Why ISIS Emerged As A Violent Extremist Group in the Northeast of Syria?[*]

IŞİD Neden Suriye'nin Kuzedoğusunda Şiddet Yanlısı Aşırılıkçı Bir Grup Olarak Ortaya Çıktı?

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Öz

Amaç: Bu makalenin amacı hem iç hem de dış unsurlara odaklanarak, Suriye'nin kuzeydoğusunda IŞİD gibi şiddet yanlısı aşırılıkçı grupların yükselişine katkıda bulunan faktörleri araştırmaktır. Ayrıca, IŞİD'in yeniden ortaya çıkma potansiyelini ve bunun nasıl engellenebileceğini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Tasarım/Yöntem: Bu araştırma, veri toplama için doküman analizi ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerin bir kombinasyonunu kullanmaktadır. İlk aşama, doküman analizi yoluyla IŞİD hakkındaki mevcut literatürü incelemeyi içerirken, ikinci aşama, Suriye'nin Rakka, Deyrizor ve Halep şehirlerinden; aktivistler, gazeteciler, araştırmacılar, avukatlar ve sivil toplum aktörlerinden oluşan, bölgelerinde IŞİD'in varlığına ve etkilerine doğrudan tanıklık etmiş toplam dokuz katılımcı (yedi erkek ve iki kadın) ile yapılan görüşmeler yoluyla toplanan nitel verilerin analizine dayanmaktadır.

Bulgular: Bulgular Irak'taki aşırılıkçı fikirlerin ve savaşçıların Suriye'ye transferi, Irak'tan dönen Suriyelilerin cezaevi deneyimleri, yerel mücahitlerin rolü ve bağlantıları, grup içi bölünmeler, ideolojik ve mezhepsel çatışmalar, örgütün propaganda stratejisi, devletin çöküşü ve güç boşluğu, kaos ve yoksulluk, yerel dini yapının zayıflığı, siyasi ve kimlik temelli motivasyon, aşiret ve aile dinamikleri, sosyal statü ve güç arzusunun IŞİD'in Suriye'nin kuzeydoğusunda ortaya çıkmasına neden olan faktörler olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, siyasi ve ekonomik reformların gerçekleştirilmesi, sivil toplumun güçlendirilmesi, kadınların toplumsal yaşama yeniden entegre edilmesi, güvenliğin sağlanması ve adaletin temin edilmesinin örgütün yeniden ortaya çıkışını engelleyeceğine dikkat çekmektedir.

Sınırlılıklar: IŞİD, birçok bölgede faaliyet gösteren şiddet içeren aşırılıkçı bir gruptur. Ancak bu araştırmada, sadece Suriye'nin kuzeydoğusunda ortaya çıkma nedenlerine odaklanılmaktadır.

Özgünlük/Değer: IŞİD'in ortaya çıkışını inceleyen araştırmalar büyük oranda doküman analizi ile sınırlıdır. Ancak bu araştırmada doküman analizine ek olarak, sahadan da veri toplanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiddet İçeren Aşırılıkçılık, IŞİD, Suriye'nin Kuzeydoğusu, Bölgesel Güvenlik, Uluslararası Güvenlik

Abstract

Purpose: The article aims to investigate the factors contributing to the rise of violent extremist groups, such as ISIS, in the northeast of Syria, by focusing on both internal and external factors. In addition, it seeks to reveal the potential for ISIS's resurgence and how it can be prevented.

Design/Methodology: This research uses a combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews for data collection. The first phase involves reviewing the existing literature on ISIS through document analysis, while the second phase is based on the analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews with a total of nine participants (seven men and two women) from Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Aleppo in Syria, including activists, journalists, researchers, lawyers, and civil society actors, who directly witnessed ISIS's presence and impact in their respective regions.

Findings: The findings reveal the transfer of extremist ideas and fighters from Iraq to Syria, the prison experiences of Syrians returning from Iraq, the role and connections of local mujahideen, internal divisions within the group, ideological and sectarian conflicts, the organization's propaganda strategy, the collapse of the state and the power vacuum, chaos and poverty, the weakness of the local religious structure, political and identity-based motivation, tribal and family dynamics, social status, and the desire for power as factors that led to the emergence of ISIS in northeastern Syria. The research highlights that implementing political and economic reforms, strengthening civil society, reintegrating women into social life, ensuring security, and guaranteeing justice will prevent the organization from reemerging.

Limitations: ISIS is a violent extremist group that operates in many regions. However, this study focuses only on the reasons for its emergence in the northeast of Syria.

Originality/Value: Studies examining the emergence of ISIS are primarily limited to document analysis. However, in addition to document analysis, this study also collected data from the field.

Keywords: Violent Extremism, ISIS, Northeast of Syria, Regional Security, International Security

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the northeast of Syria, has had a significant impact on regional and international stability in addition to Syria. Governments, international organizations, and local communities have made many attempts to counter extremism and radicalization. However, a thorough grasp of the elements influencing the emergence of these groups is still ambiguous. The complexity of this issue necessitates in-depth research into the interconnected factors that fueled the growth of extremist societies, with a particular focus on ISIS in this region.

This article aims to explore the factors contributing to the rise of ISIS as a violent extremist group in the northeast of Syria. The article offers a unique perspective by examining the impact of these factors through direct interviews with community members and activists who witnessed the formation and growth of the extremist group. By exploring personal narratives, this article seeks to uncover the underlying factors contributing to violent extremism in the northeast of Syria to propose effective interventions promoting long-term stability.

