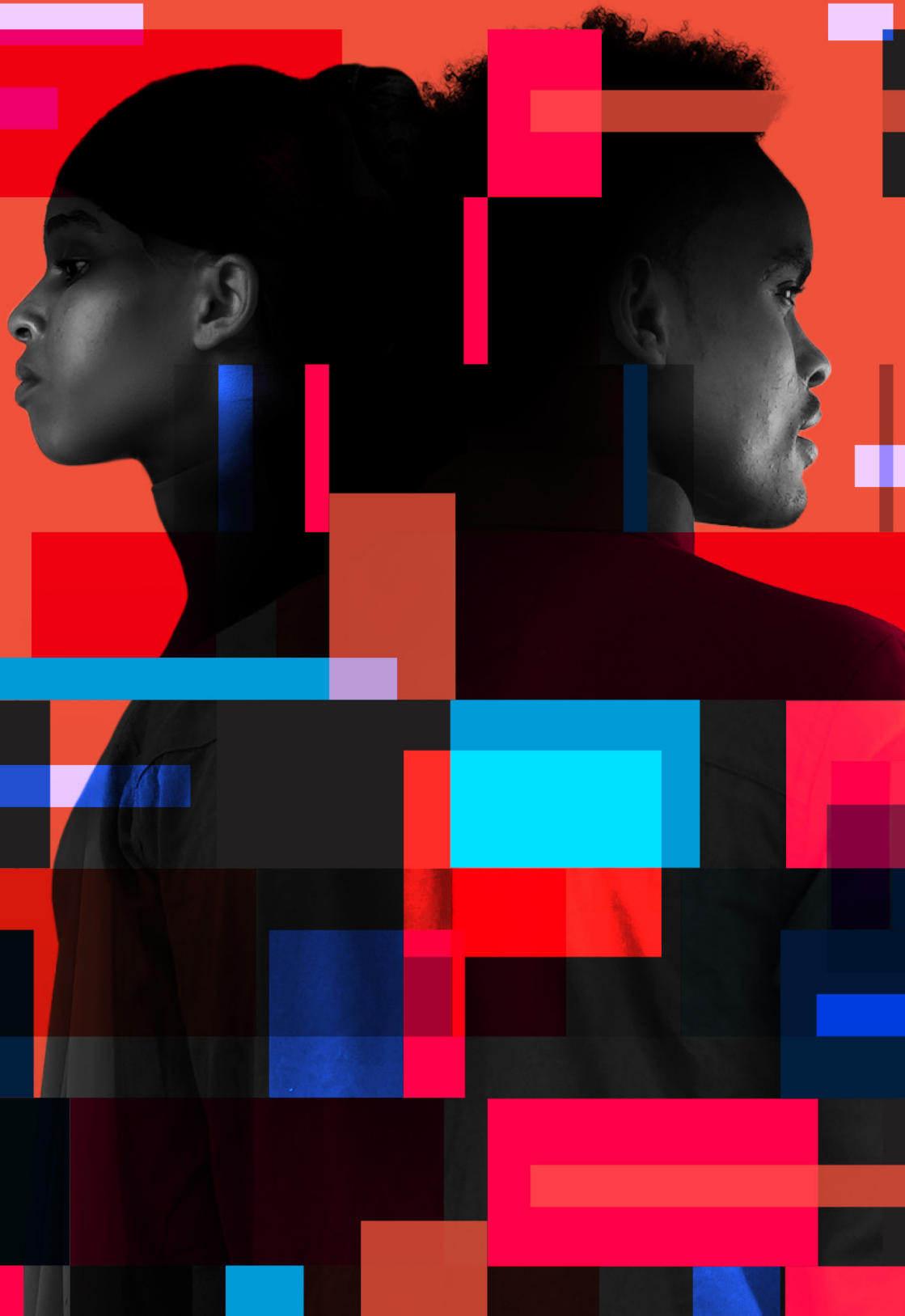# JOURNEY TO EXTREMISM IN AFRICA
PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

JOURNEY TO EXTREMISM IN AFRICA:
PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

"If nothing is done,
the effects of terrorism,
violent extremism and
organized crime will be felt
far beyond the region and
the African continent."

António Guterres
United Nations Secretary-General

FOREWORD

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" Violent extremism is not confined to a specific country or region, but rather a shared burden and one that humanity as a whole must respond to. The human stories spotlighted in this report provide an evidence base that makes clear the need for renewed international focus, integrative solutions and long-term investments to address the underlying drivers of violent extremism."

Insecurity arising from extremism has led to the highest levels of population displacement - both Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) and refugees since the Second World War; a large proportion of that displacement is taking place in Africa. In 2015 with over 1.5 million displaced in Nigeria, over 1 million in Somalia, half a million in Central African Republic and 600,000 across the Sahel, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) embarked on a journey to understand the nature of violent extremism in Africa to better inform both policy and programming to prevent and address the spread of violent extremism.

The UN family and our many partners have been working to address the underlying, root causes of violent extremism. It is possible to address the drivers that lead to violent extremism. Yet investment in prevention and sustaining peace continues to fall short. In fact, as evidenced by this report, investments in securitized and reactive approaches continue to be on the rise, crowding out underfunded, but much-needed, efforts on prevention and peacebuilding. This is despite evidence highlighting the positive return on investments in peacebuilding, estimated at a ratio of 16:1, meaning that for every US$1 invested in peacebuilding, $16 could be saved on the costs of conflict and violent extremism. This calls for a reinvigorated evidence-based approach to preventing violent extremism.

In 2021, almost half of all deaths from violent extremism occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. The Sahel has been the most heavily affected, with deaths from terrorism in the region rising tenfold since 2007. Violent extremism is spreading further across the continent, from Mozambique to Togo, effectively turning sub-Saharan Africa into a new global epicentre of violent extremism, with devastating impacts on lives and livelihoods and on prospects for peace and development.

Informed by primary research with nearly 2,200 respondents – including more than 1,000 former members of violent extremist groups – this second edition of the *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement* report is the most extensive study yet on what drives people to violent extremism. It investigates what drives people to the brink of recruitment, the 'tipping point' - and ultimately, the 'turning point' that informs their decision to leave these groups behind.

As outlined in the *Our Common Agenda* report, the United Nations Secretary-General is developing a New Agenda for Peace. It calls for enhanced investment in prevention and the need for a better understanding of the underlying drivers and systems sustaining conflict.

In line with this request, I trust the Journey research will inform the UN family's efforts to support countries across Africa to prevent violent extremism, including through vital efforts coordinated by the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT). As part of UNDP's new Crisis Offer, the new evidence aims to support countries to break the cycle of crisis, get ahead of the curve and invest in hope: from jobs to justice and advancing progress across the Global Goals.

Violent extremism is not confined to a specific country or region, but rather a shared burden and one that humanity as a whole must respond to. The human stories spotlighted in this report provide an evidence base that makes clear the need for renewed international focus, integrative solutions and long-term investments to address the underlying drivers of violent extremism. Such efforts are now more critical than ever, aptly described by the UN Secretary-General as the "very reason that the UN exists."

Achim Steiner
UNDP Administrator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CTE	Countering Terrorism and Extremism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
ISIS/Daesh	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levan (the latter is a translation of Daesh, the Arabic acronym)
ISWA	Islamic State in West Africa
JNIM	Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNOCT	United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism
VE Group	Violent Extremist Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The surge in violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa undermines hard-won development gains and threatens to hold back progress for generations to come. The need to improve understanding of what drives violent extremism in Africa, and what can be done to prevent it, has never been more urgent

Sub-Saharan Africa has become the global epicentre of violent extremist activity. Worldwide deaths from terrorism have declined over the past five years, but attacks in this region have more than doubled since 2016[1]. In 2021, almost half of all terrorism-related deaths were in sub-Saharan Africa, with more than one-third in just four countries: Somalia, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.[2] Violent extremism (VE) has also spread to other parts of the continent, such as Mozambique, and is having a devastating impact on lives, livelihoods and prospects for peace and development[3]. This is despite an astounding wealth of endogenous resilience manifested by local communities across the continent, who have been at the forefront of prevention and innovative practices of building everyday peace in uncertain times.

These dramatic shifts in violent extremist activity from the Middle East and North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa have garnered relatively little international attention in a world reeling from the impacts of an escalating climate crisis, increasing authoritarianism, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The surge in violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa undermines hard-won development gains and threatens to hold back progress for generations to come. The need to improve understanding of what drives it in Africa, and what can be done to prevent it, has never been more urgent. The United Nations Secretary-General's 2021 report, *Our Common Agenda,* stresses the importance of an evidence-driven approach to address development challenges.[4] In 2017, UNDP published a groundbreaking study, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment.*[5] This established a robust evidence base on the drivers of violent extremism, with important implications for policy and programming.

As a major output of UNDP's multi-year Programme on Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa (2015-2022),[6] the 2017 study informed and shaped UNDP's approach across the continent, as well as its programming at national and regional levels.

Based on the personal testimonies of former members of VE groups and a reference group of individuals living in similar at-risk circumstances, the 2017 study revealed the amalgam of macro-, meso- and microlevel factors driving violent extremism in Africa, as well as sources of resilience that can prevent its spread. It concluded that effective responses to violent extremism require a multifaceted, development-focused approach, with development actors uniquely placed to address the structural drivers. It also highlighted the very localized and fast-changing nature of violent extremism, underscoring the importance of regular research to understand the evolution of its drivers and dynamics. Importantly, the 2017 study put in stark relief the question of how counter-terrorism and wider security functions of governments in at-risk environments conduct themselves with regard to human rights, due process and sensitivity to context. It thus underlined the United Nations 2016 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which acknowledged that the traditional "single-minded focus only on security measures and an utter disregard for human rights have often made things worse."[7]

Despite the clear lessons on the limitations and risks of state-alone security-driven responses to violent extremism, militarized approaches have continued to predominate in sub-Saharan Africa over the past five years. Within the region, resources have increased for an array of multi-country military coalitions set up to conduct counter-terrorism operations. The international architecture for counter-terrorism has also expanded with the creation of more dedicated mechanisms, despite the limited evidence that such

security-driven militarized responses, by themselves, would be effective in contributing to sustainable peace, security and stabilty. Indeed, despite more than a decade of security-driven responses underpinned by huge international investment, VE groups have extended their reach and impact markedly in the Sahel region and elsewhere on the African continent.

Against this backdrop of the surge in violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa, and the continued prioritization of security-driven responses, UNDP initiated a follow-up study, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement* in 2020. The research was developed to strengthen and refine the evidence base established in 2017, as well as to update and expand the scope of the research, tracking variations in relation to the findings of the first report. The objectives were to further analyse the changing nature of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa and take stock of efforts to prevent its spread since the 2017 study. In addition to analysing the drivers, 'tipping points' and accelerators affecting recruitment to VE groups, the new research also explores pathways away from extremism.

The second edition of the *Journey to Extremism* research focuses on eight countries across sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. It reflects the life journeys of 2,196 interviewees, three times as many respondents as in the 2017 study. This includes over 1,000 former members of VE groups, both individuals who joined voluntarily and those who were forcibly recruited. Importantly, the sample also includes a significantly higher number of female interviewees (552). While more research is required on the experiences of women and girls in relation to violent extremism, the gender-disaggregated findings of this study shed light on women's and men's divergent pathways to recruitment. The report presents the interview data in relation to the changing nature of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa and efforts to address it, providing a complementary analysis of the broader international policy context, trends in aid flows and responses to violent extremism.

The new study delves deeper into the pathways away from violent extremism, revealing factors that may push or pull recruits to disengage from VE groups

Building on the methodology of the 2017 study, the new research further illuminates the complex pathways that lead some individuals to join VE groups, while others in similar circumstances do not. Refracted through the personal perspectives and lived experiences of the young women and men interviewed, it constructs an aggregate view of the relative significance of various factors. Like the first study, it focuses on four broad clusters – upbringing and education, economic factors, religion and ideologies, and state and citizenship – and examines how they interact and influence an individual's life

journey. It also explores the prevalence and nature of 'tipping point' events that may ultimately cause an individual to join a VE group.

