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Regional responses to violent extremism: assessing IGAD's efforts in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract

This study examines the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) regional responses to violent extremism in the Horn of Africa using secondary data from forty academic and institutional sources. Findings reveal that IGAD has achieved significant institutional and normative progress through initiatives such as the IGAD Center of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) and the Regional P/CVE Strategy. However, its effectiveness remains constrained by limited enforcement authority, weak intelligence coordination, and donor dependence. While IGAD excels in policy harmonization and preventive programming, implementation gaps persist across member states. The study concludes that IGAD's success depends on enhancing operational capacity, legal harmonization, and member-state commitment to transform coordination into collective regional security action.

Keywords: *IGAD, Horn of Africa, violent extremism, regional security, countering violent extremism.*

1. Introduction

The Horn of Africa remains one of the regions most profoundly affected by violent extremism in the world, characterized by fragile governance, weak institutions, and porous borders that facilitate the cross-border movement of militant groups and their illicit resources. Transnational extremist networks such as al-Shabaab and others, enabled by illicit activities like small arms smuggling, money laundering, and human trafficking, have flourished within this context of chronic instability (Menkhaus, 2021). Somalia, South Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia and Kenya have endured decades of conflict, making the region an epicenter of extremist mobilization and illicit trade (Tinti, 2021). The collapse of state structures in Somalia, in particular, opened space for powerful extremist movements and militant groups to thrive, destabilizing the entire subregion (Weldemichael, 2019). These dynamics have entrenched cycles of violence and economic underdevelopment while undermining efforts toward state reconstruction and peacebuilding.

Scholars argue that the region's challenge of violent extremism is not only a national problem but also a regional one because militant networks operate fluidly across borders (Munyi, 2016). The illicit trade in weapons, narcotics, and human beings links remote areas of the Horn to global criminal economies, often providing financing for extremist groups (Cliffe & Luckham, 2020). In addition, youth unemployment, poverty, and political exclusion have made communities more vulnerable to recruitment into extremist organizations (Hassan, 2018). These factors collectively pose a serious threat to the sovereignty of states and the stability of the Horn of Africa.

In response to these extremism-related security challenges, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has gradually expanded its original focus from drought and development coordination to peace, security, and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Its mechanisms such as the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), the IGAD Capacity Building Programme Against Terrorism (ICPAT), and the IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) seek to strengthen cooperation among member states to address transnational extremism (Kasaija, 2019). These frameworks aim to improve intelligence sharing, border management, and coordination of counter-terrorism and law enforcement operations (IGAD, 2020). IGAD's regional approach recognizes that the fight against violent extremist groups requires collective strategies rather than isolated national efforts.

Nevertheless, despite the existence of these frameworks, violent extremism persists across the region. Militant activity and radicalization remain significant threats, and border control remains weak (ISS, 2021). The effectiveness of IGAD's initiatives is constrained by several factors, including limited financial resources, political rivalries among member states, and the absence of harmonized legal frameworks for counter-terrorism (Kelley, 2020). In some cases, corruption and divergent national interests hinder joint enforcement and information-sharing initiatives (AUC, 2022).

The central claim of this study is that IGAD has established an important institutional basis for regional counter-extremism and security cooperation, but its practical effectiveness is limited by weak implementation and coordination capacity. Thus, the problem arises from the gap between IGAD's policy frameworks and the realities on the ground: violent extremism continues to escalate despite multiple strategies, showing that the organization's responses are more procedural than transformative. Understanding these gaps is essential to strengthening regional mechanisms and building a coherent, results-oriented approach to tackling violent extremism and security in the Horn of Africa.

2. Literature Review

The Horn of Africa has long been conceptualized as one of the most complex and insecure regions globally, where transnational organized crime (TOC) intersects with weak governance and protracted conflicts. Contemporary literature frames the region's insecurity within the broader discourse of "state fragility" and "regional security complexes," emphasizing how porous borders and weak institutions enable cross-border criminal economies (Cliffe & Luckham, 2020). Recent analyses contend that organized crime in the Horn is not a peripheral issue but a systemic feature of political economies, deeply intertwined with corruption, informal trade, and the survival strategies of marginalized

communities (Tinti, 2021). Such dynamics make it difficult to isolate crime from governance, development, and political patronage structures.

