



CONFERENCE ARTICLE

**The Importance Of State Youth Policy In The Fight Against Religious Extremism
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT)**

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ABSTRACT

Although the roots of such phenomena as extremism, radicalism, and terrorism under the guise of religion go back a long way, they have never posed such a threat to social stability and development as they do today. The widespread spread of religious extremism and radicalism in different parts of the world poses a great threat to the peace of countries and the security of regions. Preventing such threats, eliminating the factors that fuel them, and combating them have become a priority for every country.

Studying foreign experience in combating religious extremism, radicalism, and terrorism, absorbing its instructive aspects, and putting them into practice is equally necessary and beneficial for all existing states. In this sense, it is important to study the long-term experience of Egypt, which was one of the first in the Arab-Islamic world to encounter the problem of religious extremism and terrorism. This article analyzes the importance of state youth policy in combating religious extremism using the example of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

The experience of the countries of the world shows that religious extremist organizations mainly choose young people for their goals and focus on them. Most of the members of the modern Islamic group are between the ages of 18 and 35, which means that it relies on youth power for radical ideas and solutions to problems .

This situation can be witnessed even when studying the processes that took place in Egypt's recent past. Young Egyptians, who are just entering adulthood and have not yet clearly defined their life goals, are becoming the main "targets" of religious extremist organizations.

It is worth noting that a number of socio-economic problems have caused the youth in Egypt to fall under the influence of religious extremism. Uzbek orientalist Sh. Yovkochev, addressing this issue, lists the following socio-economic problems: the rise in unemployment among young people, especially university graduates, the low standard of living of the population, the discrepancy between wages and market prices, the low level or absence of social services in some regions, as well as limited access to education and healthcare . Also, the scientist specifically noted "lack of attention to the demands of youth" as one of the internal political factors that created the basis for the emergence and spread of religious extremism in Egypt.

In the 1990s, the inequality of wealth among the population, the sharp increase in the number of unemployed among young people, the decline in the standard of living and living conditions of the population, the further worsening of the lives of the poor, and their increased vulnerability to poverty complicated the social situation in Egypt and brought it to a state of decline. The Islamic militants of the 1990s were younger than their predecessors, they were uneducated, and most of them came from the backward regions of Upper Egypt, from small towns. For example, the average age of the militants arrested in 1970 was 27 years old, while in the 1990s it was 21 years old.

Compared to the previous decade, the number of people who have just graduated from school and college among extremists has increased (from 36% in the 1980s to 71% by the 1990s), while the number of people with higher education has decreased (from 59% to 21%). Among extremists, 36% of the population lives in poor areas (previously 16%), 18% live in rural areas (7%), 31% live in small and medium-sized cities (43%), and 15% live in large cities (34%).

Studies show that young people who have grown up in economically disadvantaged sections of the population have fallen under the influence of extremist groups that widely use social assistance programs. It is known that religious organizations are concerned about social needs, and this is one of the manifestations of their activities. One of the main reasons for the popularity of Islamic groups among young people, as well as among the poor and socially vulnerable sections of the population, can be said to be their affordable and high-quality services. For this reason, the population, mainly young people, sought protection and assistance from religious organizations that the state could not provide. In Egypt, activists of religious extremist organizations often proposed an alternative social security system, which also created an opportunity to criticize the government. Because through the assistance they provided, they tried to demonstrate that the government was unable to meet the needs of citizens in a timely manner .

The events of the "Arab Spring" have shown the extraordinary importance of state youth policy in ensuring national security in the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The top political leadership of Egypt has learned a valuable lesson from the events and has begun to put youth issues at the center of domestic policy.

Although a number of hidden reasons have driven the events of the "Arab Spring" in Egypt, the world press often portrays the 2011 Egyptian revolution as a result of inequality, poverty, corruption, unemployment, and other factors .

Considering that the "Arab Spring" events in Egypt were carried out by urban youth, it becomes clear that the above-mentioned problems led Egyptian youth to Tahrir Square.