In addition, the new study delves deeper into the pathways away from violent extremism, revealing factors that may push or pull recruits to disengage from VE groups. Expanding the metaphor of a life journey and comparing the trajectories of those who chose to leave the VE group through surrender and amnesty with those who were arrested, it introduces the notion of a 'turning point'. This refers to a shift in attitudes and represents that point when a recruit no longer believes in the aims or approach of the VE group and is thus open to disengagement. It acknowledges, however, that even with such a shift in attitudes, many reasons – having to do with fear of repercussions and practical circumstances – may make it difficult for a recruit to leave the group.

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report will strengthen UNDP's evidence-based, development-focused approach to preventing violent extremism in Africa. Specifically, it will inform the design of the second iteration of UNDP's flagship multiyear regional project, *Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa and Arab States: A Development Approach* (2022-2025). Beyond this, it aims to inform and promote action by a wide range of stakeholders engaged in preventing violent extremism at local, national, regional and international levels. The evidence presented reaffirms the need for a fundamental change of approach to addressing violent extremism in Africa and suggests a series of practical implications for policy and programming to help bring about that change. The key findings are presented below, followed by a summary of the implications for programming and policy.

Key findings

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report reaffirms many of the findings and insights revealed by UNDP's 2017 study on the wide range of factors that may influence an individual's journey to extremism. It deepens our understanding of a process through which structural factors intersect with individual experiences to inculcate a unique worldview on matters of politics, religion and ideology and that directs the individual towards or away from the path of violent extremism. While for the most part, the new study reinforces the earlier findings, it also reveals some significant variations. These are reflective of the changing nature and context in which VE groups evolve and expand their footprint on the continent. They also reflect shifts over time in perceptions towards the state and the social contract between citizen and the state, as local capacities, despite enormous resilience, are being tested in situations where incomplete progress towards development and missed opportunities reverberate.

If left unchecked, these findings speak to the 'ripeness' of violent extremism in Africa, which threatens to stunt development prospects for generations to come and curtail hard-won development gains.

Pathways to recruitment

1. **VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IS SHAPED BY CONDITIONS OF GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION, CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND EDUCATION**

Isolation, remoteness and lack of exposure to others are significant factors in shaping early conditions that may render individuals susceptible to violent extremism later in life

Similar to the 2017 study, most individuals who later joined VE groups grew up in some of the most remote and peripheral areas, suffering from inter-generational socio-economic marginalization and underdevelopment. They were also statistically significantly more likely to have had less exposure to individuals from other interethnic and religious groups. 53 percent of reference group respondents claimed to have had friends from other religions growing up, this proportion was only 40 percent for voluntary recruits. In addition, they were considerably more inclined to later perceive their religion to be under threat, as well as to express negative views about religious diversity. As such, this study corroborates earlier findings on the salience of remoteness as one of the factors in a child's upbringing that shape underlying threat perceptions. This may lead to a hardening of attitudes towards others later and, thus, create the conditions that influence the trajectory to future recruitment.

Perceptions of childhood unhappiness, as well as a perceived lack of parental involvement and interest in a child's upbringing, increase the likelihood of joining a VE group

Echoing the findings of the first *Journey to Extremism* research, perceptions of childhood unhappiness and lack of parental involvement are associated with a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Similarly, higher levels of childhood happiness and parental involvement emerge strongly as a source of resilience. All else being equal, a one-point increase in the childhood happiness rating decreases the odds of voluntary recruitment by around 10 percent. A one-point increase in the parental involvement rating decreases the odds of voluntary recruitment by around 25 percent, consistent with the findings of the 2017 study. This suggests that an individual's journey to violent extremism can be seen to originate, at least in part, in the child's unfulfilled need for belonging and connectedness, which underscores the importance of the family and environment in which the child is raised as a critical source of resilience.

> Contrary to the first study, in which 40 percent of respondents pointed to 'religious ideas of the group' as the primary reason for voluntary recruitment, less than half (17 percent) identified religion as a key driver

Access to education, and its duration, can bolster resilience to violent extremism

Like the 2017 study, this dataset unequivocally confirms the significance of education as a resilience factor. Consistent with the 2017 study, the journey to extremism is found to be significantly influenced by a lack of even basic education. Low levels of education were found to be more widespread among voluntary recruits (59 percent) than the reference group (33 percent). Lack of education was further found to affect the pace in which recruitment occurs. Recruits who joined a VE group within only a month of introduction had four years of schooling on average, compared to almost seven years (6.8 years) among those who joined more slowly. Education also proved to be a prominent source of resilience: all else being equal, an additional year of schooling reduces the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by 13 percent. Additional years of education are thus associated with a lower likelihood of violent extremism.

2. **RELIGION EXERTS A DUAL POWER IN THE JOURNEY TO EXTREMISM: IT IS BOTH A POTENT VECTOR FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF GRIEVANCES BUT ALSO REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF RESILIENCE**

Rather than emerging as a 'first response' in explaining recruitment, religion is revealed as a powerful touchstone for mobilizing context-based grievances and identity

Contrary to the first study, in which 40 percent of respondents pointed to 'religious ideas of the group' as the primary reason for voluntary recruitment, less than half (17 percent) identified religion as a key driver. Men were more inclined to perceive it as an influential factor, compared to women, who rated it as a less salient factor. A discernibly lower proportion of voluntary recruits perceived religious diversity to 'be a good thing' (54 percent), compared to 82 percent of the reference group, suggesting the success of extremist narratives in hardening social and religious attitudes. Conversely, the effect of not perceiving one's religion to be under threat decreases the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by 48 to 50 percent. This contrast with the 2017 study which found no observable variation. Moreover, voluntary recruits were statistically more likely to perceive their religion to be under threat compared to the reference group in this study. The pull of VE groups providing 'a sense of belonging' was further found to be a statistically significant predictor of voluntary recruitment into VE groups. This suggests that when religion operates as a powerful expression of individual and group identity and offers a way to channel existing grievances and perceived threats, the likelihood of recruitment increases.

Religious education and religious literacy constitute key protective factors against violent extremism

Distinguishing clearly between individual perceptions about radical religious ideologies as a driver to extremism on the one hand, and actual religious education and literacy levels on the other, the findings show that individuals who later joined a VE group voluntarily were more likely to have received fewer years of religious education than their reference group counterparts.

They were also more likely to join at a greater speed than those who received higher levels of religious education. A significant proportion of voluntary recruits also acknowledged that they either don't read religious texts themselves, but rely on intermediaries, or have no or limited understanding of the texts, rendering them more vulnerable to the influence of imported views and exposure to extremist ideas. In contrast, higher levels of religious education proved to be associated with a lower likelihood of voluntary recruitment. The findings resonate with the findings from the first *Journey to Extremism* research, which challenge globally mounting popular narratives that conflate religious ideologies with extremist behaviour. The findings further highlight the value of religious education and religious literacy as a crucial source of resilience in countering extremist narratives, consistent with the first study.

3. ECONOMIC INCENTIVES ARE KEY TO UNDERSTAND DRIVERS TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The hope of employment is cited as the primary driver of recruitment, reflecting generalized grievances of socioeconomic injustice and marginalization
The *Journey to Extremism* research again underscores the relevance of economic factors as drivers of recruitment. Twenty-five percent of voluntary recruits cited 'employment opportunities' as their primary reason for joining, particularly among the sample's male respondents.

Yet, contrary to the 2017 study and widespread assumptions regarding youth unemployment as a driver of violent extremism, no significant correlation was found between unemployment and susceptibility to violent extremism: 73 percent of voluntary recruits expressed frustration with the government in terms of providing employment opportunities, compared to 71 percent of the reference group. Thus, the study finds a generalized sense of economic hardship and deprivation in the outlook of all respondents, further underpinned by grievances animated by the shortcomings of the state itself.

Economic incentives converge with gender roles and identities
The *Journey to Extremism* further highlights how seemingly material incentives converge with gender norms and roles. While male respondents cited employment as the main factor, female respondents most frequently referred to the influence of family, including their husbands, as the primary driver of this decision. On average, male voluntary recruits stated that they earned significantly less prior to joining a VE group, compared to those recruited by forced, and were held primarily in vulnerable employment. Those who followed the violent extremism trajectory more quickly, were also more likely to be married and, thus, bear key responsibilities within the family. These findings further illustrate how economic dependency, traditional gender roles and the pressure of community, together with grievances associated with lived realities of vulnerability and underemployment, converge and may affect recruitment patterns in different ways.

4. A BROKEN SOCIAL CONTRACT PROVIDES FERTILE GROUND FOR RECRUITMENT

Widespread lack of trust in government and its institutions reveals a much more fractured social contract between the state and its citizens
While the 2017 study found limited confidence in, and grievances towards, government to be associated with the highest incidence of violent extremism in Africa, no statistically significant variation of 'trust in government' was observed in this dataset. Rather, the study found low levels of trust in government institutions, particularly in security actors, and low levels of democratic participation in the outlook of all respondents. On average, voluntary recruits exhibited only marginally lower levels of trust. The new dataset thus reveals a much more fractured social contract between the state and its citizens than previously. This may warrant the very real prospect of an even greater spread of violent extremism on the continent than in recent years, with further associated development backsliding and devastation.

Deep-seated perceptions of impunity and distrust in security actors continue to fuel grievances leading to violent extremism
Grievances against security actors, notably the police and military, and the justice system, were particularly evident in this data sample. Sixty-two percent of voluntary recruits reported having 'little or no trust' in the police, with 61 percent of the reference group

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The *Journey to Extremism* research again underscores the relevance of economic factors as drivers of recruitment. Twenty-five percent of voluntary recruits cited 'employment opportunities' as their primary reason for joining, particularly among the sample's male respondents

responding similarly. Similarly, 59 percent expressed a similar perception towards the military, compared to 46 percent of the reference group. These findings suggest deep-seated profound divides between communities and security actors, which is known to offer fertile ground for recruitment into VE groups. These findings highlight the urgent need to improve the quality and accountability of institutions across service delivery areas such as security.

Widespread dissatisfaction with state service provision is prevalent, particularly regarding employment

Contrary to the 2017 study, which found lower levels of satisfaction with government service provision among recruits than among reference group counterparts, this dataset did not identify a statistically significant variation in respondents' outlook. Thus, dissatisfaction with service delivery does not emerge as a significant predictor of the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Nevertheless, the new findings clearly reveal widespread negative perceptions in the outlook of all groups, especially regarding employment, security and education. A striking 73 percent of voluntary recruits stated that they thought the government was doing a bad job in providing employment, with the reference group posting an equally high proportion of 71 percent. While both reference group and voluntary recruits were almost equally divided in their perceptions of the role of the state in providing everyday security, male recruits held more critical views than females.

Distrust of the government and dissatisfaction with state provision of services underscore the appeal of VE groups that present themselves as proto-states and alternative service providers

VE groups hold increasing appeal as alternatives to the state

Distrust of the government and dissatisfaction with state provision of services underscore the appeal of VE groups that present themselves as proto-states and alternative service providers. Through contextual data from Mali and Somalia the Journey to Extremism 2.0 research helped to explain perceptions of the role of VE groups as service providers in key areas, such as mediation of local conflicts, justice provision and everyday security. In Mali, a significant proportion of the voluntary recruits pointed to the appeal of VE groups in mediating local conflicts (70 percent) and everyday security (71 percent). In Somalia, 62 percent of voluntary recruits pointed to the role of VE groups in ensuring everyday security and 58 percent identified their role in providing justice. While more research is needed, this provides some insights into the process whereby VE groups exploit existing governance deficits and draw on the progressive delegitimization of the formal state to mobilize support and tap into localized grievances and narratives of victimization and injustice.

Local actors more trusted than state authorities

Religious and community leaders earned significantly higher levels of trust, although these levels were lower among voluntary recruits, consistent with the 2017 study. A significant majority of all respondents favoured religious leaders, with 80 percent of voluntary recruits reporting 'some' or 'a lot of trust', compared to 84 percent of reference group respondents. This compares to community leaders, with up to 75 percent of reference group respondents and 63 percent of voluntary recruits indicating that they had 'some' or 'a lot of trust' in those leaders. Consistent with the 2017 study, this underscores the importance of proximity factors and local actors as first responders in areas affected by the threat of violent extremism, characterized by a limited state presence. This further confirms the crucial role that religious leaders and faith-based organizations can play in countering violent extremist narratives and strengthening cohesiveness.