Emerging scholarship identifies a convergence between traditional forms of organized crime such as arms trafficking, piracy, and human smuggling and newer manifestations like cybercrime and environmental crime (Ojolo & Singh, 2025). These crimes are increasingly transnational, adaptive, and networked, exploiting weak border regimes and digital vulnerabilities. Studies highlight Somalia as a microcosm of these dynamics: criminal groups exploit governance vacuums and resource scarcity to sustain illicit economies ranging from maritime piracy to terrorism financing (Weldemichael, 2019). Similarly, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan serve as key corridors in trafficking networks that move people, weapons, and narcotics across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (Hassan, 2023). The cumulative effect of these illicit flows is the erosion of state sovereignty, proliferation of violence, and distortion of legitimate markets.

At the normative and institutional level, IGAD has emerged as a central actor in articulating regional responses to crime and insecurity. Scholars agree that IGAD's institutional evolution from a development-oriented body to a regional peace and security mechanism marks an important shift in regional governance (Kasaija, 2019). Through initiatives such as the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), the IGAD Capacity Building Programme Against Terrorism (ICPAT), and the IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP), the organization seeks to coordinate intelligence, harmonize laws, and facilitate inter-state cooperation on counter-terrorism and transnational crime (IGAD, 2020). These frameworks reflect the regionalization of security policy and recognition that crime in the Horn cannot be addressed through isolated national approaches (AUC, 2022). However, the empirical literature reveals a persistent gap between institutional design and operational effectiveness. IGAD's frameworks often lack enforcement mechanisms and rely heavily on donor funding, which limits sustainability and local ownership (Kelley, 2020). Menkhaus (2021) argues that while IGAD has succeeded in creating dialogue and norm-building platforms, implementation is undermined by divergent member state interests and sovereignty concerns that constrain intelligence sharing and coordinated action. Studies further show that harmonization of criminal laws remains incomplete, leading to jurisdictional inconsistencies that criminal networks exploit (Badar & Higgins, 2023). As a result, IGAD's crime prevention instruments are often procedural rather than transformative, achieving bureaucratic coordination but limited deterrence.

Another emerging theme in the literature concerns the political economy of crime governance. Scholars like Hassan (2023) and Cliffe & Luckham (2020) note that regional responses are shaped by elite bargains, where state actors sometimes benefit from or tolerate informal and illicit economies. This creates a paradox: the same governments tasked with combating crime may indirectly sustain it. Moreover, national security priorities such as counterterrorism in Somalia or border control in Ethiopia often overshadow regional cooperation, leading to fragmented implementation. IGAD's limited autonomy and lack of binding authority further restrict its ability to sanction non-compliance or compel coordination (Kasaija, 2019). These structural limitations mirror challenges seen in other regional bodies like ECOWAS and SADC, suggesting a broader African pattern of institutional weakness in transnational crime governance.

Recent studies also highlight emerging frontiers of insecurity that require adaptive regional frameworks. Cybercrime, environmental crime, and illicit financial flows are rapidly expanding, yet IGAD's mechanisms remain primarily oriented toward conventional threats such as terrorism and trafficking (Ojolo & Singh, 2025). The absence of a comprehensive digital security or environmental crime strategy exposes the organization's lag in responding to evolving security landscapes. Nonetheless, the creation of the Horn of Africa Wildlife Enforcement Network (HAWEN) under IGAD's leadership indicates a growing appreciation of the link between ecological and criminal economies (AUC, 2022).

The analytical consensus across the literature is that IGAD has laid an important normative foundation for regional cooperation against transnational crime but remains constrained by implementation deficits, political fragmentation, and capacity limitations. Future scholarship calls for more empirically grounded research that measures outcomes such as reductions in smuggling, trafficking, or violent incidents rather than merely describing frameworks and policies. Addressing these gaps would not only

enhance the analytical rigour of regional security studies but also provide practical insights into how IGAD can transform from a coordinating secretariat into an enforcement-oriented regional actor capable of mitigating crime and insecurity across the Horn of Africa.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

A qualitative, explanatory research design based exclusively on secondary data. Given the distributed, cross-border nature of transnational crime and the normative-institutional focus on IGAD, a secondary-data synthesis enables critical, comparative analysis across multiple document types (policy instruments, academic research, institutional reports, legal texts, and media accounts). The approach is interpretive and theory-driven: it seeks to explain how and why IGAD's institutional frameworks translate (or fail to translate) into operational outcomes in crime prevention by synthesizing extant evidence and identifying enabling and constraining mechanisms.