In Egypt, the increase in birth rates in 1985-1990 and the increase in the share of young people in the demographic structure of the population by the time of the revolutions ensured the widespread involvement of young people in these mass movements. It can be said that since 1990, while the unemployment rate has remained unchanged, the proportion of young people among them has doubled, especially those aged 20-24, and they accounted for more than 1 million out of a total of 2.5 million unemployed. 43% of these unemployed young people were university graduates who could not find work that matched their knowledge and skills. Thus, the main force of the revolution was unemployed young people with higher education.

Egyptian youth, who have been observing the processes of democratization and liberalization taking place in the world, have become dissatisfied with their environment. The widespread use of new information and communication technologies in the country has led to the emergence of this network from the control of the authorities. On YouTube and Facebook, Egyptian youth have called for not being indifferent to the political future of the country and for active participation in the formation of a new government.

It was realized through the organized organization of the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. From the first days of the revolution in Egypt, its immediate political prospects became clear, namely, the direct claims of the Muslim Brotherhood to power. The subsequent events showed that the 30-year-old Mubarak regime in the secular regime fell, and the fundamentalist "Muslim Brotherhood" came to power instead.

The active participation of Egyptian youth in the events of the "Arab Spring" showed the MAR government headed by President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi that the issue of youth is of urgent importance in maintaining internal security. The National Population Council of Egypt conducted a sociological survey shortly before the beginning of the "Arab Spring" in the country (in 2009) and after the end of these events (in 2014). It is worth noting that the results of these studies, which included information on factors affecting the interests of young people in schooling, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, and many other areas, became the starting point for the development of modern state youth policy in Egypt.

The first response of the government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to the events of the "Arab Spring" was the amendments made to the country's Constitution. The issue of youth is stipulated in both the constitution adopted in 2012 during the era of the "Muslim Brotherhood" and in the constitution adopted in 2014 after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power. If we compare the sections on youth issues of both constitutions with each other, the difference becomes clear. If Article 71 of the Basic Law adopted during the era of the "Muslim Brotherhood" states that "the state must take care of children and youth and support their spiritual, moral, cultural, educational, physical, psychological, social and economic development," Article 82 of the Constitution of 2014 adopted after the ouster of "Brothers" states that "the state guarantees care for youth and adolescents, as well as assistance in revealing their talents and developing cultural, scientific, psychological, creative and physical abilities."

National youth conferences are also becoming an important institution of the new state youth policy. It began with the first meeting held in Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2016 under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The first conference was held in Cairo in December 2016, the second in Aswan in January 2017, the third in Ismailia in April 2017, and the fourth in Alexandria in July 2017. More than 1,000 delegates from the regions where the conferences were held participated. At these conferences, young people have a

lively dialogue with the head of state and, along with issues of regional socio-economic development, discuss acute national problems. In particular, it is noteworthy that the Ismailia conference discussed topics such as combating the rise in commodity prices, as well as the responsibilities and tasks of the state, society, and citizens.

It is worth noting that Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world, with a population of 100 million people. Naturally, providing young people with affordable housing is a pressing issue in this country, and this issue has been one of Egypt's "painful" problems to one degree or another since the time of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. For this reason, the current President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has put this issue at the forefront of his youth policy. After all, the housing problem was one of the main internal reasons that prompted Egyptian youth to participate in the "Arab Spring".

In 1974, the Egyptian Ministry of Housing and Urban Development developed a large-scale program to build new cities in the desert to relocate part of the population from Cairo and Alexandria. This program simultaneously solved a number of pressing problems, one of which was to provide social housing for young people. In 1979, the New Urban Settlements Directorate was established to implement this program. Currently, 24 new urban settlements are being built in Egypt, bringing the total number to 29. They are located on an area of approximately 1.14 million feddans (1 feddan = 0.42 hectares). The total number of housing units built in them is currently 1,820,000, of which approximately 1/3 were built by the government and 2/3 by the private sector. They currently house 7 million people, and after the completion of all construction projects, the population should increase to 17 million. Along with housing, all necessary urban infrastructure is being created in new settlements (in the same ratio as housing construction between the private and public sectors) and industrial zones. A total of 8,758 industrial enterprises have been built in these zones. They have created 582,000 new jobs. In addition, another 5,729 industrial enterprises are being built, employing more than 176,000 workers. Egyptian Minister of Housing Mustafa Madbouly announced that the value of social housing projects implemented in Egypt in 2016 amounted to approximately \$10 billion, and the ministry is implementing a presidential decree on the construction of another 600,000 social housing units worth 103 billion Egyptian pounds.