This issue should be addressed for two primary reasons. First, the continued existence of extremist groups threatens the security and welfare of the local population by causing violent confrontations, violations of human rights, forced migration, and instability. Second, a careful analysis of the conditions that gave rise to extremist ideas is necessary, given the region's potential as a hub for international terrorism. This article will critically assess the emergence of ISIS in the northeast of Syria and evaluate potential risks for the resurgence of extremism in the future. A comprehensive understanding of these underlying drivers is essential for effectively countering extremism and promoting lasting peace. By deeply understanding these factors, this article will provide valuable insights for policymakers, security forces, and humanitarian organizations, facilitating the development of targeted, effective interventions. Ultimately, the goal is to counter radicalization, curb the spread of extremist ideologies, and work toward sustainable peace in this region and beyond. This article has the potential to offer valuable insights that can inform the academic community and contribute to the development of effective preventive measures against the rise of extremism in similar contexts.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Extremism covers a wide range of manifestations, including terrorism, racism, xenophobia, interethnic and inter-religious hatred, as well as left-wing and right-wing political radicalism. It is primarily a political term used to describe actions and behaviors that deviate from the established norms of a state, encompassing both those formally defined in laws and constitutions, as well as those unwritten norms that are widely recognized (Qadeem, 2020). In a way, defining extremism is difficult to put into words, but it becomes recognizable when encountered. Given the negative connotation associated with the term "extremism," we focus on three key elements within the lexical paradigm of "extreme" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary [web], 2023). The adjective "extreme" describes "beliefs and political parties that most people consider unreasonable and unacceptable. "The noun 'extremism' refers to 'political extremism (in terms of extreme political opinions),' while the noun 'extremist' can refer to a "group of extremists (people with extreme opinions)," and the adjective "extremist' characterizes a group of individuals with "extremist tendencies" (Sotlar, 2004). The term "violent extremism," on the other hand, refers to the ideologies and beliefs adopted by non-state actors who aim to achieve radical change through the use of violence. Scholars have proposed various definitions to encapsulate its complexity. For example, violent extremism is often defined as the pursuit of political, religious, or social objectives through extremist ideologies that endorse the use of violence (USAID & UNDP, 2011; McCauley, Clark & Moskalenko, 2008). This term underscores the reliance on violence as the primary method for achieving objectives, while also emphasizing the significant role of ideology in motivating extremist behavior (McCauley et al., 2008).

Violent extremism remains a multifaceted and concerning global issue, drawing significant attention from scholars, policymakers, and security experts worldwide. Understanding the root causes of violent extremism is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent and address this phenomenon. Understanding the nature of violent extremism is essential before delving into its causes. For example, McCauley, Clark, and Moskalenko (2008) assert that civil wars create fertile ground for

violent extremist ideologies to flourish. Prolonged conflicts and the collapse of state institutions create an environment conducive to the growth of extremist groups. In the absence of legitimate governance, disillusioned individuals may resort to violent extremism as a means of addressing their grievances. Bacon and Muibu (2019) argue that during civil wars, recruitment and radicalization into extremist groups become more accessible. Grievances resulting from the conflict, coupled with the allure of collective identity and purpose, attract vulnerable individuals to extremist ideologies. For Korteweg (2008), the fluid nature of conflict zones allows extremist groups to exploit porous borders and lawless regions for recruitment and training. Michael, Weiss, and Hassan (2015) argue that radicalization during civil wars is driven by social networks, charismatic leaders, and exposure to violent ideologies. A significant example of this is the Syrian civil war, which attracted foreign fighters to join extremist groups like ISIS. The collapse of governance and the ensuing power vacuum provided fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root in Syria (Sotlar, 2004). This conflict became a magnet for radicalized individuals worldwide, highlighting the connection between civil wars and the rise of violent extremism.

Political violence, whether carried out by state or non-state actors, plays a crucial role in the emergence and spread of violent extremism. Repressive state measures amplify grievances and resentment among marginalized populations (Sotlar, 2004), pushing some individuals toward radical alternatives in response to perceived injustices (Rumman, 2020). When peaceful means of dissent are suppressed, violence becomes a way to express grievances and assert autonomy. Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and the actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) illustrate the impact of political violence on radicalization. The LTTE's violent tactics resonated with Tamil communities who felt marginalized by the government's policies (Karam, 2022). The prolonged conflict and cycles of violence contributed to the radicalization of individuals into the LTTE ranks. As Bjørgo and Gjelsvik (2017) emphasize, political instability, marked by frequent changes in governance and social unrest, creates an environment conducive to violent extremism. The uncertainty and disillusionment among the population can drive individuals to seek radical solutions.

Lyall (2009) suggests that extremist groups exploit the chaos during political instability to advance their agendas. As political institutions weaken, extremist narratives offering stability and a return to an idealized past appeal to disillusioned individuals. As noted by Abbas and Awan (2015), Afghanistan illustrates the link between political instability and violent extremism, with decades of unrest enabling groups like the Taliban to thrive. The lack of stable governance allowed grievances to be exploited and individuals to be recruited by the Taliban. Understanding violent extremism requires a comprehensive approach, as factors like civil war, political violence, and instability drive radicalization. By addressing these factors, policymakers can develop strategies to reduce extremism and promote long-term peace and stability (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

The rise of violent extremism has emerged as a significant concern for both regional and international security. At the regional level, one of the key consequences of violent extremism is the creation of conflict zones. Extremist groups frequently operate across borders, establishing areas of instability that present complex security challenges for both states and international actors (Lyall, 2009). Moreover, the activities of these groups cause forced displacement and humanitarian crises, straining host regions with limited resources and increasing local tensions. Violent extremist organizations can also weaken state institutions, challenging their authority, filling governance gaps, and further destabilizing regions (Zoubir, 2017). Violent extremism has significant global impacts on security. Groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda operate transnationally, making it difficult for individual states to address the threat alone, requiring international cooperation and intelligence sharing. The movement of foreign fighters also poses security risks, as they may return to their home countries or other nations to carry out attacks or spread extremist ideologies (UNDP, 2016). Violent extremism disrupts economic activities and international trade by deterring investments in conflict zones, leading to downturns and hindering regional development. Attacks on critical infrastructure and trade routes also disrupt global commerce, impacting both regional economies and international trade networks (Wright et al., 2017).

In conclusion, violent extremism impacts regional and global security, destabilizing conflict zones, causing humanitarian crises, and threatening trade. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive, collaborative approaches, including multilateral efforts, capacity building, and intelligence cooperation. Understanding these effects is crucial for policymakers to develop effective

strategies to protect security. In response to these challenges, international efforts have focused on collaboration and global partnerships. Organizations like the United Nations, European Union, and regional bodies share best practices, resources, and intelligence to counter violent extremism. Capacity building and counterterrorism support help strengthen security measures and address extremism's root causes. Intelligence sharing plays a key role in disrupting transnational terrorist networks and mitigating security threats.

Since terrorist organizations frequently operate internationally and take advantage of weaknesses in national security systems, intelligence sharing is essential to successful counterterrorism strategies. To prevent, detect, and disrupt terrorist activities, counterterrorism measures mainly depend on timely and reliable intelligence, which is why interagency and international collaboration are crucial. Coordinated reactions to new threats are made easier by shared intelligence, which also improves situational awareness and risk assessment (Lander, 2004). Practical cooperation is occasionally hampered by issues including disparate national interests, disparate legal systems, and worries about data privacy and trust (Bures, 2016). Notwithstanding these challenges, it is generally acknowledged in academic and policy discussions that intelligence sharing greatly improves states' ability to combat terrorism proactively, lowering the probability and severity of attacks (Walsh, 2010). Although it is commonly acknowledged that intelligence sharing is essential for counterterrorism, institutional, political, and cultural impediments frequently limit its efficacy. States may be reluctant to reveal sensitive intelligence for fear of revealing operational flaws, losing strategic advantage, or jeopardizing sources (Gill & Phythian, 2012). Harmonized intelligence sharing is further complicated by national differences in data protection regulations and technology capabilities (Bures, 2013). Agency trust issues further constrain the breadth and depth of collaboration and worries about data exploitation (Walsh, 2007). These difficulties are especially noticeable in international organizations like the European Union, where collective intelligence operations are complicated by conflicting national interests and concerns about sovereignty (Argomaniz, 2011). However, it is still crucial to overcome these obstacles since terrorist networks can take advantage of the holes left by disjointed intelligence systems.