3.2. Data sources

Data were drawn from five complementary secondary sources: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles and books; (2) IGAD and African Union policy documents, strategy papers, and annual reports; (3) reports from international organizations and think tanks (UNODC, ISS, World Bank, ENACT); (4) government laws, statutes, and official statements of IGAD member states; and (5) high-quality investigative media and grey literature that provide empirical descriptions or case examples. Selecting diverse source types allows triangulation of claims, enabling both normative institutional analysis and empirical assessment of outcomes.

3.3. Search strategy

A structured, reproducible search strategy was implemented across academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar) and institutional repositories (IGAD, AU, UNODC, ISS, ENACT). Search strings combined thematic and geographical terms (e.g., "IGAD" OR "Intergovernmental Authority on Development") AND ("transnational crime" OR "organized crime" OR "piracy" OR "human trafficking" OR "smuggling" OR "terrorism" OR "violent extremism") AND ("Horn of Africa" OR "Somalia" OR "Kenya" OR "Ethiopia" OR "Djibouti" OR "Sudan" OR "South Sudan" OR "Eritrea" OR "Uganda"). Searches were limited to publications from 2000 onward, with emphasis on 2015–2025 literature to capture recent institutional developments. Backward and forward citation tracking complemented database searches to identify seminal and grey-literature sources.

3.4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

A total of 44 documents were included for full-text analysis. This size was considered adequate for data saturation and analytical depth. Excluded materials were primarily omitted due to limited relevance, duplication, or lack of methodological credibility. The final corpus ensured a balanced mix of academic rigor and institutional applicability, enabling both theoretical insight and empirical grounding.

Table 3.1: *Summary of Inclusion and exclusion process*

Category of Information	Total Retrieved	Included	Excluded	Justification for Inclusion/Exclusion
Peer-reviewed journal articles	38	22	16	Included recent, high-quality academic works directly examining transnational crime or regional security in the Horn of Africa; excluded older or marginally relevant studies.
Institutional and policy reports (IGAD, AU, UNODC, ISS, ENACT)	21	11	10	Included core strategic documents and program evaluations linked to IGAD's security mechanisms; excluded duplicative or purely descriptive reports.
Government and legal documents	9	4	5	Retained those containing substantive legislative or policy information; excluded draft or unverified versions.
Academic theses and dissertations	6	3	3	Included theses offering analytical or theoretical insight on IGAD or regional crime governance; excluded those lacking methodological transparency.
Think tank and NGO briefs	7	4	3	Retained evidence-based analyses providing recent empirical support; excluded advocacy materials lacking data.

The final selection offered a balanced representation of scholarly and institutional perspectives, integrating peer-reviewed academic analyses with policy and programmatic reports. This blend ensured both theoretical coherence and empirical validity, providing a solid evidentiary base for assessing IGAD's regional responses to crime and insecurity in the Horn of Africa.

3.5. Data extraction and management

A standardized data-extraction template was used to record bibliographic details, study type, geographic scope, research questions, key findings, methods, data on IGAD initiatives (e.g., CEWARN, ICPAT, ISSP), evidence of outcomes (e.g., reduction in incidents, prosecution data, inter-state operations), and stated limitations. NVivo (or equivalent qualitative software) was used to store documents and facilitate coding; a parallel Excel log tracked source selection, inclusion/exclusion decisions, and quality appraisal scores to ensure auditability.

3.6. Data analysis

Analysis proceeded in three interlinked stages. First, a thematic synthesis identified recurrent themes across sources (institutional capacity, legal harmonization, political will, resource dependency, intelligence sharing, operational outcomes). Second, a process-tracing approach was applied to selected case examples (e.g., IGAD's IGASOM planning, CEWARN interventions, anti-piracy responses) to examine causal mechanisms linking IGAD actions to observed outcomes or failures. Third, critical discourse analysis (CDA) evaluated how IGAD's policy language constructs problems and solutions revealing gaps between rhetoric and practice. Synthesizing these strands allowed both explanation (how and why IGAD succeeds/fails) and evaluative judgments about effectiveness.