5. THE TIPPING POINT

The absence of a 'tipping point' reduces the risk of recruitment significantly

The *Journey to Extremism* research put forward the notion of a transformative trigger that pushes individuals decisively from the at-risk category to join a VE group. Recognizing radicalization as a highly socialized and dialectical process, influenced by a confluence of factors and conditions, this study examines the extent to which an individual's decision to join was influenced by the occurrence of a specific trigger event, also noted as a 'tipping point', as well as the statistical significance of such events. It reveals that as many as 48 percent of respondents stated that they had experienced such a tipping point. For someone who had not, the likelihood of voluntary recruitment was sharply reduced by 40 and 50 percent compared to someone who had experienced such an event.

Government action, accompanied by human rights abuses, continues to trigger, fuel and accelerate recruitment towards violent extremism

Seventy-one percent of the 48 percent who described having experienced a trigger event, cited government action, including the killing and arrest of family or friends as the specific event that ultimately impelled them to join a VE group, similar to the 2017 study. Trigger events were also found to be a significant accelerator of recruitment, with higher levels of anger and fear featuring more prominently among those who joined more quickly, compared to those who joined more slowly and reported primarily feeling hope. Thus, consistent with the previous *Journey to Extremism* research, this highlights how recruitment into VE groups presents a unique 'pull' opportunity for change and an opportunity to rebel against the status quo. These findings further illustrate that, in most cases, state action, accompanied by a sharp escalation of human rights abuses, appears to be the prominent factor finally pushing individuals into VE groups in Africa.

Most male recruits were also introduced to the group by friends (50 percent), while most females were introduced through their husband (46 percent). This difference likely reflects the gendered roles and responsibilities within family structures and networks in the countries under review

6. THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Joining a VE group reflects the influence of social networks and pressures

Forty percent of voluntary recruits joined a VE group within one month of their first encounter with the group and 67 percent joined within one year. The data confirm the significance of factors related to the socialized nature of the recruitment process, notably the influence of peer networks and family. A majority (45 percent) of voluntary recruits joined a VE group with friends, while 15 percent joined with family and 16 percent joined alone. Of those who joined within a month of introduction, a higher proportion of recruits joined with a friend (58 percent), compared to 22 percent of quick recruits who joined alone. Moreover, when examining these patterns by gender, male recruits were more likely to join with friends (61 percent), while female recruits tended to join with their family members (50 percent). Most male recruits were also introduced to the group by friends (50 percent), while most females were introduced through their husbands (46 percent). This difference likely reflects the gendered roles and responsibilities within family structures and networks in the countries under review.

A statistically significant association exists between low levels of internet use and the likelihood of voluntary recruitment

Higher internet usage – in areas with limited internet penetration - is associated with less susceptibility to violent extremism

A statistically significant association exists between low levels of internet use and the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Voluntary recruits who never used or lacked access to the internet also joined more quickly than others. Among 'quick recruits', traditional media such as radio was further cited as the main source of information after word of mouth. They were also more likely to join with friends than alone, suggesting the association between lower internet usage and greater vulnerability to peer influence in the recruitment process. Women report a lower degree of access to the internet across the voluntary and reference group, compared to men. This differs from the 2017 study, which found that voluntary group respondents reported a 9 percent higher use rate compared to

reference group counterparts. It suggested that as connectivity rates improve, so will the potential for online recruitment, which offers a far wider reach than localized processes. Indeed, recognizing the limitations of online influence in peripheral areas where internet penetration is low, VE groups have adapted their strategies to combine both offline and online recruitment tactics to be able to reach those previously unreached.

Voluntary recruits indicated lower levels of participation and awareness of preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives than their reference group counterparts

A significantly higher proportion of voluntary recruits stated that they were not aware of any preventive initiatives upon joining (70 percent), compared to those who where (30 percent). Reference group respondents indicated a higher level of awareness and participation in such initiatives when compared with voluntary recruits. Nevertheless, the regression analyses did not find a statistically significant impact of awareness and participation in PVE activities on the likelihood of voluntary recruitment in any of the econometric models. This differs from the first study, which found that awareness of PVE initiatives slowed the pace of recruitment.

Pathways to disengagement

8. DRIVERS OF DISENGAGEMENT.
   UNMET EXPECTATIONS AND DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE GROUP'S ACTIONS AND IDEOLOGY OFFER CRITICAL ENTRY POINTS FOR VOLUNTARY DISENGAGEMENT

Unmet expectations were prevalent among those who left the VE group voluntarily

Seventy-seven percent of those who chose to leave said their expectations were not met, compared with 60 percent of those arrested. The relationship between voluntary disengagement and unmet or unfulfilled expectations was found to be statistically significant, suggesting an association between unmet initial expectations and the decision to leave the VE group voluntarily.

Economic incentives feature prominently in the decision to disengage

Sixty-two percent of individuals captured through arrest stated that they had been paid while a member of the VE group, compared with only 49 percent of those who disengaged voluntarily. The variation in the outlook of respondents was further found to be statistically significant, highlighting an association between lower levels of payment and voluntary disengagement. The research also found that those who joined quickly expressed greater disappointment over monetary rewards (42 percent) compared to those who joined within a year (32 percent). These findings differ fundamentally from the 2017 study, which did not find economic factors as prominent a factor for disengagement as for recruitment.

Disillusionment with the group's ideology and/or actions is key in triggering a turning point

When examining the salience of factors influencing the ultimate decision to leave, the outcomes were strikingly behavioural and ideological, relative to other factors such as mistreatment and hunger. Describing a disconnect between the group's initial promises and ideas and its actual practices, 68 percent identified 'no longer agreeing with the actions of the group', including the killing of civilians, as the most significant factor. Sixty percent of those who voluntarily disengaged identified 'no longer believing in ideology of the VE group' as the second most influential factor prompting them to leave. Eighty-five percent of female recruits reported that no longer believing in the ideology of the VE group was a major influence on their decision to leave, compared with 62 percent for males. These findings highlight the importance of addressing underlying values and beliefs underpinning violent extremist behaviours as a pathway to sustainably bolster resilience, as well as the underlying grievances that give rise to a cognitive shift and receptiveness towards VE groups and extremist ideas.

Those who disengage voluntarily are less likely to re-join and recruit others, while those arrested acknowledge that they intend to re-engage in violent extremist activity

When examining respondents' intent to possibly re-engage with a VE group, a higher proportion of those who disengaged voluntarily expressed an intent not to re-engage in such (65 percent), compared to individuals captured through arrest, who expressed a much greater intent to reengage, with the objective of 'recruiting more people to join' (40 percent). For those arrested through capture, the most salient factor motivating them to reengage was the VE groups' 'providing a sense of belonging' (35) and 'wanting to seek justice' (32 percent). These findings may reflect that those captured through arrest hold more positive views of the use of violence as a legitimate means to address grievances and to achieve social change, contrary to those who disengage voluntarily. This further underscores the relevance of behaviourally informed approaches to prevention.

9. THE DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Government incentives and amnesty programs have an impact on disengagement

Most respondents who disengaged voluntarily from a VE group stated that government incentives and amnesty programmes influenced their decision to leave. Similarly, awareness of such amnesty and reintegration programmes supporting disengagement also emerged as crucial in the disengagement process.

Disengagement has a cascading effect

Just as joining a VE group is a socialized process, so is the decision to disengage, closely linked to the decision by family, friends and community members to leave. Males were far more likely to state that they left with friends (42 percent), while the most frequent response among female recruits was that they left with their husband (31 percent), followed by other family members

(29 percent). This contrasts with the very few who decided to leave alone. These findings underscore the significance of considering the entire social ecology of peer networks, social bonding and identity as vital aspects of disengagement processes, while reinforcing behavioural dimensions that may bolster individuals' resilience.

A gender-sensitive lens key to empower communities at large

While the research revealed the pathways to and from extremism as highly gendered, the primary drivers influencing the decision to join appeared to be strikingly less ideological for women than for men, relative to socialized factors and reliance on the family and husband. This underscores the potential of women in curbing ideological narratives known to be a touchstone for mobilising context-based grievances. Women were also less likely to be aware of PVE initiatives compared to men, yet of those participating in such initiatives, they indicated a higher level of participation in both the primary and reference groups, compared to men, further underscoring women's important and often untapped potential in empowering communities in PVE initiatives.

Implications of the research

Given the evidence this study generated, what measures can be taken, both through programming and in the policy sphere, to prevent men and women from joining VE groups? The following section distils key implications of the findings of the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report. Just as the latest data reinforce many of the findings of the original 2017 study, these implications reaffirm many of those identified five years ago and suggest important new areas.

For programming

Programming implications are presented in relation to key findings from the data.

UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* research illustrated that peripheral and borderlands communities are associated with specific vulnerabilities, often suffering from generations of socio-economic marginalization and neglect. Despite their resilience, these communities are found to be more isolated and have less exposure to others, with more limited prospects in development terms and lower internet penetration. The new research highlights how the nature of childhood experiences and upbringing shape the extent to which an individual subsequently feels a sense of identity and belonging and how its absence increases the likelihood of seeking it through membership in a VE group. While the evidence for such psychological factors is difficult to adduce, this points to the value of psychosocially-informed interventions, among others.

- *Bolster* efforts to support community resilience through a whole-of-society approach with targeted development-focused programs for at-risk peripheral and borderlands areas.

- **Design** age-appropriate PVE interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of youth, including children and adolescents.
- **Support** community-led and culturally-sensitive outreach on good parenting, gender awareness and domestic violence and revise school curricula and teacher training to give greater priority to citizenship and civic engagement, respect for diversity and critical thinking.
- **Invest** in young people's capacities, agency and leadership (outside of formal school structures), through, for example, mentoring opportunities and funding support to youth organizations with a particular focus on empowering young women and strengthening youth engagement in PVE projects, including identifying youth PVE champions (both former recruits and those who resisted recruitment), and enabling them to share their knowledge and experiences.

Invest in young people's capacities, agency and leadership [...] through, for example, mentoring opportunities and funding support for youth organizations with a particular focus on empowering young women

RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES

Religion emerges as an important vehicle for the mobilization of grievances but also represents an important source of resilience. In particular, higher levels of religious education are found to be a preventive force and to slow the pace of recruitment. Greater religious diversity is further found to sharply reduce the likelihood of recruitment.

- **Support and amplify** the voices of religious leaders who preach tolerance and interfaith cohesion, while challenging misinterpretations of Islam, countering harmful narratives and promoting alternative messaging.
- **Capitalize** on the important role that religious teaching can play as a source of resilience, supporting increased religious literacy among at-risk groups.
- **Invest** in communityled governance systems that promote transparent and accountable leadership on religious affairs, including in areas such as the development of curricula in madrassas and engagement with parents on educational content.
- **Engage and include** religious leaders and women of faith in the development, implementation and monitoring of national and subnational PVE strategies.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Economic pressures are a central driver of extremism, reflecting multidimensional poverty and a lack of employment opportunities, as well as gender roles and expectations. However, a one-dimensional focus on vocational training and livelihood support will not alone yield sustainable outcomes, unless it can raise expectations and fulfil socio-economic hopes of sustainable employment and thus tackle underlying grievances of socio-economic deprivation and deep sentiments of injustice and marginalization that lead individuals to seek alternatives. The gender-disaggregated data related to economic drivers of recruitment suggest that decisions to join are not influenced by materialistic incentives alone, but also by socially constructed gendered roles related to expectations to roles and responsibilities within the family.

- **Invest** in economic regeneration of at-risk areas, including by upgrading infrastructure, prioritizing job creation and improving access to markets and financial services.
- **Provide** gender-sensitive income generation schemes for at-risk youth as well as long-term livelihood programmes and entrepreneurship training that integrates life skills, citizenship values and social cohesion.
- **Develop** strategies that provide economic incentives and alternatives for recruits, engaging wider communities to avoid the perception of rewarding those recruited.