Given the critical role of global intelligence-sharing in disrupting transnational extremist networks and preventing attacks, the case of ISIS in the northeast of Syria demonstrates how the group exploited the absence of coordinated intelligence and local governance to attract thousands of foreign fighters through online propaganda and cross-border networks, establish territorial control in Syria and Iraq, and later spread globally through decentralized cells and returning operatives—underscoring the urgent need for integrated international security efforts in fragile regions. The next chapter addresses questions such as how ISIS emerged, what kind of strategies and tactics it followed, and what roles women play within the group.

3. ISIS AS A VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUP IN THE NORTHEAST OF SYRIA

The northeast of Syria has historically been a hub for agriculture, trade, and natural resources. It is also a dynamic region with its own ethnic and religious diversity. However, the region has seen complicated and turbulent political, social, and military events, especially since the Syrian crisis began in 2011. The Arab Spring quickly turned into a protracted crisis with profound effects in the region (FAO, 2010). The northeast of Syria is an ethnically diverse region, including Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, and many other minority communities. The interaction between these different identities has dramatically influenced the course of events and the distribution of power in the region. The northeastern region has witnessed clashes between Syrian government forces and various armed groups. The conflicts have led to widespread displacement, extensive destruction, and significant human suffering, while also contributing to the rise of ISIS, an organization closely tied to extremist ideologies. The presence and actions of this extremist group within the region had profound consequences, impacting not only the immediate area but also having far-reaching effects on the broader international context (Humud & Christopher, 2020).

Extremist groups, including remnants of ISIS, have exploited displaced people's desperation in this vulnerable context. These issues have disproportionately affected the local population. The fighting has hampered healthcare, education, and clean water, causing a humanitarian disaster. Damage and

closure of key infrastructures have caused physical and mental pain, deprived children of school and future possibilities, and posed health hazards due to the absence of clean water (REACH, 2022).

This severe environment has created despondency, making the local population more receptive to radical views as they struggle to meet basic requirements. Marginalized communities in the northeast of Syria have faced a range of challenges during the conflict, including limited representation in decision-making, lack of economic opportunities, and restricted access to essential services like healthcare, education, and clean water. This exclusion not only leads to social isolation but also limits their economic prospects, leaving them vulnerable to extremist recruitment. These communities, feeling neglected by society and the state, are at a higher risk of radicalization, with groups like ISIS exploiting their frustrations. To prevent the rise of such groups, it is essential to address the causes of marginalization (Stein & Burchfield, 2019).

Several key factors can explain the rise of ISIS. These include authoritarian governments and sectarianism, political instability and chaos caused by ineffective governments, U.S. interventions in the region, and the exploitation of natural resources (Kamara, 2018). ISIS is widely regarded as a highly violent Salafi Jihadist organization that adheres to the principles of Salafi Jihadism. This ideology has four main objectives: the unification of the ummah (the global Muslim community), the removal of apostate regimes, the eradication of Western influence, and the establishment of a caliphate based on these goals. Given its actions and stated objectives, the Islamic State meets all the criteria to be classified as a Salafi Jihadist terrorist organization (Duman, 2015). ISIS's approach is rooted in strict Salafi religious thought, which allowed the group to transform from an armed faction into a formidable army rapidly. A key aspect of ISIS's strategy is decentralization, which grants military commanders' autonomy to carry out attacks, raise funds, and recruit locally. This flexibility has helped ISIS adapt to changing circumstances and maintain its operations despite security pressures (Arosoaie, 2015; Wright et al., 2017).

Unlike Al-Qaeda, ISIS's jihadi doctrine is unwritten, heavily relying on Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir's interpretation, which justifies violence under any circumstances to achieve its goal of establishing a caliphate. Among many differences, we can notice some of the most prominent: While Al-Qaeda maintained a centralized leadership, targeted the "far enemy," and exercised strategic restraint, ISIS pursued immediate state-building and embraced extreme brutality. Its doctrine, heavily influenced by Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir's Jurisprudence of Blood, justifies violence under any condition, including attacks on civilians, using suicidal attacks, which is forbidden in Islam, and the use of sexual slavery. ISIS also broke with traditional jihadist gender roles by actively recruiting women through online propaganda and assigning them roles in policing and recruitment. In territories under its control, ISIS imposed a strict educational system focused on ideological indoctrination, removing secular subjects and training boys for combat. Moreover, ISIS revolutionized jihadist media, using high-quality videos, social media platforms, and multilingual messaging to attract over 40,000 foreign fighters globally. In contrast, Al-Qaeda continues to ignore this part and relies on some video messages. Its ability to mobilize fighters, establish territorial control in Syria and Iraq, and later evolve into a decentralized global network made it more flexible and media-savvy than Al-Qaeda.

ISIS's strategies and tactics are highly complex and multifaceted. This group has employed various methods to achieve its jihadist ideology and goals. ISIS avoids confrontation with large military forces and instead resorts to guerrilla warfare methods. These tactics focus on attacking weak and isolated units, using smaller, mobile groups to engage effectively. Additionally, they often use suicide bombers to strike at the vulnerabilities of these units. (Helvalı, 2020). ISIS employs suicide bombers and trucks laden with explosives to carry out large-scale attacks. These attacks are designed to have both military and psychological impacts. ISIS records these attacks on video and uses the footage to strengthen their propaganda while weakening the morale of opposing forces (Kamara, 2018). ISIS has used tribal alliances to control local populations and secure armed support by cooperating with former Ba'athist soldiers. This strategy is based on the principle of "levée en masse" (the obligation to assemble), helping ISIS establish dominance over local administrations (Ryan, 2015). ISIS has capitalized on the Sunni-Shia divide and sectarian conflicts, stirring up sectarian tensions to polarize the population. This tactic has not only been used in Iraq and Syria but also in other countries, where sectarianism has been used to exacerbate social divisions. This strategy has helped ISIS expand its