Sources were appraised for credibility, relevance, methodological rigor, and potential bias using adapted critical appraisal checklists (for example: methodological transparency for academic articles; independence and transparency for think-tank reports; completeness and specificity for policy documents). Findings were triangulated across source types policy claims versus independent

evaluations to check consistency. Where conflicting evidence existed, the study prioritized empirical data; for instance, incident statistics, prosecution records) and peer-reviewed analyses.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the secondary data analysis of forty peer-reviewed and institutional sources that examined IGAD's responses to violent extremism (VE) in the Horn of Africa. Through thematic synthesis, four dominant strands of evidence emerged, corresponding to IGAD's structural, programmatic, operational, and community-level engagements. Tables 4.1 to 4.4 summarize key findings for each theme, followed by interpretive commentary that connects the data to the broader research question.

Table 4.1 outlines findings on the institutional evolution of IGAD's security and counter-extremism apparatus, focusing on how structures such as ICEPCVE, ICPAT, and CEWARN have been designed to coordinate the region's preventive and counter-extremism agenda. Sources including IGAD (2020, 2021), Kasaija (2019), and Menkhaus (2021) emphasize that IGAD has built a layered institutional framework, expanding its original developmental mandate to encompass security, intelligence, and capacity-building functions.

Table 4.1: *Institutional architecture & regional coordination (VE focus)*

Aspect	Sources	Implication
Core institutions	IGAD has created ICEPCVE; ICPAT; CEWARN; also established a Regional Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies (RCTS) in 2023 (IGAD, 2020; ICEPCVE materials; AUC, 2022; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023; Lawal, 2024).	The proliferation of specialized bodies suggests increasing institutional complexity, but raises coordination overlap risks.
Norm-building & training	IGAD organizes regional P/CVE training with UNOCT, EU; collaborates with universities and think tanks (UNOCT/IGAD 2025; Horn Institute 2020; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023; Kamau, 2022).	Training and norm dissemination are strong, yet translating norms into cohesive national policies remains inconsistent.
Coordination outcomes	Improved dialogue and regional policy alignment; however joint operations still rare; evaluation reports note Kenya, Ethiopia piloting collaborative operations (Waga, 2024; Nuh, 2022; Kamau, 2022; Adero, 2023).	IGAD's role as convener is effective; operational coordination (troops, joint patrols, cross-border actions) lags due to legal, political, trust issues.

Table 4.1 reveals that IGAD's institutional expansion represents genuine regional ambition but also exposes fragmentation and overlap. While the creation of ICEPCVE and related organs demonstrates political commitment to address VE, multiple bodies each with distinct donors and reporting lines have led to what Lawal (2024) calls "bureaucratic diffusion." The data suggest that IGAD's strength lies in normative coordination, not enforcement. Scholars such as Kelley (2020) and Abdi and Yusuf (2023) argue that IGAD's convening power has generated policy coherence among member states but remains hindered by weak trust and sovereignty sensitivities. Thus, institutional maturity has not yet translated into operational synergy; coordination exists largely in the form of policy platforms and workshops rather than integrated field operations.

Table 4.2 synthesizes literature examining IGAD's regional P/CVE strategy and related initiatives promoting resilience, education, youth empowerment, and inter-faith dialogue. Sources such as the IGAD Regional Strategy (2021), AUC (2022), Strong Cities Network (2022), and Farah et al. (2023) document IGAD's pivot toward preventive, community-based approaches rather than solely military ones.

Table 4.2: *Prevention & Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) Programming*

P/CVE domain	Reported practice (what the articles say about IGAD's role)	Effectiveness / critique (analysis)
Policy frameworks	IGAD promotes regional P/CVE strategy emphasizing prevention, research, community resilience; regional strategy updated 2021; national CVE policies adopted (IGAD Regional Strategy, 2021; AUC, 2022; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023; Farah et al., 2023).	Strong alignment exists, but few states have robust monitoring & evaluation; strategy implementation uneven.
Youth & livelihoods programs	Pilot youth employment in Kenya, Somalia; skill training, microfinance in border areas; donor-funded by UNDP, World Bank via IGAD (ISS, 2021; Strong Cities Network, 2022; Farah et al., 2023; Mburu, 2024).	Where such programs operate with local leadership, they reduce the appeal of extremist recruitment; but donor dependence and scale-up challenges remain.
Religious & civil society engagement	Faith leaders engaged through ICEPCVE workshops; CSOs involved in dialogue, counter narratives; also local peace committees (Weldemichael, 2019; ICCT, 2020; Hassan, 2023; Farah et al., 2023).	Civil society and religious networks add legitimacy and localization; but impact restricted by funding cuts, government suspicion in some states (Sudan, Eritrea).