STATE AND CITIZENSHIP

The profoundly fractured relationship between the state and citizens highlights the risk of a further expansion of violent extremism. Preventing this involves improving the quality of service provision and addressing governance deficits. It also calls for a fundamental reimagining of the social contract from the bottom up to ensure that it is accountable, legitimate and relevant in the eyes of the citizens it is meant to serve.

- **Improve** service delivery across security, justice and other basic services provided by the state, integrating citizen oversight and engagement as part of delivery.
- **Strengthen** oversight of state security actors by independent civilianled bodies, with clear accountability and sanctions for abuses, to fundamentally address and end impunity.
- **Reinvigorate** anti-corruption campaigns with a renewed emphasis on building state-citizen confidence and accountability and ending impunity for officials.
- **Design** national PVE action plans in a participatory fashion and integrate a wider sectoral focus on youth issues.
- **Invest** in greater resilience of democratic institutions and processes and support civic education processes.
- **Support** initiatives to reimagine the social contract and strengthen national identities, social cohesion and citizenship.

THE TIPPING POINT

Many recruits experienced a 'tipping point', most commonly a government action or the killing or arrest of a friend or family member. The report finds that the absence of a 'tipping point' sharply reduces the likelihood of recruitment by between 40 and 50 percent, while the occurrence of a tipping point is confirmed as a prominent driver that fuels, catalyses and accelerates recruitment into VE groups. These abuses, and the underlying factors that give rise to such grievances, must be addressed and eliminated. To help alleviate psychological suffering and break these cycles of violence, mental health and psychosocial support measures should be integrated into PVE programming, as is occurring increasingly in peacebuilding.

- *Accelerate* the implementation of security sector reform processes tailored to the specific challenges of violent extremism that are grounded in international humanitarian law, standards and rights-based approaches and that integrate civic oversight and confidence-building mechanisms.
- *Support* effective oversight of state security actors by an independent, civilian-led body, with clear accountability and sanctions for abuses.
- *Support* confidence-building mechanisms and trust-building exchanges between local authorities (including security actors) and the communities they are meant to serve.
- *Integrate* mental health and psychosocial support into PVE programming, including support for communityled trauma counselling services.
- *Design* alternative/counter-messaging programmes contextualized to local, vernacular cultures and delivered through trusted local organizations, disseminated via SMS, radio and community centres.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Despite the highly personalized aspects of an individual's pathway to violent extremism, this report confirms that recruitment is a highly socialized and gendered process that varies significantly for men and women. Moreover, contrary to widespread assumptions about online radicalization, higher internet usage is found to significantly decrease the likelihood of recruitment. Yet, in peripheral areas where internet penetration is lower, this involves a greater reliance on peer networks and thus underscores the importance of bolstering community resilience through offline messaging and traditional media.

- *Undertake* broader research into gender-disaggregated recruitment patterns to deepen the understanding of underlying pressures, expectations and incentives.
- *Develop* gender-sensitive PVE strategies and programming that apply a gender lens both to the analysis of the issues and framing of objectives and to design, implementation and monitoring.

- *Develop* gender-sensitive programming tailored to the specific exit pathways of women and girls.
- *Support* efforts to strengthen community resilience through radio and offline messaging.
- *Support* the design of alternative/counter-messaging programmes contextualized to local, vernacular cultures and deliver them through trusted local organizations via SMS, radio and community centres.

DRIVERS TO DISENGAGEMENT: THE TURNING POINT

Pathways from extremism require a fundamental shift in beliefs and values to yield sustainable outcomes. Disengagement is a highly localized process, where local actors and communities at large have important roles to play in strengthening resilience and sustaining behavioural change.

- *Support* efforts to reinforce and rebuild social bonds, promote a sense of belonging and offer an alternative identity that rejects violence as a way to address grievances, resolve conflict, express agency or pursue a goal.
- *Support* community-based reintegration and reconciliation efforts through community and locally-based organizations, including by leveraging the role of community leaders and communities, including peer networks and relationships.
- *Reinvigorate* prevention efforts to avoid a return to violence, including by acknowledging the legitimate grievances and structural, political and economic dynamics and risk factors that may have contributed to violent extremism at the outset.
- *Work* with former recruits to develop and communicate narratives designed to disincentivize young people regarding the economic benefits of joining VE groups.
- *Develop* strategies that provide economic incentives and alternatives for recruits by engaging wider communities to avoid being seen as rewarding the recruits.

THE DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The research highlights the socialized dimension of disengagement processes, but also underscores the significance of strengthening the awareness and availability of such exit pathways.

- *Scale up* amnesty and other exit opportunities for disillusioned recruits and invest in comprehensive rehabilitation and

Leverage the perspectives of peer networks and structures, including former VE group members as voices for alternative/counter-messaging, including by providing alternative narratives and developing peer-to-peer learning and education programmes

reintegration services. These include behavioural and mental health and psychosocial support mechanisms that can help prevent individuals from experiencing feelings of isolation and alienation in the disengagement process that can, in turn, contribute to recidivism.

- *Support* awareness-raising efforts and accessibility of amnesty and disengagement programmes, including through trust-building measures to link national and subregional interventions to the community level.
- *Develop* gender-sensitive disengagement PVE strategies and programming that apply a gender lens both to the analysis of the issues and framing of objectives and to the design, implementation and monitoring process.
- *Leverage* the perspectives of peer networks and structures, including former VE group members as voices for alternative/counter-messaging, including by providing alternative narratives and developing peer-to-peer learning and education programmes.

For policy

The programming implications suggest practical strategies and interventions required primarily at national and subnational levels to prevent violent extremism. However, programming will be hampered and undermined unless the broader national and international policy context is conducive to the multifaceted, development-focused approach required. While the risks of security-driven responses and the need for a development-focused approach may be recognized more widely, this has not yet translated into the necessary reorientation and reprioritization of international policy and resources. Therefore, urgent action is required in the policy sphere, both at national and international levels, to reverse this trend and prioritize preventive development-focused approaches. Drawing on the broader context analysis for the research, the following policy implications emerge.

Realizing the promise: towards effective oversight of human rights compliance, rule of law and accountability for militarized and state-centric counter-terrorism responses
The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report highlights widespread and generalized distrust and grievances towards the police and military. It provides robust evidence that the conduct of state security agencies may act as a prominent accelerator, driver and 'tipping point' for recruitment in the journey to extremism, rather than the reverse. These findings clearly show the need for more effective oversight of human rights compliance, rule of law and accountability by state security actors.

- *Exercise* effective oversight over and accountability for human rights and rule of law compliance in militarized, state-centric counter-terrorism responses - contingent upon the strengthening and implementation of systematic monitoring and compliance with human rights standards and the rule of law, extending beyond state security actors.
- *Ensure* regular reviews of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as a robust and independent international oversight

mechanism to more effectively assess and mitigate harm from counter-terrorism measures, including with respect to gender equality and civic space.

Reimagining and reinvigorating the social contract from the bottom-up
The new study points to a much more fractured and divided relationship between state and citizen, reflected in part by the sense of apathy characterizing the outlook of all respondents regarding the impact of elections and the possibility that they could bring positive change. This reflects a shift in levels of confidence in the democratic process, but also mirrors more divided and fractured perceptions of the state in the area ofservice provision and trust in state and institutions. It confirms the need for a reinvigorated approach that builds on people's agency, creates avenues for enhanced community resilience, and restores the social contract between citizens and the state, as a foundation for sustaining peace.

- *Invest* in sustained support for bottom-up democracy-building, including by increasing the visibility and accessibility of mechanisms for political participation and civic engagement in local and national development agendas.
- *Develop and strengthen* policies that ensure effective oversight, tailored and adequate development-based responses, particularly in the area of service-provision, anti-corruption and accountability, to challenge the emergence of VE groups as proto-state competitors for authority and legitimacy.
- *Refocus* agency-focused, human security approaches in PVE programming as an effective tool and framework for addressing underlying inequalities, grievances and root causes of violent extremism, which enhances space for solidarity as people are better able to reason about, strategize and participate in actions that transform society.
- *Create space and opportunities* for trust-building measures between state and society to reimagine a social contract fit for sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st century, including through efforts to strengthen national identities, social cohesion and citizenship.

Upscale investments and ensure improved quality and accountability of state services as a fundamental and, ultimately, more effective means of addressing violent extremism

Strengthening state legitimacy through improved service delivery, quality and accountability of state service provision
The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* findings reinforce the call for a revived commitment by states to upgrade the quality and accountability of institutions across service delivery areas at the national and subnational levels, particularly in at-risk areas as a critical avenue for strengthening state legitimacy and accountability.

- **Upscale** investments and **ensure** improved quality and accountability of state services as a fundamental and, ultimately, more effective means of addressing violent extremism compared to standalone security-focused interventions.
- **Ensure** sustained support for the democratic process at sub-national and local levels, including through bottom-up democracy-building, going beyond the tendency to focus attention and resources on national election cycles.
- **Invest and support** efforts to strengthen the technical capacity in state service provision and delivery.

Embedding a conflict-sensitive approach in efforts to address violent extremism

Violent extremism is inextricably entwined with conflict dynamics, both local and national. Thus, interventions to prevent or counter violent extremism will inevitably have an impact on conflict dynamics. The research highlights a widespread lack of trust in governments, particularly in state security forces. In this context, international support for state-centric strategies, including to strengthen state security forces, risks reinforcing power structures.

- **Embed** conflict-sensitive approaches in efforts to address violent extremism with a focus on putting people at the heart and building capacity to analyse, evaluate and mitigate the risks of potential harmful interactions between responses to violent extremism, local populations and conflict dynamics through a human security approach.
- **Strengthen** analysis and practical guidance on conflict-sensitive approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism to ensure that harmful impacts are minimized while building upon peacebuilding opportunities.
- **Support** multi-stakeholder strategies to counter and prevent violent extremism, rather than those that focus exclusively on state capacity-building.

Up-scaling support for localized, community-based support to PVE

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* research highlights the localized dynamics that shape an individual's pathway to joining a VE group, while also revealing how such groups tap into and exploit such localized grievances. This suggests a need for a critical shift in confronting the root causes of violent extremism beyond short-term standalone military means towards upscaling complementary community-based and development-based support for bottom-up conflict transformation and peacebuilding approaches that recognize the importance of countervailing preventive efforts at the local level. This also calls for a corresponding shift in partnerships with local actors.

- **Up-scale** support for localized community-based support to PVE initiatives and ensure more long-term, sustainable funding and resources to community-based preventive approaches.

- **Strengthen and reinvigorate** partnerships with civil society and community groups which are based on fortifying local ownership and their engagement in PVE initiatives in all areas of the design, implementation and evaluation of national and international strategies.
- **Ensure sustained** support and Investments in gender-sensitive PVE response with a specific focus and resources dedicated to ensuring the inclusion of women and girls' perspectives in all areas of the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions.

Integrating PVE within peacebuilding and sustainable development policy frameworks

The importance of development approaches in tackling the causes and consequences of violent extremism has gained increasing recognition. Despite this – and notwithstanding limited evidence of the success of security-driven responses over the past five years – most international attention and resources for addressing violent extremism in Africa continue to be directed towards security-focused or conventional humanitarian interventions, as evidenced by this study.

- **Strengthen** the evidence-base and analytical foundation of PVE approaches based on comprehensive analysis on root and proximate causes of conflict.
- **Design and deliver** joined-up responses, rather than pursuing disconnected PVE and peacebuilding strategies that may undermine each other.
- **Integrate and embed** prevention of violent extremism in peacebuilding and sustainable development policy frameworks.
- **Bolster and promote** multi-faceted preventive approaches to violent, with long-term development goals at its core, rather than a narrow security-focused response.