However, despite all the efforts in this area, the housing problem in Egypt has not yet been fully resolved. There is a shortage of more than 3 million housing units in the country, and in addition, 300,000 housing units for young families need to be built every year in order not to aggravate the housing problem.

The problem of youth unemployment is common to all countries, especially Arab countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Egypt there were three attempts to develop youth employment programs in the first 15 years of the 21st century.

In 2001, the government's Information and Decision Support Center developed a youth employment program, according to which 400,000 educated young people were to enter the labor market in Egypt each year, 170,000 of whom were to be employed in the public sector and 100,000 in the private sector.

In 2009-2010, the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower, together with representatives of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and other UN agencies, developed a national plan for youth employment, which had three main objectives:

- implementing programs to improve production skills and develop vocational training;
- promoting the development of entrepreneurship;
- modernizing the network of employment agencies and creating a labor market information system.

However, the adoption and implementation of this plan was

hampered by the events of the "Arab Spring", accompanied by the dissolution of parliament and frequent changes in the composition of the government.

Egypt's latest sustainable development strategy for 2030 also includes measures for employment. It provides for expanding training opportunities and creating new jobs. It is also necessary to strengthen the vocational education system and make it competitive with university education, align student employment with labor market needs, which will lead to a sharp increase in the share of students studying in technical faculties of universities. According to the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), in 2016 the country's labor force increased by 28.9 million people, of whom 25.3 million were employed and 3.6 million were still unemployed.

Of particular interest is the analysis of the dynamics of the number of unemployed, which reached 33.3% or 800 thousand people as a result of the "Arab Spring" that took place in 2010. Having increased from 2.4 million to 3.2 million people, it has grown by 200 thousand people annually over the past two years and has stabilized at the level of 3.6 million since 2013.

According to SAPMAS, since 2013, a downward trend in the unemployment rate has been observed in Egypt, which decreased to 12.5% in 2016. At the same time, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15-29 is much higher. For Egypt as a whole, it is 30%.

The second feature of youth unemployment in Egypt is the large gap in the share of unemployed boys and girls, which increases with the level of education to the tertiary level. Thus, the problem of youth unemployment in Egypt is mainly due to the lack of work for girls, since the unemployment rate among young men in Egypt is similar to that of some European countries. In the group of people with secondary general education, the employment rate among boys and girls is especially high, exceeding 11 times - 6.9% and 76%, respectively.

The situation is radically different in the group of people with tertiary education - both boys and girls suffer from high unemployment, and the difference in unemployment rates between them is minimal - twice as much as in other groups.

In 2017, the unemployment situation in Egypt, including among young people, continued to improve. According to the data of the International Labor Organization cited by the World Bank, the overall unemployment rate in Egypt has decreased to 11.6%, and among young people aged 15-24 it is 33.1%.

Experts from the International Labor Organization positively assess the efforts of the current Egyptian government to address the problem of unemployment, including among young people, and predict that it will decrease significantly in the coming years. These estimates are based primarily on the economic development forecast developed by the International Monetary Fund, according to which its rates will increase to 4.5% in 2018 and to 6.0% in 2022, which will again make Egypt the most dynamic country in North Africa.

Based on the above, it can be said that in recent years, a number of changes in the policy of the Egyptian government in working with youth have been bearing fruit. In the early years of the Abdel Fattah al-Sisi government, the policy of combating religious extremism and terrorism, which was mainly based on the use of force, did not pay off and, on the contrary, intensified the processes of radicalization among young people. Based on the experience gained, the Egyptian government is not limited to combating the consequences of the threats, but is also pursuing a policy of identifying the main causes that cause them and finding solutions to them. The fact that the main attention is paid to youth problems in this case shows how important the state policy on youth is for Egypt.

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