control (Helvalı, 2020). ISIS has utilized financial incentives to gain the support of local tribes, especially Sunni tribes, by offering monetary and material assistance. This strategy has been used to strengthen ties with local populations and increase its power base (Ryan, 2015). ISIS rapidly spread throughout the north of Iraq, capturing village after village with minimal resistance. This strategy shows ISIS's capability for quick expansion. Moreover, ISIS's ability to regenerate after military defeats is significant, as it can replace its losses and continue expanding its control over new regions (Kaválek, 2015). Al-Qaeda focuses on harming its enemies, while ISIS prioritizes power consolidation. Al-Qaeda targets the "far enemy," whereas ISIS concentrates on the "near enemy." Moreover, Al-Qaeda practices caution in its approach, while ISIS employs aggressive tactics and eschatological narratives to gain support from Muslim populations (Arosoaie, 2015). Additionally, research shows ISIS increasingly uses social media for propaganda and recruitment, targeting youth through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Their use of apps like "The Dawn of Glad Tidings," which is a mobile game, has helped spread their ideology globally, with significant implications for global security (Awan, 2017; Wiechert, 2017; Leih, 2017; Rowe & Saif, 2016; Rothenberger, 2012; Knox, 2014; Lindsay, 2011).

Women have also played essential roles in the rise of ISIS. They have been key recruiters and supporters, spreading propaganda, radicalizing, and providing logistical support. Many of them have supported extreme beliefs that promote violence, intolerance, and an Islamic state based on Sharia law. Women have participated in violent actions like suicide bombings, but not as often as men. In areas controlled by ISIS, women were expected to conform to strict gender roles, taking charge of household management, child-rearing, and ensuring that the group's rules were meticulously followed. This included enforcing dress codes, maintaining gender segregation, and indoctrinating children into ISIS ideology (Aoláin, 2022). However, it is crucial to recognize that not all women affiliated with ISIS joined voluntarily; some were coerced, forced, trafficked, or manipulated, and many suffered various forms of abuse and exploitation (Perešin, 2018). ISIS's gender policy, especially in recruiting Western women, is unique. The organization exploits Islamic patriarchal tendencies to recruit women with promises of affiliation, freedom from discrimination, and religious responsibilities. This technique involves women in recruiting and enforcing moral rules, challenging the passive perception of women (Yılmaz, 2017). After ISIS's last strongholds in Syria fell in 2019, many fighters were caught, and their families, mostly women and children, moved to Al-Hol Camp in the northeast of Syria. This camp, containing "ISIS families," may destabilize the region and revive ISIS cells. The camp's population includes 2014 ISIS refugees, Iraqi repatriates, and ISIS-affiliated families who relocated to Syria when Iraq recaptured its areas in 2017 (International Crisis Group, 2017). In addition to these families, another group connected to ISIS includes women currently serving sentences in Iraqi prisons, including some underage girls. These individuals pose a significant security risk due to their potential to continue spreading extremist ideologies, both while incarcerated and after their release (Sandi, 2022).

In conclusion, ISIS's strategies involve a layered approach that spans military, social, and psychological aspects. From guerrilla warfare to the exploitation of sectarian divisions, these tactics have helped the group enhance its influence and success in the region. These strategies aim not only to achieve military objectives but also to create social and psychological effects to maintain and expand their control.

On an international level, ISIS has significantly influenced global security and geopolitics. Its rise in Iraq and Syria threatened regional stability and attracted foreign fighters worldwide. The group's brutal tactics, including mass killings, kidnappings, and terrorist attacks, heightened global concerns about the spread of extremism and underscored the need for collective action against terrorism. For instance, Türkiye has faced substantial challenges with foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) linked to DAESH, serving as a transit, target, and host country. Between March 2014 and March 2016, Türkiye suffered 163 fatalities and 766 injuries due to FTFs. This situation illustrates the necessity of international collaboration and de-radicalization efforts to resolve such issues (Yalçınkaya, 2016).

Even though ISIS was declared defeated after the completion of military interventions, it was widely recognised that the group has significant potential for resurgence due to its robust network structure (Helvalı, 2020). To gain a more profound and evidence-based understanding of ISIS's evolution, impact, and enduring threat—particularly in the context of the northeast of Syria—this study

employs a qualitative research approach combining document analysis with field-based insights from key informants.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is qualitative in nature, employing two distinct data collection techniques. The first part of the research involves a qualitative approach, focusing on an extensive review of books, articles, and other academic sources regarding ISIS as a violent extremist organization. This consists of a document analysis to examine the relevant literature.

In the second part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the resulting data were analyzed qualitatively. These in-depth interviews with individuals possessing firsthand knowledge—such as local community members, experts, policymakers, and humanitarian workers—provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics surrounding extremism in the northeast of Syria. By integrating qualitative data from these interviews, key themes and patterns emerge, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the current situation in the region.

The research study on the formation of extremist societies, focusing on ISIS in the northeast of Syria, involved groups and individuals directly or indirectly affected by the phenomenon. The target population included members of the local communities, religious leaders, government officials, security experts, and humanitarian organization workers. Only adult male and female participants were interviewed. For qualitative research using one-to-one interviews, purposive sampling is the most suitable method. This technique targets individuals with relevant knowledge or experience related to the research topic. In this study on extremist societies, purposive sampling ensured access to individuals who could provide firsthand insights into ISIS's formation. The snowball sampling method was used, allowing participants to refer others with similar experiences or knowledge. This approach helped reach individuals who may have been otherwise difficult to find and provided a deeper understanding of extremist societies' structure and operations. The sample size and data saturation were determined based on factors like the data's richness, the diversity of perspectives, and the ability to meet research objectives effectively. In-depth interviews with nine important informants yielded the findings.

The following questions were asked in the interviews:

1. How did ISIS emerge in the region?
2. What are the internal factors contributing to the emergence of ISIS?
3. What was the approach of local communities toward the emergence and existence of ISIS?
4. What are the factors that might prevent their return?

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Gender	City	Profession/Background
P1	Man	Allepo	An activist, field researcher, and analyst who witnessed ISIS's control over his city.
P2	Man	Dier-Ezzor	An activist, writer, and researcher who witnessed ISIS's emergence in the region wrote and documented a lot of ISIS policies and violations.
P3	Woman	Raqqa	A Syrian journalist and witness documented the ISIS control period in Raqqa City through photos and videos, secretly leaking it to international news outlets.
P4	Woman	Dier-Ezzor	A Syrian investigative journalist and witness documented the ISIS control period and published articles and reports on their policies, violations, and techniques.
P5	Man	Raqqa	Non-violent civil society activist and researcher specializing in jihadist groups and the region's tribes' studies.