Recalibrating the commitment to investing in cost-effective prevention and long-term development

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* study shows that investments are still predominantely focused towards reactive and security-dominated responses. This is crowding out support for preventive and long-term development as support for peacebuilding and PVE initiatives in Africa has plateaued or, even, decreased in recent years to approximately 2 percent. Investments should be reoriented towards complementary prevention and peacebuilding efforts which have proven to have a positive return at 16:1. Thus, every US$1 invested in peacebuilding could save $16 on the cost of conflict and violence.

- **Reprioritize** international policy and resources toward adressing the root causes and conditions of underdevelopment that drive individuals into recruitment.
- **Recalibrate commitments to reorient** investments towards complementary prevention and peacebuilding efforts to harness multiplier effects and reap peace dividends.
- **Ensure and oversee** that international development budgets avoid rebranding and conflating PVE efforts with interventions to counter terror and extremism (CTE) and counter violent extremism (CVE), securitizing aid and instrumentalizing efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism in contested political contexts.

Investment should be reoriented towards complementary prevention and peacebuilding efforts, which have proved to have a positive return of 16:1. Thus, every US$1 invested in peacebuilding could save $16 on the costs of conflict and violence

INTRODUCTION

UNDP's 2017 report, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment,* shined a revealing new light on the phenomenon of violent extremism in Africa and advocated for a radical change in approaches to preventing it. At the time, the quadrupling of terrorist attacks globally between 2011 and 2016 called for an urgent response to address the unprecedented increase in attacks and fatalities by VE groups in Africa. This, in turn, required a robust evidence base to ensure that responses to violent extremism were informed by a comprehensive empirical analysis of its causes and consequences.

The report, referred to going forward as 'the 2017 study', generated a wealth of data on the causes, drivers, incentives, 'tipping points', consequences and trajectories of recruitment into VE groups in Africa. Based on 718 interviews with former recruits and with a control group across six sub-Saharan African countries – Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan – it provided an unprecedented quantitative dataset on the pathways to violent extremism.

Weaving together data from all the personal testimonies generated a map of key factors influencing the journey to extremism. Learning was extrapolated from this evidence to identify effective pathways to inform policy and programming on preventing violent extremism in Africa.

The 2017 study found that as violent extremism profoundly impacts development gains, effective responses must place development approaches at their core. It underscored the importance of enhanced state legitimacy and improved service provision as fundamental conditions for preventing violent extremism. In addition, it provided striking new evidence on how the misconduct of state security actors can act as a prominent accelerator and catalyst for recruitment to VE groups.

This triggered a critical shift in understanding how to most effectively prevent violent extremism: by shifting from predominantly security-driven militarized responses to a multi-sectoral, development-focused approach that addresses the underlying conditions that give rise to violent extremism.

Global events of the past five years have compounded the pre-existing economic and political challenges in the region, while climate change acts as a threat multiplier

By taking a human-security approach advocating for "a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented response,"[8] it called for a corresponding shift of approach. This shift focuses on reinvigorating the nexus among individuals, institutions and ideologies to address the immediate and underlying factors that foster the growth of violent extremism and leverage UNDP's ongoing work on the long-term root causes of violent extremism, including weak governance, underdevelopment and marginalization.

Five years after the publication of the 2017 report, the world is a very different place. No region or country has escaped the escalating impacts of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the rising costs of basic goods and energy. Much of sub-Saharan Africa was already affected by multidimensional poverty and inequality, but global events of the past five years have compounded the pre-existing economic and political challenges in the region, while climate change acts as a threat multiplier.

Given this changing context and the upsurge in violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa, UNDP decided to undertake follow-up research to the 2017 study.

Approach and focus of the
Journey to Extremism 2.0 report

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report was designed to inform more effective policy and programming responses to violent extremism by updating and strengthening the evidence base established in 2017. Given the rapid spread of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa over the past five years, it is imperative to keep abreast of the ways in which VE groups are evolving. By building on, refining and expanding the original dataset, the new study helps to identify variations and changes in the drivers of recruitment. It also expands the scope of the research considerably,[9] with three times as many interviewees – including many more women – drawn from a wider range of countries. In addition to analysing the drivers of recruitment to VE groups, the new research also focuses on pathways to disengagement; in other words, on the journey away from extremism, not just towards it.

The *Journey to Extremism* research is based on the premise that a comprehensive and robust evidence base on the drivers of recruitment and disengagement will contribute to more effective interventions that address both the underlying conditions and causes of violent extremism in Africa. Accordingly, the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report is focused on three inter-related objectives:

- Analyse the changing nature and continental picture of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as take stock of efforts to counter and prevent its spread since the first report was published in 2017.

- Analyse drivers, 'tipping points' and accelerators affecting vulnerability to recruitment into VE groups, while tracking variations in relation to the findings of the first study.

- Further examine pathways away from extremism, with a focus on triggers for disengagement.

Given the rapidly evolving context and the fluctuating, fluid and localized nature of VE groups, the new study first presents the findings in relation to the changing nature of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa and efforts to prevent and respond to it.

Using complementary data sources and econometric regression analysis from the *Global Terrorism Index,* among others, this report seeks to assess geopolitical trends in violent extremist activity within the region and responses and approaches taken by national and international actors to date.

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report expands the scope of its existing evidence base considerably. It focuses on eight countries across sub-Saharan Africa – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan – reflecting current hot spots of violent extremism and spill-over countries in the worst-affected areas of sub-Saharan Africa.[10] The new data sample includes 2,196 interviewees, or approximately three times as many as the 2017 study.[11]

With a quantitative dataset at the heart of the *Journey to Extremism* research, it provides extensive evidence about the factors and experiences that drive some individuals to join VE groups when the majority living in similar circumstances do not and, further, what leads them to leave such groups.

As in the 2017 study, the demographic sample is largely comprised of three groups: one composed of recruits who joined a VE group voluntarily; one of individuals who were forcibly recruited; and one (a control group) composed of individuals with no affiliation to VE groups but who share demographic characteristics with the recruits (see the next section for detailed explanation of the demographic profile). Over 1,000 interviewees were former members of VE groups. Their responses were compared to those of a similar number of interviewees from a control group. This approach makes it possible to compare why two individuals living in similar circumstances might follow divergent path - one towards extremism, the other not.

It tests several hypotheses regarding the drivers of recruitment to illuminate the relative significance of the factors and experiences that shape vulnerability or resilience. Like the first study, this new research analyses the dynamics of the recruitment process, from the initial conditions and factors, to the specific trigger event that constitute 'tipping points' for recruitment, as well as the speed of recruitment.

Aggregating and synthesizing the resultant data then make it possible to draw some conclusions about the relative significance of the different factors, despite the unique nature of each individual's journey.

By building on, refining and expanding the original dataset, the new study helps to identify variations and changes in the drivers of recruitment. It also expands the scope of the research considerably, with three times as many interviewees – including many more women

Thus, building on the tried and tested approach and methodology of the 2017 study, this study enhances the robustness and reliability of the earlier findings. It also provides a basis for comparison, revealing significant new dynamics and insights. By analysing the relative salience of these multiple factors, as well as the speed of recruitment in relation to a range of variables, it refines the understanding of what causes vulnerability, while highlighting resilience factors as well.

While the new study expands the breadth of the existing empirical basis, it also addresses key aspects that were under-explored in the first iteration. The survey sample includes a significantly larger number of female members of VE groups and a corresponding proportional reference group of female respondents. This allows for more a disaggregated gender analysis of the drivers of extremism, revealing differences in women's and men's experiences and in relative patterns of recruitment and disengagement. This may inform and yield more nuanced insights into gender-sensitive PVE policy and programming, a critical dimension often overlooked in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.[12]

The new study was also designed to shed greater light on factors that shape 'exit pathways' away from VE groups, thus expanding the conceptual scope of the research.[13] It compares two sub-groups: those who leave VE groups voluntarily by surrendering or applying for amnesty and those who exit through arrest. This comparison reveals the salience of factors that shape the incentives, motivations and trajectories for exiting VE groups.

Expanding on the metaphor of a life journey and comparing individuals who surrendered voluntarily with those who were arrested against their will through capture, the research takes a step into examining the underlying incentives and motivations that drive individuals to leave such groups behind, from initial doubts towards the specific 'turning point', when a recruit no longer believes in the aims or approach of the VE group. It also explores the factors influencing the final decision to leave. This refined dimension is relevant both to preventing violent extremism and to facilitating insights into disengagement and reintegration processes, about which only limited evidence exists.[14]

The broader conceptual framework of the *Journey to Extremism* research is derived from political socialization theory.[15] This is understood as the "process through which a person develops its own unique frame of reference and worldview that guides choices and views on key issues such as politics, religion and ideology."[16] The development of this worldview is mediated through various "agencies of society... includ[ing] the family, peer group, school, adult organizations, and the mass media."[17] Political socialization theory therefore posits that the journey to extremism is shaped not just by an individual's life circumstances, but also by his or her exposure to other ideas, values and belief systems. Through this multifaceted lens, the new study charts the 'journey map' of influences, incentives and triggers that shape pathways to recruitment, as well as factors that contribute to disengagement.

The conceptual underpinning of this research is also informed by frameworks that distinguish between micro, meso and macro drivers,[18] as well as pull and push factors.[19] Recognizing that such conceptualizations can have a reductive effect on complex phenomena, these are incorporated within the prism of political socialization theory, which provides the conceptual framework for the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report.

The new study was also designed to shed greater light on factors that shape 'exit pathways' away from VE groups, thus expanding the conceptual scope of the research

As such, through a detailed research questionnaire, it analyses the life stories and testimonies to explore differences in the micro-level life experiences, including the motivations, incentives and decisions of young men and women, while also examining the macro- and meso-level factors that influenced some to take the journey towards and away from violent extremism. This approach thus aims to strike a balance between individuals' agency, including their aspirations and decision-making, and the structural determinants of the broader context.

The study recognizes that no single factor can effectively determine whether under certain circumstances, an individual with a particular set of dispositions and relationships and exposure to certain ideas will follow a certain life path. It further acknowledges that recruitment and disengagement processes are inherently distinct but share common trajectories.

However, the fundamental premise of this follow-up study and the *Journey to Extremism* research is to continuously posit that more remains to be learned about the factors that shape pathways to and from violent extremism.

It is UNDP's vision that expanding the emerging evidence base of these dynamics, as well as developing an in-depth understanding of such factors, can contribute to more effective interventions that are better geared to address and mitigate the underlying, indirect and direct causes of violent extremism in Africa.

In addition to this aggregate research report and in order to highlight specific trends, a series of thematic briefs and subregional analyses complement the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report. They delve deeper into key aspects emerging from the research. The new study and this series of briefs will strengthen UNDP's database on the drivers of violent extremism in Africa.

This new evidence will contribute directly to the design and evidence base of the forthcoming second iteration of UNDP's multi-year regional project (2022-2025), which will serve as a blueprint for UNDP's interventions in Africa and the Arab States to prevent and respond to violent extremism through a development approach.

Structure of the report

The main body of the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report is structured around the three research objectives outlined above. It is preceeded by the following section, which describes how a relevant sample was built for the dataset and how the research questionnaire was refined to strengthen the study's conceptual and methodological basis. It summarizes the research methodology, while a more detailed explanation of the methodology of the econometric analysis is provided in a separate appendix at the end of the report. In addition, it notes some key considerations and caveats regarding the wider lessons that can be drawn from this particular localized and diverse dataset.

Chapter 1 focuses on key changes in the context of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa since 2017. This includes data and analysis on the changing nature of violent extremism in the region drawn from secondary sources. It also examines how national and international actors have responded, including trends related to spending and aid flows related to preventing violent extremism.

Chapter 2 focuses on the empirical data and analysis of the drivers of recruitment that are at the heart of the study. Building on the 2017 research, it examines and scrutinizes how the interplay of macro, meso and micro factors converge to drive people to join VE groups.

This encompasses formative influences, such as geographic location; family circumstances, childhood and education; the role of religion and religious ideologies; economic factors; and state and citizenship. It also explores how these drivers affect the speed of recruitment, identifying both accelerating factors, which highlight vulnerabilities, and sources of resilience.