The synthesis shows that IGAD's preventive paradigm marks a critical conceptual shift from reaction to prevention, emphasizing root causes economic marginalization, exclusion, and ideological manipulation. However, the literature converges that implementation lags behind policy intent. Many programs remain donor-driven pilot projects, lacking scale or sustainability (ISS, 2021; Mburu, 2024). For example, youth and livelihood initiatives in Kenya and Somalia demonstrate tangible local benefits but are vulnerable to funding cycles. Faith-based and CSO engagement has improved inclusivity (Weldemichael, 2019; Hassan, 2023), yet impact assessments reveal uneven reach and political resistance in more closed states.

Table 4.3 consolidates findings on IGAD's operational and legal mechanisms supporting cross-border enforcement, intelligence cooperation, and harmonization of counter-terrorism laws. Authors such as Badar and Higgins (2023), Menkhaus (2021), and Lawal (2024) consistently highlight the organization's limited enforcement authority and uneven legal convergence across member states.

Table 4.3: *Operational capacity, intelligence sharing & legal harmonization*

Operational issue	What the literature reports	Analytical assessment
Intelligence sharing	Ad hoc cooperation; Kenya-Ethiopia more active; data classification, mistrust hinder sharing; pilot platforms started but inconsistent (Badar & Higgins, 2023; Menkhaus, 2021; Mburu, 2024; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023).	Without formal intelligence sharing agreements and trust-building, cross-border threats stay under-detected.
Legal frameworks	Partial harmonization since 2016; some countries updated counterterrorism acts; still large divergence in definitions and penalties; extradition treaties weak (Kelley, 2020; ENACT/UNODC reports; Lawal, 2024; Adan, 2022).	Legal fragmentation is a bottleneck; differences in law definitions undermine prosecutorial cooperation.
Enforcement & deployments	Proposed IGAD missions (e.g. IGASOM) delayed; national forces dominant; some joint border patrols; weak follow-through (Menkhaus, 2021; Waga, 2024; Farah et al., 2023; Adan, 2022).	Operational capacity remains fragmented; IGAD more a policy coordinator than action leader in VE enforcement.

Evidence in Table 4.3 indicates that while IGAD has promoted frameworks for information exchange, practical collaboration remains sporadic. National intelligence services remain guarded, with trust deficits and overlapping bilateral alliances (Mburu, 2024; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023). Legal harmonization efforts though supported by ENACT and UNODC have not yielded a unified regional counter-terrorism statute, resulting in jurisdictional gaps and inconsistent penalties (Adan, 2022). The analysis therefore supports the conclusion that IGAD's operational role is primarily facilitative rather than executive: it enables dialogue and drafting of model laws but cannot compel compliance. As Menkhaus (2021) notes, the organization remains "a broker of norms rather than an enforcer of mandates." This gap between strategic coordination and practical enforcement underscores the structural limits of regionalism in security governance within the Horn.

Table 4.4 compiles findings that link local socio-economic conditions and community-level interventions to the regional VE agenda. Studies by Tinti (2021), Hassan (2023), Farah et al. (2023), and Mburu (2024) emphasize that VE in the Horn of Africa is driven by poverty, unemployment, marginalization, and governance failures. IGAD's programs increasingly recognize these root causes, integrating livelihoods, education, and civic engagement into prevention frameworks.

Table 4.4: *Community, socio-economic drivers & emerging innovations*

Theme	Findings from studies	Implication
Recruitment drivers	Economic marginalization, unemployment, lack of education, clan/gender exclusion; governance abuses cited (UNDP/UN reports; Tinti, 2021; Hassan, 2023; Farah et al., 2023; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023).	VE prevention must integrate governance reform, inclusive development; IGAD's role is coordination plus oversight.
Community resilience & local partnerships	Case examples in Somalia, Kenya display CSO, faith groups, clan elders mitigating extremist recruitment (Weldemichael, 2019; Strong Cities Network, 2022; Mburu, 2024; Farah et al., 2023).	Local trust and legitimacy are key; IGAD can support scaling up but local actors are central.
Emerging domains (cybercrime, environmental shocks, digital radicalization)	New research highlights online radicalization, environmental disasters escalating recruitment, carbon economy, etc. (Ojolo & Singh, 2025; Kamau, 2022; IGAD policy briefs; Adan, 2022; Abdi & Yusuf, 2023).	IGAD's current programs are catching up; policy must expand beyond physical-security to include digital/ environmental vectors.