P6	Man	Dier-Ezzor	Human rights lawyer and advocate, founder of a human rights organization active in the northeast of Syria, works with the community that survived ISIS, and with local actors for peacebuilding.
P7	Man	Raqqa	Teacher, researcher, and writer from Raqqa. He has published several investigations and articles covering ISIS's existence in Syria, as well as his brother, who was kidnapped and forcibly disappeared by ISIS till today.
P8	Man	Dier-Ezzor	A researcher and journalist who covered most of the period of ISIS's presence in Syria. He has also extensively documented human rights violations committed by ISIS in the region.
P9	Man	Dier-Ezzor	An activist, investigative journalist, and former ISIS detainee who witnessed all ISIS phases and changes in the region of northeast Syria, covered most of the period of ISIS presence in Syria, and provides insight into the current state of the region.

This case study provides a detailed perspective of life under extremist rule using direct witnesses from people who lived in ISIS's presence in the northeast of Syria, therefore placing the narratives within the broader historical and geopolitical landscape of the region. To achieve this, the study conducted interviews with nine individuals, each from diverse experiences and backgrounds, as illustrated in the table above.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The initial interview question posed to the participants was, "*How did ISIS emerge in the region?*". The responses revealed multifaceted explanations for the group's rise. Participant 1 asserts that ISIS is a structure whose philosophy was brought from outside and is not a product of the Syrian people or the region's own ideology. He now makes reference to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Young Syrians who traveled to Iraq to fight joined Islamic groups there, but upon their return, the Assad government imprisoned them in Sednaya prison. They were even more radicalized after being subjected to severe torture. Participant 1 compared Sednaya prison to a "terror export academy". Those who emerged were driven by a strong sense of religious conviction, torture-induced suppression, and a need for vengeance. Following their release by the Syrian government, these individuals swiftly established tiny but potent jihadist organizations when the country's civil war erupted. After meeting with Syrian officials who were linked with the group and stationed in Iraq, Participant 2 claims that the notion to extend the organization in Syria came about. Elite fighters were initially sent to Syria in place of a direct military deployment. They mostly used connections made while the United States was occupying Iraq. Like Participant 1, Participant 2 emphasizes how the organization was strengthened by the high number of young people in the eastern of Syria who backed Iraqi fighters during the invasion. By using the local expertise and contacts that former Syrian-born mujahideen brought to Syria through the cadres it sent, ISIS established the organization's foundations. As a result, the group was able to learn more about the sociopolitical structure, demographics, and social roots that would support Salafi doctrine in the area. According to Participant 2, this served as a center for the organization's growth.

Participant 9 asserts that the fear and confusion engendered by ISIS's 2013 media campaign, killings, and bombs were the primary element that enabled the group to gain control of the area. The organization's job was further made simpler by the ensuing power vacuum and security weakness brought on by the continuous fighting between Syrian government troops and different armed opposition organizations, as well as sectarian rivalries between the region's most influential tribes. According to Participant 9, the group planned assassinations against numerous well-known individuals in the area and used sleeper cells to carry out multiple explosions close to the headquarters of Free Syrian Army units in an effort to warn both military and civilian groups that resistance to the group would result in death. Participants 2 and 3 also point out that the ideologically motivated conflict between the parties has produced favorable circumstances for the organization's growth. According to Participant 2, the absence of a leader in the area, resulting from conflicts between the organizations, facilitated the organization's ability to win over the populace. The Iraq War, ideology transfer, and the importation of personnel from Iraq (P1, P2), prison experience (P1), the role and connections of local mujahideen (P2), group divisions, ideological and sectarian conflicts (P2, P3, P9), the power vacuum (P9), and the organization's

propaganda strategy (P9) are therefore some of the factors that participants cite as contributing to the emergence of ISIS in Syria.

The second interview question posed to the participants was, "*What are the internal factors contributing to the emergence of ISIS?*" A variety of internal factors contributed to the rise of ISIS, many of which were deeply rooted in the socio-political fabric of the region. Participant 6 claims that disarray creates a safe environment for extremist organizations to flourish in any conflict-affected nation; in Syria, these accounts date back to after 2013. According to Participant 6, the state's collapse, turmoil, poverty, and the breakdown of the educational system all contributed to the rise of ISIS in Syria. These factors all contributed to the extremist group's rise in Syria. Participant 8 claims that the local church establishment's shortcomings facilitated their ability to draw adherents. Due to poverty and backwardness, the majority of people in the region—who are largely Sufis and not restricted by a particular theological ideology—were seduced by wealth, power, influence, automobiles, fuel, guns, and wages. According to Participant 4, the residents in the area felt compelled to leave the Assad administration and looked outside for assistance in doing so. He claims that the region's residents turned to ISIS because they believed that Sunni identity had to be maintained. However, according to Participant 1, those who did not play a significant role in society joined the group purely for the purpose of gaining reputation and power. According to Participant 3, in the El-Diyab tribe, one of the largest tribes in Raqqa, the father or sheikh had divided his land and political influence among his sons. The son, who was deprived of this influence and family wealth, joined ISIS to gain power. Participant 3 states that the presence of tribes within ISIS ranks facilitated the establishment of the organization's authority and influence. As mentioned by Participant 6, the organization typically targets and successfully recruits people who had family issues at a young age. The group has been able to reach a larger segment of the population thanks to these people. According to Participant 5, some people solely have their own interests in mind and have supported ISIS, which has helped it develop, regardless of the side in power. Those who rebelled against them and objected to their presence were either slain or abducted. There is dread in the community as a result of the silence of many who are aware of the organization's true nature. Participants therefore propose that several internal factors, including the collapse, chaos, and poverty of the state (P6), the weakness of the local religious structure (P8), political and identity-based motivation (P8), tribal and family dynamics (P3, P6, P7), and the desire for social status and power (P1, P5) contributed to the formation of the organization.

The third interview question posed to the participants was, "*What was the approach of local communities toward the emergence and existence of ISIS?*" The local community's reaction to ISIS was complex, diverse, and evolved over time. Participant 5 claims that at first, ISIS was superior to all other factions. ISIS commanders portrayed themselves as descendants of the Prophet's companions and their time, which swayed the religiously inclined local community, who came to believe they were correct. Furthermore, civilians' disillusionment with the dictatorship and the passivity of the international community made them think that the regime would not be overthrown politically, which bolstered their belief that military overthrow was the answer. Only the most capable and seasoned Islamic groups were believed to be capable of accomplishing this during the conflict, and they were trusted. In a similar vein, Participant 2 claimed that some people favored ISIS's existence because of its religious beliefs and the battle against the Syrian government. Since they established administrative control over the area and were among the most organized groups, they received support.

