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**RELIGIOUS POLITICAL EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN  
THE NORTH CAUCASUS: POLITOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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*Abstract*

Due to historical, sociocultural specifics and geopolitical significance, the North Caucasus is still a zone of ethno-political tension and confrontation of various political systems. Against this background, the display, development and escalation of various conflicts, extremism and Wahhabism is high frequent. The study considers the features of displaying and developing extremism and terrorism in the North Caucasus in the context of the activities of ethno-political elites.

Political elites are the central actors of the political process in the region. They possess legitimacy, administrative resources and influence. Experts understand that in the conditions of the North Caucasus the ethno-political elites are the subject of preparing, making and implementing strategic and tactical decisions. In the context of this work, it is important to consider the elites' social practices on countering and blocking the factors of terrorism and extremism in the region. The leaders of the of the Russian North Caucasian regions very successfully struggle against the ideology and practice of terrorism and extremism, and the ethnic elites of certain republics of the region cope with this task much better.

The study offers formulated recommendations that can contribute to blocking extremism and terrorism in the context of the regional political process.

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**Keywords:** The North Caucasus, elites, extremism, terrorism, conflicts, separatism.



## 1. Introduction

Incoordination of political elites' attitude leads to the government crisis and long-term conflicts. For example, the beginning of the confrontation between General D.M. Dudayev and the federal center led to the start of the Russian-Chechen conflict, to the disintegration of the Chechen society, to the exhausting and disastrous war for its victims and destructions.

In August 1996, the city of Grozny was surrendered to the militants. Everywhere around the region in every settlement Shariah power was established. The Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation General A Lebed signed a well-known Khasav-Yurt Accord with General A. Maskhadov. But Udugov's propaganda interpreted that agreement as the recognition of the independence of Ichkeria .

In January 1997, presidential elections were held in Chechnya, under the supervision of international observers, including the OSCE. The field commander A. Maskhadov came to power, having received political support from the leadership of Russia.

In May, 1997 the President of Ichkeria A. Maskhadov and the President of Russia B. Yeltsin undertook a political and legal attempt to resolve the Russian-Chechen conflict by signing a formal peace treaty "On peace and the principles of Russian-Chechen relations" in the Kremlin (Akayev, 2001).

The political and economic situation that was developed in Ichkeria, after Maskhadov came to power, acquired a new development and was not by no means steady. The established political regime exposed Chechnya to economic destruction, and its people - to ruin, turning them into hostage to trigger-happy politicians and bandits.

Under the rule of A. Maskhadov the social problems of citizens, generated both during the first war and by the incompetent leadership of Maskhadov's officials sharply worsened in Chechnya. The Chechen Republic had become an environmental disaster area in a short span of time. As a result of the catastrophic destruction of industrial production and agriculture, the opportunity to participate in industrial labor and receive wages was lost.

The younger generation was in an extremely humiliating position. The difficult financial situation did not allow thousands of young men and women to attend classes at universities and schools. Maskhadov's power deprived young people of any hope for better future. At the same time, Wahhabi emissaries opened new horizons for them as "Pure Islam" and "Caucasian Caliphate". Quite a lot of young people, especially from poor families, who were tempted by dollars, weapons, were drawn into "jamaats" who attacked the army structures of the Russian army (Akayev, 2005).

In Maskhadov-Wahhabi Ichkeria, there was a mass migration of Chechens. If in 1984 the number of Chechens in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was more than 800 thousand, then at the beginning of the next war in 1999, hardly 600 thousand people were left in Chechnya, and there were up to 90% of those who wanted to leave. But they did not have money for leaving Chechnya.

The second war in Chechnya was a direct consequence of the Wahhabi provocation carried out by B. Kebedov, the leader of the Dagestan Wahhabis, the Arab Khattab and Sh. Basaev, who had invaded the territory of Chechnya from mountainous Dagestan. Their goal was to create an Islamic state in Dagestan and expel Russians from the Caucasus. Provocation of political and religious radicals had nothing in common with the interests of the Chechen people, who needed peace, political stability and economic growth (Soltamuradov, 2007).

After the militants had been squeezed out of Dagestan, Chechnya again found itself in a military fire. The hostilities were ended with the defeat of the main militants, the process of restoring the Chechen Republic was started, the government and the authorities were formed, and people gradually began to resume their peaceful life. A-H.A. Kadyrov played a big role in this creative process, thanks to him the life in the republic was gradually adjusted, schools and universities, social institutions, enterprises were restored, and citizens went back to the republic (Akayev & Akhtaev, 2012).

Large preventive work was carried out with the population and especially with students and rural youth in educational institutions, in mosques, in places of mass gathering and recreation of the population through the media, social networks. Unfortunately, despite that work, we were witnessing terrorist acts, extremism that destabilized the situation, devalued those efforts of the authorities, their threat was a significant factor in the regional political process (Salgiriev, 2016).

One of the most important factors that contributing to the development of the extremism in the North Caucasus is poverty, high unemployment and social differentiation.