Chapter 3 focuses on further examining the significance of 'tipping points', identifying the trigger events that in some cases catalyse the decision to join a VE group. It also investigates the social and behavioural aspects of the recruitment process, including the influence of peer networks and the internet. Finally, it examines the influence of prevention initiatives and resilience factors, as identified by reference group respondents.

Chapter 4 focuses on pathways to disengagement from VE groups. Based on political socialization theory, and drawing further on role exit theory, it applies a conceptual lens to explore the drivers of disengagement that lead to the specific 'turning point' when commitment to the VE group's actions and ideology may shift. It recognizes, however, that while such shifts are difficult to substantiate and even when they do occur, there may be many reasons – from fear of repercussions to practical circumstances – that make it difficult for a recruit to leave a VE group. This calls for further empirical inquiry and research beyond the scope of this study. Finally, it considers the socialized nature of the disengagement process, examining the extent to which peers and family influence decisions to leave VE groups.

To provide a visual overview of the journey to and from extremism and to highlight the specific trajectories with reference to gender, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are summarized in an infographic.

Chapter 5 draws together all the findings from the *Journey to Extremism* 2.0 dataset, the econometric analysis and the broader context assessment to formulate a series of practical implications. These are intended to inform policy and programming to prevent violent extremism at both national and international levels.

It is UNDP's vision that expanding the emerging evidence base of these dynamics, as well as developing an in-depth understanding of such factors, can contribute to more effective interventions that are better geared to address and mitigate the underlying, indirect and direct causes of violent extremism in Africa

Note on terminology

VIOLENT EXTREMISM: This is a highly contested concept, as is its component 'extremism'. It is usually considered to be a more inclusive term than 'terrorism', although both are sometimes used interchangeably. Violent extremism is often applied much more narrowly to religious violence alone, ignoring the many other forms of ideologically motivated violence.

Recognizing that no single definition of this term is likely to be endorsed by all, the terminology of this study aligns with the normative framework on violent extremism provided by the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism:

> The present Plan of Action [...] considers and addresses violent extremism as, and when, conducive to terrorism. Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat. These groups' message of intolerance – religious, cultural, social – has had drastic consequences for many regions of the world.[20]

The Plan of Action states:

> Nothing can justify violent extremism, but we must also acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum. Narratives of grievance, actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change become attractive where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored, and aspirations are being crushed.[21]

This understanding involves examining the process whereby such ideologies are channelled through narratives and used as powerful expressions of identities, grievances and deprivation, becoming a tool to legitimize social change through violence. As such, this entails looking beyond the ideologies alone by exploring the underlying causes and structures that give root to the ideology and render it effective.[22]

RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: The concept of radicalization is increasingly recognized as unsatisfactory in its power to explain violent extremism, given that many individuals may hold radical views without moving to perpetrate violent acts. The term is generally used to refer to the process by which individuals leave the mainstream and become extreme in views and/or behaviour. However, this study approaches the concept of radicalization as a highly dialectical socialized process, shaped not just by factors in an individual's life circumstances, but also by his or her exposure to other ideas, values and belief systems and experiences that may eventually lead him or her to adopt violent extremist ideas (attitudes) or commit violent extremist acts (behaviours), or that are likely to render the individual more vulnerable to recruitment.[23] Recognizing that not all people faced with the same set of circumstances will end up on the same path, it approaches the journey to extremism as a process determined by the outcome of a confluence of micro, meso and macro factors and situational, enabling and motivational drivers and triggers that may influence individuals' susceptibility and vulnerability to violent extremism.[24]

Beyond the study's focus on radicalization in the path towards violent extremism, it focuses on recruitment, defined in its broadest sense to include informal and even self-initiated processes, noting that while the latter is often a precondition for the former, this may not always be the case.[25]

TERRORISM: As with violent extremism, there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. At the political level, this reflects the difficulty agreeing on how to determine when the use of violence is legitimate (directed at whom, by whom and for what ends), as well as the difficulty in agreeing on the distinction between state-led and non-state violence. Further, acts of terrorism are often a tactic carried out as part of a larger military or geopolitical strategy. The United Nations defines terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public."[26]

COUNTER-TERRORISM: This refers to military and security operations, as well as the adoption of legislative and policing frameworks to control, repress and track terrorist activities; training, equipping and reorganizing national security forces and intelligence services; and enhancing border surveillance and checkpoints.[27]

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE) AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PVE): The counter-terrorism agenda has evolved over the past decade into a broader strategic approach that incorporates non-military responses aimed at disrupting the activities of VE groups and preventing their expansion, while also addressing the enabling environments in which violent extremism exist and gain a foothold. Some definitional ambiguity is again widely accepted. Multilateral, regional and national CVE and PVE initiatives have emerged, often including strategic communications, media, education and community policing activities, but with different approaches apparent across agencies. A useful distinction may be drawn between CVE, which is focused on countering conditions conducive to violent extremism, and PVE, which is focused on transforming the underlying drivers of violent extremism and preventing its spread. However, in practice, initiatives frequently address both aspects, taking a combined approach. Given the overall prevention priority, UNDP's organizational focus is on PVE, noting that CVE-type objectives may be incorporated or nested within overall PVE-specific or PVE-relevant programming.

DISENGAGEMENT AND DERADICALIZATION: Disengagement and deradicalization are different outcomes and do not necessarily co-occur. Disengagement refers to behavioural change, such as withdrawing from or leaving a violent extremist organization or changing one's role within it, but does not necessarily require a change in cognitive values or fundamental beliefs.[28] The motivations for ceasing involvement may vary by context, group and individual. Disengagement is a more realistic and attainable goal than deradicalization in most VE settings, certainly over the short to medium term.[29] Deradicalization implies a fundamental change in understanding. This can then create a cognitive opening that may make an individual receptive to new ideas. Deradicalization thus indicates shifting substantively from an ideological commitment to a violent extremist movement or cause to withdrawing or being conditioned to withdraw from violent extremist beliefs.[30]

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The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report is the product of an intensive two-year research process, undertaken in areas of sub-Saharan Africa that have been most directly affected by violent extremist activity. The 2,196 interviewees represent a nearly 70 percent increase in the number of respondents compared with the 2017 study

DEMOGRAPHIC SAMPLE
AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report is the product of an intensive two-year research process, undertaken in areas of sub-Saharan Africa that have been most directly affected by violent extremist activity. Interviews with former members of VE groups were conducted in eight countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. When the study was initiated, these countries were all characterized either as epicentres of violent extremism or as spill-over countries,[31] and so were selected based on their empirical relevance for examining the phenomenon of violent extremism. An unprecedented number of former VE group members were interviewed for this study. The 2,196 interviewees represent a nearly 70 percent increase in the number of respondents compared with the 2017 study. Eight hundred and eighty-four of the respondents were individuals who previously or, in a handful of cases, at the time of the interview, were still members of violent extremist organizations, which they had joined voluntarily. Interview data were collected from May 2020 to August 2021.

To understand why some individuals decided to join violent extremist groups when most people living in similar circumstances did not, the demographic sample was constructed similarly to the 2017 study. To enable comparison, interviewees were drawn from two categories: a 'primary group' consisting of former or current members of VE groups and a 'reference group' of those with no affiliation to such groups. Reference group members were selected using a non-randomized sampling method based on their living in designated at-risk communities and sharing similar demographics with the primary group, but never having been members of VE groups.

FIGURE 1 **DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWS** BY COUNTRY

10% Burkina Faso

17% Cameroon

9% Chad

18% Mali

8% Niger

21% Nigeria

15% Somalia

2% Sudan
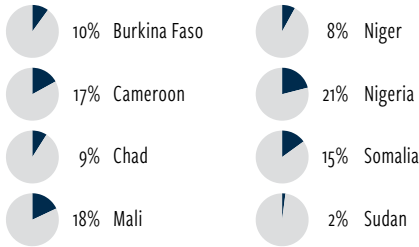
Figures 1 and 2 shows the percentages of the relevant survey sample by the three categories of respondent and by the country where data were collected.[32] The primary group included 1,181 respondents (933 men and 248 women). The primary group is subdivided into two subgroups: former members who joined violent extremist groups voluntarily and those who were forcibly recruited. Of the primary group, 884 respondents (773 male and 111 female) stated that they had joined voluntarily, including both former recruits and some who, based on self-identification, were still members of a VE group. This category of respondents is referred to in the report as the 'voluntary group' and represents 40 percent of the full sample. By contrast, only 14 percent of the sample - 297 individuals, of whom 160 male and 137 female - reported that they were recruited by force to join a VE. This group is referred to as the 'forced group'. The secondary control group, composed of 1,015 respondents, is referred to as the 'reference group'. That group consisted of 711 men and 304 women, or 46 percent of the sample. These individuals were selected based on the similarity of their demographic profile to that

of the recruits in the primary group in terms of geographic location, age and gender. Thus, these respondents lived in comparable conditions to the primary group and had similar levels of exposure to violent extremism yet had no affiliation with VE groups.

As indicated in Figure 2, the interviews by country are distributed fairly unevenly, reflecting the variation in sampling methods used, as well as the issue of accessing respondents in the countries under review. Nigerians accounted for the largest groups by nationality in the relevant sample, accountig for 21 percent. Sudanese respondents were the smallest number by nationality, accounting for 2 percent of the relevant sample. Although the largest group of recruits were Nigerian, the largest sample was surveyed in Cameroon. This may indicate that many recruits ended up outside their country of origin, whether because of fighting, fleeing or other reasons. For example, 42 of the Nigerian respondents in the survey sample chose to disengage in Cameroon, where the research team had access to them.

FIGURE 2 **DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS and COUNTRY OF DATA COLLECTION
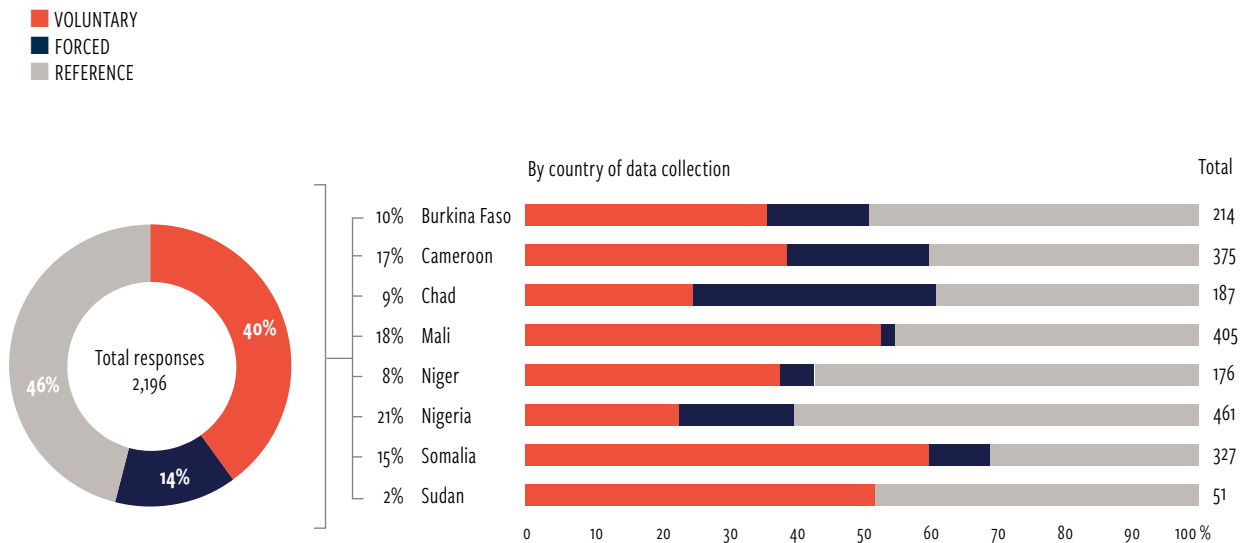
Figure 3 shows the age distribution of the sample at the time of the research by respondent type. The respondents' age distribution shows that voluntary recruits were marginally younger, on average, than the reference group respondents. The mean age of respondents in the voluntary group (29 years) was lower than in the reference group (31 years). Forced recruits tended to be younger than either voluntary recruits or the reference group.