The "strengthening" phase of ISIS in Raqqa, which included killings, arrests, and the implementation of dress and smoking bans, followed the conclusion of the "disciplining and control" phase, according to Participant 5. According to Participant 5, this caused the populace to start feeling hostile towards them. But no one dared to confront fear since it is such a strong deterrent. According to Participant 5, *"The only way people could resist was to leave ISIS-controlled areas or prevent their kids from receiving an education from ISIS." For instance, children were taught "gunpowder + gunpowder" in their textbooks rather than the "apple + apple" process. Therefore, the only way parents could oppose was to prevent their children from attending school using the ISIS curriculum. Raqqa saw a substantial increase in the rate of illiteracy as a result of more people skipping school."* Participant 2 claims that people progressively started to despise ISIS because of the organization's extreme violence, meddling in people's affairs, levying taxes and fees, prosecuting civil activists and regime defectors, and outlawing

smoking and other similar activities. The trials, executions, and kidnappings that ISIS carried out forced inhabitants to flee the area. Resistance actions against the group were conducted in secret or from locations outside of its sphere of influence. These efforts, however, were unable to make a significant difference because of the tremendous strain on the internet, communication centers, and their potent intelligence machinery.

Participant 3 claims that the populace was worn out and fatigued, particularly as a result of the country's recent upheaval and the succession of governments. They initially believed that ISIS was fighting alongside the populace against the authoritarian administration, but they were wrong. ISIS was armed, wealthy, and powerful, and it did not think twice about using violence against its opponents, according to Participant 3. The local community's responses varied based on their beliefs and areas of interest; some tribal members and Salafis supported the group, swearing loyalty, while a significant portion of the population disapproved but lacked the resources to counter such a powerful and intimidating group. Cultural opposition to the ideology and fanaticism of ISIS remained insufficient and feeble. Cultural activities were prohibited, opposition journals were closed, and civil society movements faced various restrictions and infringements. Schools and universities were shut down, and the organization's mandated curriculum was put into effect. Male doctors were forbidden from treating women, while female doctors were forbidden from treating men. A sizable section of the populace was compelled to flee ISIS's persecution by moving to Türkiye, Europe, or regions under regime control. The resistance has failed because of kidnappings, assassinations, and other brutal means.

In particular, participant 4 points out that intimidation and fear restrict people from speaking up and expressing themselves. On the other hand, resistance movements were sparked by extreme violence, murders, threats, and the enforcement of unfair laws. Conversely, other tribes joined forces with ISIS to defend their trade, their interests, or their clan. Although it is challenging to extrapolate how local leaders responded to ISIS, widespread opposition was significantly greater than that of local leaders. The group imposed significant restrictions on the area. Women were compelled to dress in a particular way. Only male relatives (father, brother, or spouse) were permitted to accompany women outside. Communication with the outside world and the use of the Internet were prohibited. Because of the methodical shelling, schools were closed. After that, ISIS established schools using a curriculum that it had particularly created. This enabled the organization to recruit children and teenagers without parental consent and exert significant influence over them. In an effort to draw children's attention and try to steer them toward the group, it occasionally planned media-based protests. At the same time, other parents were compelled by the region's poverty to send their kids to these schools in exchange for monthly payments, food assistance, or a cash reward if their child became a "martyr." A portion of the local population's disinterest in education was also caused by poverty. ISIS gained control of oil resources after seizing the area, which allowed them to access a substantial source of income.

Participant 8 claims that the group treated the local community in this area with fierce hostility. Many respected people, those with social rank, and innocent people were put to death as a result of the brutality they perpetrated, which made the population unable to accept their authority. The group became increasingly despised in the neighborhood. People in Deir ez-Zor reacted negatively to the brutal executions, severe violence, and bombings; they dreaded being oppressed and vehemently opposed them. They issued a fatwa condemning the Shaitat tribe to death based only on their identity. As a result, the group was unable to build a solid social foundation in the area. Because of ISIS's devastation, persecution, oppression, and massacres, the overwhelming majority of people in the regions it occupies have firmly rejected the group, according to Participant 9.

Participant 1 claims that they developed connections with influential and affluent people in the area, especially local business owners, offering them some benefits and a measure of security in return for paying taxes. The rich members of the population who had not formally joined the group were under pressure to pay taxes. Without being given the opportunity to repent, civilian leaders were singled out and ignored. Religious leaders in the city lost all power and influence; they were compelled to either comply and join ISIS or risk being executed for apostasy. The majority of the city's clerics left for Türkiye as a result. The group attempted to entice some of its opponents to join it by offering them a "door of repentance." However, women were subject to dress regulations enforced by ISIS. Women

made up the majority of the city's population, and they opposed the dress code. The populace turned away from ISIS as a result of these actions.

Participant 6 claims that the group intimidated and subjugated people by using extreme force, cruel torture, and murder techniques; this initially led to partial acceptance and gave a sense of security. The people's environment of intense violence and ongoing fear, however, as well as the deteriorating economic circumstances after ISIS's arrival in the area—including the blocking of humanitarian aid organizations' operations, the restrictions on people's freedom of movement and interregional travel, and the ban on entering areas under regime control—further deteriorated the economic situation. Public outcry and calls for ISIS to withdraw from the area resulted from all of this. ISIS targeted civilian activists, according to Participant 6; some were detained, some ran away, and some took so-called "instability courses." Regarding women, Hisba patrols kept an eye on them, harassed them, and made them wear a particular kind of clothes—legal apparel. Women were cursed, those who disobeyed the laws were whipped, and those found guilty of "adultery" were stoned to death; the organization executed a large number of women in the area on this charge. Simpler methods were implemented to penalize women in villages; however, even if they worked in agriculture and animal husbandry, they were required to wear the same clothes, and infractions were punishable by penalties. They acted cautiously in their relations with tribal leaders, fearing reactions, especially when interacting with leaders of large clans and influential figures in the region. However, they aimed to divide by reviving differences, rebellions, and other divisions among members of the same clan. The organization also attempted to impose its own curriculum and open a university, but failed because parents did not send their children to the organization's educational centers. Participants' statements indicate that a segment of the local community initially trusted and supported the organization (P3, P5, P6), but began to hate and reject it due to violence and oppression (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9), and were unable to show open and strong resistance due to fear (P3, P4, P5). They emphasize that oppression was particularly intense for women (P4, P6).

