvironment, especially intergenerational contradictions, failed family life, unrequited love, adultery, perfidy, etc. 7. A powerful feeling of love can be an important factor contributing to the involvement of some girls in the ranks of religious extremist organizations. It is well known that many girls can act recklessly due to the deep and sincere love for a young man, follow him to any hell, risk their lives, and, if necessary, give their lives for their beloved one.

The following negative factors from our social economic, ideological, political, spiritual and cultural being contribute to the influence of religious extremist ideologues on young people. 1. The blurring of the future country image among the youth, no public state education is represented as a social ideal. Sociological survey shows a significant variation in the opinions of young people on this issue. For example, 71.5% among young Dagestanis would like to live in a secular state, 27.4% in a religious state, and among young Chechens, 22.5% and 65.3% respectively (Dzutsev & Betilmerzaeva, 2016). 2. In modern Russian society, where ideological pluralism has been proclaimed, there is no generally accepted state ideology, understandable and accessible for youth, on the basis of which they would build their present and plan the future. Multinational Russia with aggravated social economic, cultural-historical, ethnopolitical, religious confessional and other problems remains without its own viable ideology. 3. The sharp social and property stratification of Russian society, the unrestrained growth of social stratification, which undermines youth’s belief in social justice, contributes to the devaluation of genuine spiritual and moral values, weakens patriotism feelings. 4. The presence of despiritualization phenomena among a part of young people actualizes the problem of the spirituality development as the highest value of the spiritual world. 5. The erosion processes of the traditional cultures of the North Caucasus peoples are caused by profound cardinal changes in their fundamental foundations after the USSR collapse. Capitalism in the “Caucasian papakha” is now oppressing traditional spiritual and moral shrines: duty, honor, conscience, dignity, loyalty to the word, honoring of elders and women, protection of the weak, mutual aid, selflessness, modesty, etc. 6. The contradictions between traditional religion (and not just Salafism) and national culture exist.

## 5. Research Methods

Such sociological methods as questionnaire and observation were mainly used in disclosing the ideology countering problem of religious extremism among new generation of the North Caucasus macroregion, including the Chechen Republic. The study was mainly conducted among students, undergraduates and graduate students of Chechen State Pedagogical University, as well as among youth of specific family related microgroups. As a result of the active opposition of the religious extremism ideology, many of their adherents do not dare to openly manifest their socially harmful essence, to a greater extent they act in the “sleeping cell” mode. This circumstance dictates the use of cautious, unobtrusive questionnaire, long interviewing, verbal casual friendly conversation, included and non-included observation, sociometric survey. An expert survey turned out to be effective when studying the extremely topical subject problem of ideological influence on young people, that is the situation assessment by well-informed people. As already noted, widescale ethnical sociological studies conducted by many well-known sociologists and scientists in all regions of the North Caucasus in 2016 were used for a deeper study of the problem of religious extremism among young people in different regions of the North Caucasus, (Dzutsev & Betilmerzaeva, 2016).

## 6. Findings

When studying the ideology countering problem of religious extremism among young people, certain results were achieved, which made it possible to formulate the following recommendations: 1. It is necessary to solve the problem of preparing a new shift of ideological personnel from among theologians and secular scholars who are able, based on in-depth knowledge, strong convictions and unshakable motivational attitudes to lead an ideological struggle efficiently and uncompromisingly against the radical, religious extremist ideology. 2. Trained ideologists and theologians should be equipped with an effective not only secular, but also religious ideology which is capable of properly protecting traditional religious views, ideas, feelings, and centuries-old stereotypes of religious attitudes and behavior of young believers at the appropriate informational, intellectual, and religious level. 3. The relevant problem is the protection of the unconscious sphere of young people from the negative impact on them of the religious extremism ideology. It seems to be necessary to organize personnel training to work in this specific area of the human spirit, which is able to master the accumulated experience, methods and secrets of the enemy psychological processing and neutralize his efforts in this direction. 4. In modern Russia the propaganda of religious extremist ideology is prohibited, which forced its adherents preachers, various Muslim recruiters to terrorist organizations to switch to the latent mode of activity. This circumstance actualizes the problem of enhancing the proper work of the special services, the establishment of an appropriate agent network, the main purpose of which should be the rapid organizers and recruiters identification of young people, providing effective assistance to potential victims, and not just the use of punitive measures against these victims. 5. It is well known that a network of extremist organizations encounters a certain proportion of young people, many of whom have already died, others are in mortal danger, and this circumstance brings incredible distress to their parents and relatives. A parent committee should be created from this close people category, whose members will show all the tragedy, the terrible finale to young people, that is obvious for members of well-known religious and terrorist organizations, share their experience in the fight

against terrorism and preventive work among its potential victims. 6. It is well known that in our days a certain part of young people, including the subjects from the North Caucasus, are recruited into terrorist organizations. It is necessary to study the forms, methods and means that are used by youth recruiters and, based on the materials studied, to develop adequate measures on countering ideological sabotage against youth.

## 7. Conclusion

For the spiritual security of the Russian state and society as a whole, the problem of religious extremism now poses a serious threat, especially its manifestation under the ideology of Islamism, which carriers are mainly a certain part of young generation. The relevance of this problem is primarily caused by the aggressive nature and scale of this ideology spread, which carriers pose a serious threat to our society, its cultural and spiritual existence. This ideology is especially dangerous for the subjects of Southern Russia, who in the recent past experienced terrorist attacks under religious separatist banners. To find a successful solution to the problem of neutralizing the influence of the religious extremism ideology on young people, it is necessary to solve a number of important issues, which include: relatively high unemployment, young people unemployment with socially useful work, lack of stable sources for a full life, reduced education quality and medical care, full leisure, violation of social justice principles, the development of the process of unjustified social property polarization. These problems are largely due to the near dramatic past, and the modern Chechen government successfully solves many of the above problems in key areas of Chechen society.

Based on all the above, the following conclusions can be made: 1. It is necessary for the whole world, especially the national intellectuals, the theological community, political and public figures, every sensible citizen to defend the traditional values of Russian Federation peoples, their cultural and historical roots, original way of life, and native hearth and actively oppose religious extremism with all available resources. 2. One should penetrate deeply into the nature of modern religious extremism, as well as into the dynamics of the processes themselves, which take place within the Salafi (Wahhabi) dogma (aqyda) and religious political doctrine. This complex is constantly mimicking under the pressure of harsh circumstances. 3. Extremism relies mainly on young people. And this means that prophylactic anti-extremist vaccinations should be done from an early age, before young people become infected with distorted ideas. It is necessary to study the mechanism of beliefs formation and use this mechanism for the formation and development of children healthy beliefs. 4. All Russian and regional (North Caucasian, Volga Region, etc.) conferences of native Muslim theologians should be held to consider topical issues in the life of modern Muslim Ummah of Russia, including the ideology countering problem of religious extremism among young people. 5. In the modern world, as known, “on the one hand, information and communication technologies (Internet, cellular service, television) open up new perspectives for human development, but on the other, make people more and more vulnerable to various kinds of influences, create powerful channels for consciousness manipulation”(Lectorskii, 2016). In this regard, an important issue in countering religious extremism is cyberterrorism, the use of Internet sites by extremists. Since terrorists use false information to recruit young people into their organizations, they should have relevant information



about what terrorism is, how it manifests itself on the Internet, what sites exist, what their purpose is, to what participation in such groupings leads and etc.

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