**Table 01.** Unemployment in the North Caucasus Federal District

The federal district	Labour-force size (thous. people)	Including		Labour-force participation rate (%) to population size at the age of 15-72 years	Employment rate (%) to population size at the age of 15-72 years	Unemployment rate (%) to the labour-force size
		Employed	Unemployed			
	January-March 2017. (average of period)					
<b>The North Caucasian federal district</b>	<b>4 537,2</b>	<b>4 020,1</b>	<b>517,0</b>	<b>65,2</b>	<b>57,7</b>	<b>11,4</b>
The Republic of Daghestan	1 363,7	1 192,6	171,2	63,3	55,4	12,6
The Republic of Ingushetia	242,9	177,0	65,9	74,8	54,5	27,1
The Kabardino-Balkarian Republic	424,0	374,5	49,5	66,9	59,1	11,7
The Karachayevo-Cherkessian Republic	198,3	166,8	31,5	57,8	48,6	15,9
The Republic of North Ossetia - Alania	325,8	283,6	42,2	64,3	56,0	12,9
The Chechen Republic	621,0	532,2	88,8	68,4	58,6	14,3
The Stavropol Territory	1361,4	1293,4	68,0	65,1	61,8	5,0

**Table 02.** Dynamics of real money income (%) to the relevant month of the previous year (Rosstat, 2017).

The federal district	2016		2017	
	January	February	January	February
<b>The North Caucasian federal district</b>	<b>95,7</b>	<b>97,0</b>	<b>109,5</b>	<b>98,1</b>
The Republic of Daghestan	96,9	97,7	111,1	100,3
The Republic of Ingushetia	100,8	108,3	98,7	106,1
The Kabardino-Balkarian Republic	102,2	108,0	109,3	104,6
The Karachayevo-Cherkessian Republic	93,5	87,7	103,1	95,1
The Republic of North Ossetia - Alania	85,5	92,3	111,6	92,9
The Chechen Republic	95,3	97,3	110,0	93,2
The Stavropol Territory	95,2	95,2	109,4	97,9

## **2. Problem Statement**

Extremism and terrorism pose a threat to public safety, strike a blow against the development and appropriate functioning of the national economy. The causes for demonstrating such extremely destructive and illegal forms of social protest are underdeveloped civil society institutions, social exclusion and stratification, xenophobia, nationalism and corruption (Vartumyan, 2005). Young people perceive these signals more intensely. Today the so-called youth extremism is most visibly manifested. It is no coincidence that the local ethnopolitical elites of the North Caucasus republics strictly react to extremism among the youth, and take quite effective preventive measures.

## **3. Research Questions**

Considering the genesis of the Russian-Chechen conflict, it can be said that the ruling elites at this stage of the historical process have fulfilled their functional role in developing national ideology, producing popular symbols in society, in which people blow off their emotional energy (Magomedov, 2001; Mokhov, 2015). It is important to understand that at this stage the national consciousness of the Chechen society was extremely mythological, and it was built on stories and legends. In the early 1990s, people gathered in the central square of Grozny for spontaneous meetings, where marginalized, lumpenized parts of society were mostly accumulated to call for complete independence and sovereignty from Russia. Provocateurs misinformed ordinary people, saying that during the military clashes with federal forces “the enemy’s gunpowder would be wet, the saints would fly in the sky and crush planes and helicopters with their crutches etc.” There were people who believed in the sincerity of those calls and did not realize the seriousness of the political situation in the republic. The referendum, held in March, 2003 in the Chechen Republic, adoption of the Chechen Republic Constitution, holding on its basis the elections of the President and the Parliament of the Chechen Republic, showed that the Chechen people chose the way of being integrated in the political, legal and cultural space of the Russian state.

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

The goal of the study is to identify the dynamics of the extremism and terrorism development in the North Caucasus in the elites functioning.

## **5. Research Methods**

Such philosophical and general scientific methods were used in the study as: observation, abstraction, system analysis, structural and functional analysis.

## **6. Findings**

The degree of terrorism threat is aggravated by the fact that extremists and terrorists are armed with the advanced technological means for ideological, informational, and financial influence. Recruiters actively involve young people in their ranks through social networks, the Internet, etc. In this regard, the task on developing and implementing effective policies against terrorism and extremism, elaborating new methods and approaches becomes urgent. Social exclusion, poverty, marginalization, sharp differentiation

lead to permanent political tensions in the region (Salgiriev, 2012). The most important factor in the stabilization of the political process, preventive measures against terrorism and extremism display is the solution of economic problems. The weak integration of the North Caucasus into an integrated socio-cultural space of Russia also determines conflict behavior in managing interactions.

## 7. Conclusion

Russia faces major systemic problems caused by economic sanctions, tensions on the border with Ukraine, the antiterrorist operation in Syria, the activation of the Islamic state (a banned organization in Russia). To accomplish these tasks, the successful and effective work of the political elites is necessary. The elites are intended to ensure the solid stabilization of the federal statehood of Russia, to arrange conditions of a dignified life for all Russian citizens.

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