While Syria is laying the groundwork for a new democratic system, there are also talks about the potential return of ISIS. The devastation brought about by years of conflict may actually be advantageous for the organization. ISIS might reappear, but not as a state, according to Participant 1. Instead, it might take the shape of sleeper cells that carry out particular tasks and are highly successful at sabotage and bombing. The party finds it challenging to retake the area, though. This is because it has lost many of its fighters, and the ones that are left cannot bring it back to its previous level of power. According to Participant 2, there is little chance that the group will resurface. The exile of its members and their families has caused the group to become estranged from its roots. Its ability to recruit new members has reduced, and its operations have declined. Participant 2 claims that the local populace is aware of the detrimental effects that the ISIS experience has had on the area and that the organization's ability to win over society is now severely weakened as a result of the atrocities it has committed. In this regard, the group lacks the ability to revive its prior political endeavor. But it also indicates that there are certain risks. Because of their religious identity, Sunni groups may be compelled to embrace ISIS due to sectarianism and the region's ongoing totalitarian regimes. The Syrian revolution's failure and the people's inability to achieve any reforms or political gains could lead to the organization's resurgence. Although it is not a direct reason, Iran's desire for regional hegemony may serve as motivation for the organization's rebirth by taking advantage of the Kurdish-Arab national strife. A time bomb of extremism is created when ISIS families and children in the area are not rehabilitated and reintegrated into society; in particular, keeping families in closed camps feeds hatred and keeps children from growing up socially excluded, isolated, and psychologically ill. The organization may be able to recover from this circumstance.

In the north of Syria, women and children are living without any trial, rehabilitation, or social integration, according to Participant 3. Additionally, children raised in the region's camps have been denied access to programs and education that could help them, instead being indoctrinated with extremist ideologies and emotions of hatred toward the outside world and other people. If the fate of ISIS inmates and their children is not decided, it may play a significant role in the group's comeback, this time with much more ferocity. The problem is being made worse by the region's security instability, ISIS's sleeper cells, the organization's ideology and propaganda, the proliferation of drugs there, and the

rising number of addiction cases, particularly among teenagers. A significant gap has developed, and the circle of ignorance has grown as a result of the region's lengthy educational lapse, the system's shortcomings, and a lack of knowledge. The participant acknowledges that the three groups might reappear, but cautions that they will be even more vicious than previously. Participant 6 asserts that despite limitations on funding cycles and weapon access, the elements that contribute to ISIS's survival still exist today. The situation is further exacerbated by ongoing chaos, the enduring mistrust between the local population and local authorities due to corruption and nepotism, the local population's lack of involvement in decision-making processes, and the fact that control and intervention over the community's wealth are restricted to security-oriented solutions and violations. New members are more inclined to join the group due to concerns that the government will retake control of towns and cities. According to Participant 4, the group is still operational. The cell activities of the organization are still going on. And the Al-Hol camp is basically a ticking time bomb, he adds. He claims that as the kids get older and more mature, they serve as a resource for the organization's rebirth. According to Participant 4, ISIS will remain a kind of time bomb with its cells in the area as long as these camps remain walled off from the outside world, as long as rehabilitation is not provided, and as long as no door is opened to bring these people back to life.

Participant 5 suggested that the group may reorganize. ISIS may regain power because of regional security flaws, anti-population policies, drug trafficking, and unfavorable economic circumstances. He notes that the Al-Hol camp is the largest time bomb in the area, just like Participant 4. This location will act as an incubator for ISIS if it resurfaces. Participant 7 asserts that since ISIS has sown the seeds of extremism and Salafi ideology across the local society, effective measures are required to uproot them. According to Participant 7, the SDF will help ISIS reappear as long as it maintains its current system of administration in the area. Additionally, the region continues to be influenced by the Salafi philosophy propagated by ISIS; many women still wear the veil that ISIS imposed, and this effect is still evident in their conduct. The region still has remnants of ISIS; in fact, the extension of the Kurdish movement into Arab territories and the influence of the regime from Iran continue to stoke sectarian divisions. Participant 7 claims that some people would rather see ISIS resurrect because of the SDF's brutal style of government. This is a result of the SDF's poor and ineffective situational management, incapacity to guarantee economic stability, and inability to maintain public security. Additionally, there is a significant decline in trust in the SDF government; the SDF identifies everyone as "Daesh" and treats the entire local community as though it were an ISIS breeding ground. Furthermore, the SDF-backed discrimination and unequal opportunities between Kurds and Arabs exacerbate this unhappiness and insecurity. Participant 8 asserts that any desire for retribution against the Syrian regime, especially given the absence of a political solution thus far, the Syrian regime's use of sectarian rhetoric, and the Iranian militias' hold over sizable portions of Deir ez-Zor, could spark a new wave of extremism by escalating regional tensions and issues.

The need to integrate women and children in the camps into society is emphasized by Participant 5. They claim that if their suffering is not considered, they may eventually be the cause of ISIS's return to the area. In addition, Participant 2 highlights the potential role of women in the case of a return. The circumstance will create a solid basis for the organization's comeback if women and children in the camps are not adequately assimilated into society. Additionally, according to Participant 1, women might play several roles in the organization's resurgence, including networking, information sharing, and recruiting new members in the area. Participant 6 asserts that women are essential to the organization's functioning. Women are now effectively in charge of the financial network because the men and leaders have been assassinated, abducted, or vanished. Women actively recruit new members for ISIS by serving as a conduit between leadership components and clandestine elements in cities and villages. This is why women are the organization's nerve center, he said. Participant 7 highlights the camps in Syria's northeast. Social stigma and marginalization are experienced by women who have lived in the camps, married members of the organization, or had a family member join the group. In addition to being abused, these women and children lack legal rights, employment possibilities, and social recognition. Children who leave the camps are not permitted to go to school or interact with other kids. It is underlined that the women and children detained here must be rehabilitated and that their suffering must be considered. Otherwise, it is mentioned that women could be crucial to the organization's revival because they are the most efficient in terms of communication, fund transfers, and membership

recruiting. It is impossible to overlook the role of ISIS women and the potential for them to serve as the primary pillar of the group's comeback, claims Participant 9. Women have played a key role in ensuring and encouraging the participation of many foreigners; they have engaged in terrorist activities, provided fighters with logistical, media, and moral support, and set up cells to carry out attacks if the group loses its physical presence. This situation is currently being experienced in the Al-Hol camp. ISIS women may be forced to use different methods to adapt to the new situation and recruit new members; this includes spreading organizational propaganda via social media, participating in propaganda activities, and promoting extremist ideology. According to Participant 9, feelings of loneliness and inadequate economic or social opportunities may be a factor triggering women to return to the organization's ranks. Extreme ideological thoughts and ideological desires may also re-attract women who previously joined ISIS.