Thirty-nine percent of all respondents in the sample were between 26 and 35 years, while 34 percent were between 18 and 25 years. This differs from the dataset in the 2017 study, where a majority of reference group respondents were 15 to 25 years old, compared to 44 percent in both voluntary and forced groups. Nevertheless, it reflects the demographically youthful populations in the countries under review.

Conversely, 44 percent of female respondents were between 18 and 25 years of age, compared to 34 percent in the higher age category of 26-35 years.

Figure 4 shows the respondents' gender breakdown.[33] In relative terms, this dataset includes a greater proportion of female respondents – a total of 552, comprising 25 percent of the relevant sample – compared with the first dataset in 2017, which had 19 percent female respondents yet out of a data sample roughly one-third the size. In aggregate terms, the number of female respondents in this study is approximately four times as many as in the 2017 study.

The figure shows a higher proportion of women and girls in the forced group category (46 percent), while in the reference and voluntary groups, females made up 30 percent and 13 percent of their respective categories. The gendered distribution is consistent with the 2017 study, which similarly found a gender imbalance reflected in the sample.

This may suggest that a gender imbalance empirically exists in the VE groups examined in this study. It may also reflect certain issues and sensitivities encountered by the research teams in accessing women and girls interviewees.

FIGURE 3 **AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

- VOLUNTARY
- FORCED
- REFERENCE

Answered by 2191 out of 2196
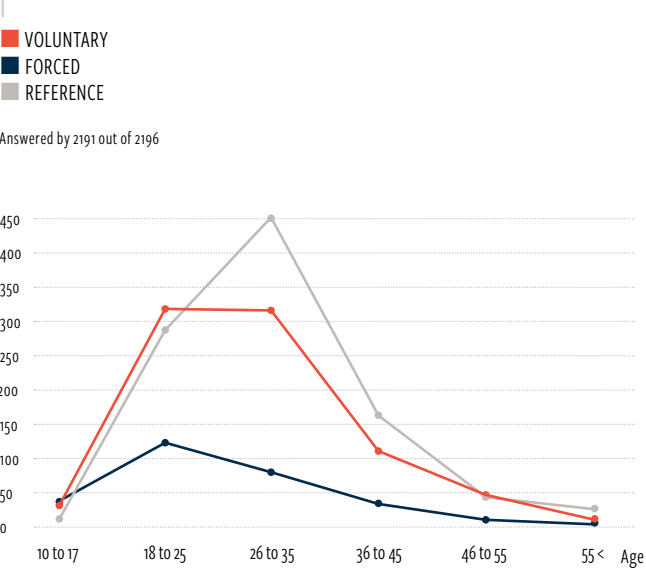
FIGURE 4 **CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS** BY GENDER

- MALE
- FEMALE

Answered by 2166 out of 2196

75% are male   **25%** are female

VOLUNTARY	FORCED	REFERENCE
87% 13%	54% 46%	70% 30%
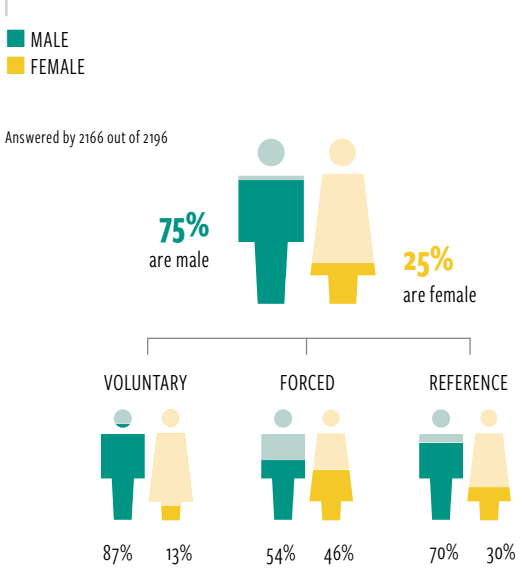
As in the 2017 study, most of the interviews took place in detention facilities, prisons and rehabilitation or community centres, as illustrated in Figure 5, which highlights the status of the primary group at the time of the interview.[34] Thirty-one percent of the primary group respondents were actively involved in a formal process at the time of interview. This process is referred to in their answers to the questionnaire as 'amnesty programme', 'rehabilitation programme' or 'surrendered'. Fifty-nine percent were awaiting formal process, indicated as either 'detention centre' or 'arrested', compared to 8 percent who were either formally sentenced or sentenced for life.[35]

Figure 5 further illustrates the significant gender difference in terms of the respondents' current status, with male recruits much more likely to have been arrested than their female counterparts. Female recruits were also much more likely to be currently undergoing a rehabilitation process. The majority of women undergoing rehabilitation were surveyed in Cameroon.[36]

The majority of primary group respondents were former members (of different rank) in some of the continent's most prominent VE groups, namely Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), the al-Qaeda-affiliated coalition in West Africa.[37]

The majority of primary group respondents were former members (of different rank) in some of the continent's most prominent VE groups

FIGURE 5 **STATUS OF RESPONDENTS** BY PRIMARY RESPONDENTS and GENDER

- ■ AWAITING FORMAL PROCESS
- ■ FORMAL PROCESS
- ■ UNDER FORMAL PROCESS
- ■ WITHOUT FORMAL STATUS Sentenced/Sentenced for life

by VOLUNTARY and FORCED RECRUITS
Answered by 684 out of 1182
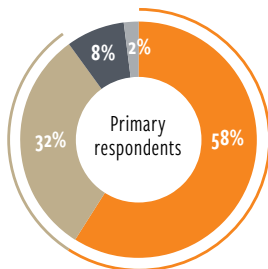
by GENDER
Answered by 813 out of 1181
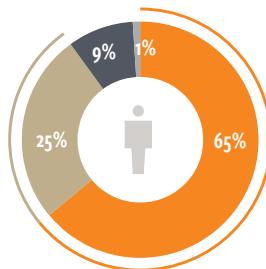
	Primary respondents			
8%	2%			
32%		58%		

Male			
9%	1%		
25%		65%	

Female			
1%	9%	10%	
80%			

	by VOLUNTARY and FORCED RECRUITS	by GENDER (Male)	by GENDER (Female)
Rehabilitation	20%	16%	51%
Surrendered	10%	9%	16%
Amnesty	2%	0,2%	13%
Arrested	31%	34%	10%
Detention centre	27%	31%	-%
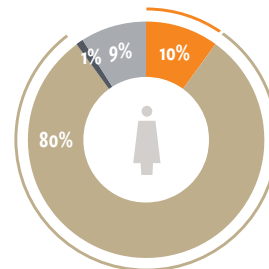
The VE groups most widely represented in the survey sample were Boko Haram (575 respondents), al-Shabaab (226 respondents) and JNIM (121 respondents).

The ratio of forced to voluntary recruits varied significantly across these major groups, with the proportion of voluntary recruits in Boko Haram[38] (50 percent) much higher than in al-Shabaab (28 percent) or JNIM (16 percent). While the new study is consistent with the 2017 study in terms of the distribution of respondents from Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, this dataset replaces the ISIL-affiliated VE groups (15 percent) with JNIM, the fastest growing VE group in 2021.[39] Figure 6 illustrates the proportion of forced and voluntary recruits across the various violent extremist groups.[40]

Figure 7 presents the gender breakdown of respondents in the primary group by organization. Among female recruits in the data sample, Boko Haram accounted for the largest number of recruits (85 percent), likely reflecting the high proportion of Boko Haram female abductees. This is consistent with complementary research illustrating the high proportion of female abductees in Boko Haram.[41]

While the new study is consistent with the 2017 study in terms of the distribution of respondents from Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, this dataset replaces the ISIL-affiliated VE groups (15 percent) with JNIM, the fastest growing VE group in 2021

FIGURE 6 **DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY RESPONDENTS** BY ORGANIZATION

VOLUNTARY
FORCED

Answered by 694 out of 834

Boko Haram 50% | Al Shabaab 28% | JNIM 16% | Other 6%

Answered by 271 out of 289

Boko Haram 85% | Al Shabaab 11% | JNIM 2% | Other 2%
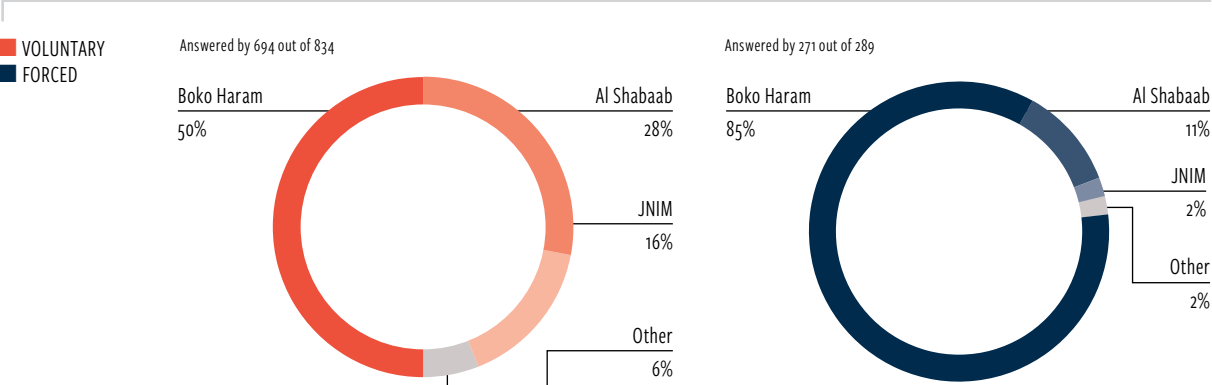
FIGURE 7 **DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY RESPONDENTS** BY ORGANIZATION and GENDER

MALE
FEMALE

Answered by 739 out of 869

Boko Haram 52% | Al Shabaab 27% | JNIM 17% | Other 4%

Answered by 246 out of 249

Boko Haram 85% | Al Shabaab 10% | JNIM 0% | Other 5%
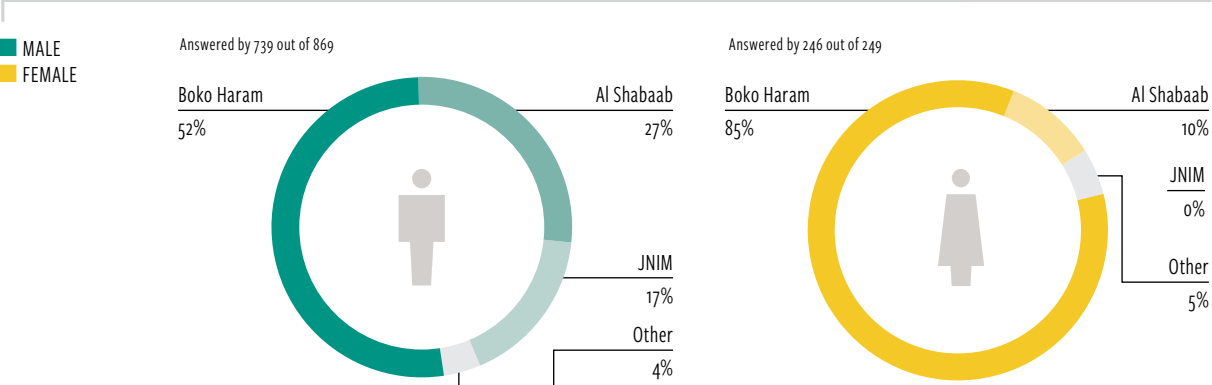
Research methodology:
building a relevant sample from the dataset

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report adopts a comparative research design similar to that of the 2017 study, allowing for comparison of two groups of individuals who live in similar circumstances but follow divergent paths in the recruitment process: one towards VE groups, the other not. Similarly, it examines the pathways in the disengagement process by comparing those who decided to surrender and apply for amnesty with those who ended up on a different trajectory: arrest through capture. As such, while acknowledging the distinct nature and dynamics of the recruitment and disengagement processes, this method aims to develop a picture of the typical journey map of the trajectories and multiple pathways towards recruitment and disengagement.