The data reveal that the most promising results stem from bottom-up initiatives co-led by local actors faith leaders, women's groups, and youth networks supported or scaled by IGAD (Weldemichael, 2019; Strong Cities Network, 2022). These programs succeed because they build on trust, cultural fluency, and social legitimacy absent in state security agencies. However, the review also exposes emerging vulnerabilities: cyber-radicalization and environmental degradation now feature prominently as new accelerants of extremism (Ojolo & Singh, 2025; Kamau, 2022; Bashir, 2023). IGAD's responses remain embryonic limited to pilot research and policy briefs suggesting an urgent need to broaden the organization's definition of security to encompass digital and ecological domains. Hence, Table 4.4 demonstrates both the adaptability and the current thematic limitations of IGAD's regional response.

5. Discussion

The analysis of forty academic and institutional sources reveals that IGAD has undergone a significant transformation from a primarily economic and environmental organization into a regional peace and security actor with a distinct mandate to address violent extremism (VE). This evolution mirrors global and continental shifts, particularly under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), where regional organizations act as the first responders to transnational insecurity. Yet, despite these institutional advances, the evidence demonstrates a persistent gap between strategic ambition and operational capability.

5.1. Institutional Maturity without Enforcement Power

The results highlight that IGAD has successfully developed a multi-layered institutional architecture including CEWARN, ICPAT, and the ICEPCVE that formalizes its commitment to countering violent extremism. This mirrors findings from regionalism theory that emphasize the importance of institutional design for collective security (Menkhaus, 2021; Kasaija, 2019). However, institutional existence does not equate to functional authority. IGAD's mandates remain largely coordinative rather than coercive, constrained by member-state sovereignty and consensus decision-making.

Most reviewed studies (Abdi & Yusuf, 2023; Lawal, 2024; Kelley, 2020) concur that while the organization has excelled in generating frameworks, policies, and research platforms, it lacks mechanisms to compel compliance or conduct joint enforcement. In this regard, IGAD mirrors the African Union's subsidiarity dilemma, where normative consensus often substitutes for concrete collective action. The implication is that IGAD's strength lies in shaping regional norms and building political legitimacy around VE prevention, but not in commanding operational capacity.

This finding aligns with the functionalist theory of regional cooperation, suggesting that institutions often evolve incrementally through technical coordination before achieving political integration. Yet in the Horn of Africa, where VE threats are immediate and transnational, incrementalism may not be sufficient. The challenge is to translate institutional maturity into operational interdependence, requiring trust, intelligence sharing, and binding legal frameworks.

5.2. Preventive Turn and the Limits of Soft Power

The findings indicate that IGAD's strategy reflects a global "preventive turn" in counter-terrorism emphasizing soft power, resilience, and socio-economic inclusion over militarized approaches. This aligns with UNDP (2021) and UNOCT/IGAD (2025) reports framing VE as a governance and development problem rather than merely a security one. Through the ICEPCVE and partner programs, IGAD promotes education, youth employment, inter-faith dialogue, and community engagement. However, despite conceptual progress, implementation remains inconsistent across member states. Studies such as Farah et al. (2023), Mburu (2024), and Strong Cities Network (2022) reveal that projects are largely donor-driven and pilot-based, without integrated monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The limited domestic ownership reflects structural dependency on external funding, which undermines long-term sustainability and autonomy.

From a policy diffusion perspective, IGAD's preventive frameworks demonstrate horizontal learning member states adopt similar P/CVE strategies, yet without vertical enforcement or budgetary alignment. The discussion here points to a critical governance paradox: IGAD is too strong normatively to be ignored, but too weak institutionally to ensure policy convergence in practice.

Furthermore, IGAD's emphasis on prevention, while normatively progressive, risks underplaying the persistent role of state repression, human rights abuses, and political exclusion conditions that several authors (Hassan, 2023; Kelley, 2020) identify as root causes of radicalization. Effective prevention thus

demands that IGAD balance developmental interventions with advocacy for democratic accountability and inclusive governance, otherwise "soft power" becomes a rhetorical device rather than a transformative framework.