The fourth interview question asked the participants, "*What are the factors that might prevent their return?*". Participants identified several interlinked strategies and conditions that could help prevent the resurgence of ISIS. Participant 3 asserts that some preventive actions, such as resolving the issues of those detained in camps and setting up fair courts for them, giving children access to education, and offering social rehabilitation, can stop or lessen the effects of the organization's return. Although she acknowledged that laws, legal procedures, and international movement mechanisms may assist in addressing the extremism issue in the region to some degree, Participant 3 said that in reality, she did not think there were any things that could totally stop them from returning. Many Syrian people in the camps were inadvertently included in the organization and are still considered refugees; coalition wars have left them displaced and defenseless, according to Participant 4. In addition to allowing people to return to their homes and towns, more needs to be done to address the baseless charges made against numerous civilians without supporting documentation or following the proper legal procedures. According to Participant 5, the security situation needs to be brought under control, and a thorough political solution needs to be found in the areas where ISIS first appeared. In addition to removing the drug and weapon pandemonium, significant efforts must be taken to improve the state of the economy. Corruption must stop. It will be taken into consideration when they return if this chaotic scenario is not handled. For foreigners and ISIS militants arrested in the Al-Hol camp or Ghweran prison, as well as their families, radical measures are needed. These camps and jails may eventually be used as a pretext for ISIS's resurgence if the international coalition leaves. According to Participant 6, the continuation of military operations and the pursuit of a political solution that offers justice to all Syrians without distinction are the two things that might keep them from returning. Civil society can reach every home like an egg; thus, this method should open the door for it. To work toward a genuine political solution, civil society organizations ought to be enlisted and supported. All of this lessens the harm that extremist organizations produce and stops the conditions that could lead to their reemergence. Participant 7 asserts that by guaranteeing women's security, education, development, rehabilitation, and career prospects, the organization may be kept from resurfacing. The inhabitants of Deir Ezzor have historically practiced Sufi Islam, but ISIS's rule has pushed the local population into religious extremism, according to Participant 8. Part of this process involves educating the populace, particularly the youth, to keep them away from extremism. Participant 9 suggests that one reason why women who have been associated with ISIS in the past may not rejoin the group is that they are excluded by their families and communities. ISIS victims must be given access to social, educational, and economic possibilities to return to their regular lives and receive psychological care.

To sum up, participants stressed the significance of establishing a political solution and laying the groundwork for governance (P5, P6), empowering civil society and bolstering local participation (P6), improving socio-economic conditions (P3, P5, P7, P9), protecting, educating, and rehabilitating women and integrating them into social life (P7, P9), ensuring security (P5, P6), and ensuring justice and fair legal processes (P3, P4, P5, P6) to prevent the resurgence of ISIS.

6. CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the reasons for the emergence of ISIS in northeastern Syria and its potential for future resurgence based on data obtained from the field. Findings include the transfer of extremist ideas and fighters from Iraq to Syria, the prison experiences of Syrians returning from Iraq, the role and connections of local mujahideen, internal divisions within the group, ideological and sectarian conflicts,

the organization's propaganda strategies, the collapse of the state and the resulting power vacuums, chaos and poverty, the weakness of the local religious structure, political and identity-based motivations, tribal and family dynamics, and the desire for social status and power as decisive factors in ISIS's rise in the northeast of Syria. According to participants' statements, the local community initially supported ISIS, but gradually distanced itself from the organization due to its policies of violence and oppression. It was understood that oppression was particularly intense for women, and it was observed that community members were unable to mount open and strong resistance due to fear. The findings of the study indicate that the possibility of ISIS reemerging in the region persists. Although the organization has lost resources and manpower, factors such as the power vacuum in the region, instability, insecurity, sectarianism, socio-economic problems, corruption, and especially the failure to reintegrate women and children in the camps into society increase the organization's potential for revival. In conclusion, the research emphasizes that implementing political and economic reforms, strengthening civil society, reintegrating women into social life, ensuring security, and establishing justice will play a critical role in preventing the reemergence of ISIS.

The study provides insights into the region's socio-political realities during the ISIS era and highlights the ongoing risks of extremism's resurgence. By examining the historical development of extremist Salafi groups, the article explores the complex processes that led to the establishment of ISIS. The emergence of ISIS had profound implications for the region, disrupting social structures, political stability, and human security. While the fall of ISIS marked a significant development, indicators of a potential resurgence remain, underscoring the importance of proactive measures to address persistent challenges.

Qualitative interviews with individuals who witnessed ISIS's presence in Syria offer firsthand accounts of the impact of extremist societies. These narratives provide unique perspectives on the formation of extremist ideologies, the motivations behind participation in extremist activities, and the dynamics that shaped the presence of such groups. The case study also emphasizes the experiences of women and children within ISIS, shedding light on their roles in the extremist environment. Understanding gender dynamics is crucial to developing a more comprehensive response to extremism, highlighting the necessity of gender-sensitive approaches to combat extremism and its potential revival.

The research underscores the importance of international interventions and political measures in addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the northeast of Syria. Effective collaboration and preventive strategies are essential for mitigating the risks of extremism and ensuring long-term stability in the region. The findings of this article contribute significantly to the understanding of extremist societies in the region. By examining the realities on the ground, the historical evolution of extremist Salafi groups, and personal testimonies, the research offers a deeper understanding of the factors that shaped and impacted extremist societies.

This research goes beyond conceptual and theoretical discussion, providing valuable insights for policymakers, international organizations, and practitioners focused on countering extremism and fostering peace and stability. By learning from past experiences and acknowledging future risks, we can work toward creating a more secure and prosperous region. This research aims to inspire collaborative efforts to address the challenges posed by extremist ideologies and to ensure a safer future for the region and its people.

A fair and inclusive political solution for all Syrians should be prioritized, with active engagement from civil society organizations. These groups can play a key role in addressing extremism, countering extremist narratives, and promoting peacebuilding efforts. Education and rehabilitation programs are crucial in preventing the radicalization of former ISIS members, while providing children and adults with opportunities for social reintegration. Addressing economic disparities and offering viable livelihoods can reduce vulnerability to extremist recruitment. Empowering women through gender-sensitive approaches in rehabilitation programs is essential for effectively countering extremism. Furthermore, resolving the Kurdish-Arab conflict and fostering religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue will help mitigate grievances exploited by extremist groups.

Strengthening legal frameworks and international cooperation is vital to confronting the challenges of extremism in the northeast of Syria. Countries must collaborate to prosecute and

rehabilitate individuals associated with extremist groups, ensuring that reintegration efforts are inclusive and comprehensive. Social rejection and marginalization should be addressed to prevent the re-engagement of former extremists. Implementing de-radicalization programs within detention centers can facilitate the disengagement of individuals from extremist ideologies. By fostering international collaboration and implementing these strategies, stakeholders can work together to prevent the resurgence of extremism and promote peace, stability, and security in the northeast of Syria. Through coordinated efforts, a safer and more prosperous future for the region can be achieved.

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