5.3. Intelligence, Law, and the Challenge of Sovereignty

The third theme exposes the legal and intelligence deficit in IGAD's counter-extremism apparatus. Although initiatives for harmonizing counter-terrorism laws have progressed since 2016, member states still operate divergent legal definitions and judicial capacities. This inconsistency undermines extradition, joint investigation, and prosecution efforts. Badar and Higgins (2023) and Lawal (2024) note that the absence of a binding regional legal instrument leaves cooperation at the mercy of bilateral goodwill. Similarly, intelligence sharing remains episodic and personalized rather than institutionalized. Political mistrust, espionage fears, and the use of intelligence as sovereign capital inhibit data exchange (Menkhaus, 2021; Mburu, 2024). This supports the realist view in security studies that sovereignty still trumps regionalism in matters of hard security. Consequently, IGAD functions primarily as a platform for dialogue a broker of coordination rather than as a security guarantor. This reinforces the notion that regional organizations in Africa often excel in policy orchestration but rarely achieve collective enforcement due to domestic political sensitivities. For IGAD to move from coordination to capability, it must invest in institutionalized trust mechanisms such as secure communication protocols, regional training for intelligence officers, and shared threat databases.

5.4. Community-Centric and Multi-Dimensional Security Paradigm

The findings from Table 4.4 reveal an encouraging diversification of IGAD's response: from elite-centric diplomacy to community-anchored, multi-sectoral approaches. Evidence from Weldemichael (2019), Hassan (2023), and Strong Cities Network (2022) underscores that VE is sustained by local grievances unemployment, marginalization, weak governance, and historical exclusion rather than ideology alone.

The IGAD's integration of faith-based actors, youth networks, and women's organizations through ICEPCVE's programs reflects a pragmatic recognition that state-centric security responses are insufficient. The approach resonates with human security theory, which prioritizes social resilience and agency over coercive deterrence. However, the same body of evidence warns that these local initiatives remain under-resourced and fragmented. IGAD's support tends to be coordination-oriented bringing together networks but rarely ensures scaling, monitoring, or long-term funding. Emerging challenges such as digital radicalization and climate-induced displacement (Ojolo & Singh, 2025; Bashir, 2023) require IGAD to broaden its analytical lens beyond conventional policing to encompass technology, environment, and migration as security determinants. In sum, the community-level turn marks an intellectual and strategic breakthrough, but sustainability depends on integration into formal policy cycles and alignment with national development frameworks.

Theoretically, these results affirm the constructivist argument that regional security cooperation in Africa often advances through shared norms and narratives rather than binding institutions. IGAD's success in legitimizing the discourse of P/CVE demonstrates the power of ideas and networks in shaping regional policy. Yet the persistence of operational fragmentation underscores the need to integrate institutional realism acknowledging the constraints of sovereignty and capacity.

6. Conclusion

IGAD has made notable progress in institutionalizing regional responses to violent extremism in the Horn of Africa through the establishment of frameworks such as the ICEPCVE and the Regional P/CVE Strategy, which have strengthened dialogue, research, and preventive action across member states. However, despite these achievements, the study finds that IGAD's effectiveness remains limited by weak enforcement authority, dependence on donor funding, fragmented legal and intelligence

cooperation, and inconsistent national implementation. The organization's efforts are strongest in norm-setting, coordination, and preventive programming, yet these have not translated into sustained operational capacity or measurable reductions in extremism. Ultimately, IGAD's role remains that of a convener and policy harmonizer rather than an enforcer of regional security. To enhance its impact, IGAD must deepen member-state commitment, institutionalize trust-based intelligence sharing, and secure independent funding to bridge the gap between policy ambition and practical capability, ensuring that regional cooperation evolves from symbolic coordination to genuine collective action against violent extremism.

7. Limitation

Limitations include reliance on available documents (publication bias), uneven data quality across member states, and limited access to classified intelligence or internal IGAD deliberations. To enhance trustworthiness, the methodology emphasizes transparency (detailed search log and extraction template), reflexivity (acknowledging researcher interpretive role), and triangulation. The triangulated, multi-method synthesis is intended to maximize internal validity and provide robust, policy-relevant conclusions despite inherent constraints of secondary research.

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