When the study was first conceived, the eight countries under review were initially conceptualized based on UNDP's categorization into epicentre countries and spill-over countries.[42] They were selected based on their geographical representativity and empirical relevance for examining the phenomenon of violent extremism. Given sensitivities regarding the profiles of VE group members, a non-random sampling method was applied to select both the primary and the reference group and to ensure comparability across key demographic features.

For the primary group of former VE group members, the sample included individuals who were made accessible to interview teams through local networks and with the support of national and local authorities, researchers and civil society actors. As reflected in the demographic profile above, most primary group interviews were conducted in detention facilities, prisons and rehabilitation or community centres, where most interviewees were awaiting formal process related to allegations of terrorist acts.

Reference group members were subsequently identified based on an extrapolation of the demographic profiles of the primary group provided by government authorities. They were selected from designated at-risk communities; that is, areas determined to be at heightened risk of violent extremism and local conflict. In these areas, respondents were identified locally based on whether they shared demographics with the primary group – including age, gender and geographical location – but had VE group affiliation (based on self-categorization). Local research teams and civil society organizations, as well as UNDP local country offices and partners with in-depth knowledge of the local context, facilitated access to the secondary group.

The report's aggregate findings rely primarily on descriptive analysis, supplemented by econometric analysis using logistic regression techniques to examine the microlevel correlates and systemic variations in the dataset. This is enriched by personal testimonies gathered during the research process that give voice to the experiences of individual recruits and those living in conditions conducive to violent extremism. A detailed questionnaire, comprising mostly quantitative questions, was tailored to the primary and reference groups respondents.

For purposes of comparison, both questionnaires explored the life histories and personal perspectives of respondents on a range of personal, cultural, socio-economic and political issues at the time the interview took place.

The questionnaire targeting the primary group included additional questions on underlying motivations and perceptions relating to recruitment and disengagement, which were not included in the reference group questionnaire. The two datasets provided a basis for comparing the life journeys of those who joined VE groups with those who did not. The questionnaire for primary respondents subsequently enabled respondents who disengaged voluntarily – through surrender and applying for amnesty – to be distinguished from those who disengaged through arrest. The identification was based further on whether or not respondents had indicated an interest to reengage in VE group activity.

Hence, the two datasets served as a relevant, albeit imperfect, basis for comparison of the factors leading to voluntary recruitment into VE groups and, later, to disengagement from those groups. This provided an opportunity to explore systematic differences between the groups' respondents and others in the survey sample, while distinguishing perspectives and experiences, despite prevailing similarities.

Building on lessons learned from the first study, the interview questionnaire was refined to strengthen the study's methodological basis and generate more nuanced responses. For example, the wording of certain questions was modified to avoid leading questions or biases in the responses.

While most of the questions in the 2017 study consisted of quantitative closed questions, the new study, although still anchored in a quantitative approach, included more open-ended questions to give space for contextualization and more voice to respondents. Notwithstanding certain revisions and refinements in the framing with additional open-ended options, the survey remained largely intact to capture key questions related to the four broader themes - upbringing and education, economic factors, religion and ideologies, and state and citizenship - to enable a certain degree of comparison.

Subject to filtering out incomplete and/or duplicate responses in the dataset, all questionnaire responses were compiled into one database, which underwent descriptive analysis across questions and econometric analysis. The initial dataset included a total of 2,234 interviews. However, after removing duplicated inputs, the sample size was 2196. [43]

The econometric analysis used logistic regression analysis to model the multivariate relationship among different variables, comparing the reference group to the primary respondent. This was done using logistic regression techniques, after completing data imputation for missing data and matching along key background covariates outlined above (gender, age, nationality, education) between voluntary recruits and reference group respondents.[44]

Rather than taking a data mining approach, the potential explanatory factors were selected based on their relevance and significance in terms of the findings of the 2017 study and established evidence in the field to look for differences between the group of voluntary recruits and the reference group. Thus, instead of testing all possible hypotheses, the econometric analysis focused on a subset of hypotheses with the greatest explanatory power vis-à-vis the earlier findings and research.

Only a subset of relevant respondents both from the recruits and the reference group were used in the econometric analysis in order to understand the micro-level correlates or drivers of radicalization. For the reference group respondents, matching and subsetting were conducted based on whether they had at least some exposure to violent extremist organizations, as determined by either living directly under their control or by having been approached by them for recruitment. For the recruits, the relevant subset included only those recruits who did not state that they were recruited by force (that is, voluntary recruits). As such, survey respondents were matched based on key demographic characteristics including gender, age and nationality to avoid biases. This further decreased the sample sizes used in the regression analyses.

The data sample for the econometric analysis therefore consisted of 1,465 relevant survey respondents, comprised of 870 voluntary recruits in the primary group and 595 reference group interviewees. This compares with the descriptive analysis, which totals 2,196 respondents, comprising 884 voluntary recruits (40 percent), 297 forced recruits (14 percent), and 1,015 respondents from the reference group (46 percent).

For a detailed explanation of the methodology used in the econometric analysis, please refer to the methodological Appendix 1.

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While acknowledging the distinct nature and dynamics of the recruitment and disengagement processes, this method aims to develop a picture of the typical journey map of the trajectories and multiple pathways towards recruitment and disengagement

Key considerations

The major impetus of the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* research is to build a composite continental picture of the drivers of violent extremism in Africa, while acknowledging the specificities and nuances of the eight countries under review. This leads, inevitably, to certain limitations.

First, given that the primary group members were categorized as 'forced' or 'voluntary' recruits based on interviewee self-identification, particular conditions may well have influenced or incentivized their choice of category. For instance, some respondents may state that they were recruited by force when this was not the case. Particularly for most primary group respondents awaiting formal process, identifying as a forced rather than voluntary recruit may seem to offer advantages and may also influence responses about perceptions of state actors. Moreover, given that many primary respondents were asked to assess their perceptions and views retrospectively at the time of joining or after leaving the group, their meta-perceptions may not accurately reflect their actual views. Those views may be further influenced by a range of emotive, psychological factors that have come into play since their departure from the group.[45] While it is difficult to fully overcome these biases and acknowledging that perceptions are subjective and unique to the sample in question, efforts have been made to use additional sources as a basis for triangulating responses, such as those relating to institutions and trust levels in the analysis, including the Afrobarometer.[46]

Furthermore, completely forced and completely voluntary recruits exists on a wide spectrum, with many gradations between these two extremes.[47] Unwilling recruits may not be abducted but may still be coerced into joining a VE group, while voluntary recruits may be intrinsically motivated to join or feel forced by circumstance. In the case of respondent categorization for the regression analysis, control was based on two survey questions: whether they had ever lived under the direct control of a violent extremist group and whether they had personally been approached for recruitment into a VE group. Thus, reference group respondents who would not have had any exposure to VE groups or activity were excluded, allowing a like-to-like comparison. Similarly, such spectrums are difficult to discern and clearly distinguish when seeking to compare individuals who voluntarily disengage by force or voluntarily. That is, individuals who disengage may wish to leave VE groups (change in behaviour) without necessarily becoming deradicalized (change in attitudes). This is further compounded given the bias of the sample, where disproportionately few individuals self-identified as a current member.[48] Thus, control was based on whether

respondents had indicated whether, in retrospect, they would have preferred to stay in the group and/or reengage in VE group activity. As a result, while distinctions among the various categories of respondents in the recruitment and disengagement process remain ambiguous, the respondent categories outlined in the demographic profile served as a basis for cross-comparison and analysis throughout based on the interviewees' self-identification with each respective category.

Moreover, biases uncovered above in the distribution of respondents across the sample – in relation to age, gender, status and geographic distribution - naturally pose challenges to developing a complete aggregate perspective for sub-Saharan Africa. This results, in part, from variations in the sampling methods applied by the researchers engaged in the data collection process. It is a further result of uneven access to former VE group members across the focus countries and reflects the specific characteristics of the VE groups in the survey contexts. Some of the biases are further attributed to issues related to variation in how questions were interpreted locally, despite efforts to assist facilitators and research teams. Furthermore, and despite efforts to refine the questionnaire, both its framing and length - with more than 200 questions - also likely affected the number of incomplete responses and missing data input across the questionnaire, to a certain and, in some cases substantial, degree.[49] Care was taken to cross-reference responses and highlight variations among countries, while exercising caution to avoid drawing overly generalized conclusions.

Caution should also be taken in extrapolating wider conclusions from the gender-disaggregated data. As Figure 7 illustrates, most female interviewees in the primary group were forcibly recruited by Boko Haram, which leads to a bias in the sample of female respondents. The interpretation of gender-specific data is further complicated by access issues encountered in several instances, as well as by gendered social structures that may be linked to stigma and other sensitivities affecting women and girls. This has resulted in their being less accessible in the research process. However, the relative proportions of the female respondent categories in the new study are consistent with the 2017 study, even when considering the much higher number of female respondents. This may suggest that the gender imbalance simply reflects that more men than women join violent extremist groups. However, the absence of female respondents in the JNIM group in particular contrasts with other research findings. In the case of Katiba Macina (here referred to a member of the JNIM coalition),

additional evidence points to the roles women fulfil, for example, to obtain funding and essential supplies, such as food, medicine and other necessities, as crucial human resources in recruitment processes and to strengthen the group's social cohesion through their social ties with group members.[50] Similarly, while the datasample reflect a relative low proportion of female recruits in al-Shabaab (10 percent), studies of women recruits in this group further suggest their more active roles in the insurgency, and in activities critical to its resilience.[51] Given underlying sensitivities and invisibilities linked to women's informal and formal roles in such groups, as well as access challenges, gender roles in VE groups thus deserve further investigation.

Last, while the research sets out to examine variations in comparable demographic profiles and categories of respondents over time, the non-randomized sampling method, with its quasi-experimental framework, naturally implies that the data cannot be cross-examined within the scope of a longitudinal study or inferred and generalized beyond the sample. This prevents us from deducing overarching trends from the two cohorts examined in the 2017 data sample and the current study in relation to the changing salience of any specific factor. Therefore, in principle, all results should be interpreted only in relation to specific samples, not to the larger population.

Nevertheless, while noting the distinctness of each data sample and with attention to these points, the two extensive data samples do enable us to identify important similarities and differences and, thus, track variations between this cohort and the 2017 cohort. As a result, and notwithstanding these important considerations and caveats, the UNDP bureaus for Africa and for Arab States are convinced of the value of this multi-country sample. With its extensive and unprecedented dataset at its heart, it offers a valuable basis for generating new knowledge in a complex, evolving field, which is much needed in the design of relevant policy and programmatic interventions.

With its extensive and unprecedented dataset at its heart, it offers a valuable basis for generating new knowledge in a complex, evolving field, which is much needed in the design of relevant policy and programmatic interventions

44

"I was looking for where I could practice freedom since I could not get that in my family. The same thing I experienced in the group where I felt like I was in a prison. I was never given consideration to my opinions and wants such as money."

Hawa, *26 years old, Somalia*

CHAPTER 1:
A CHANGING CONTEXT

Despite the significant resilience shown by local communities across the continent, the multi-faceted impact and rapid spread of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa now risks reversing hard-won development gains and stunting development prospects for generations to come. Five years after publication of the first *Journey to Extremism* report, the situation in many parts of the region has deteriorated further, transforming sub-Saharan Africa into a new global epicentre of violent extremism. To place the detailed empirical evidence that follows in a broader context, this scene-setting chapter assesses key trends. It focuses first on the upsurge in violent extremist groups and activity in Africa over recent years and then reviews the responses to violent extremism in Africa, including both securitized measures and allocation of international development assistance.

1.1 The spread of violent extremism in Africa

Over the last five years, the global landscape of violent extremism has shifted dramatically. Deaths from terrorist activity have fallen by over one-third globally since peaking in 2015, mainly following the decline of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.[52] However, at the same time, violent extremism has surged in sub-Saharan Africa, as illustrated in Figure 8. According to the *Global Terrorism Index*, sub-Saharan Africa was the only region in the world to experience a worsening of the impact of terror activity in 2021.[53] In the same year, 26 percent of 5,218 terrorist attacks worldwide took place in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 48 percent of all deaths from violent extremism. Four of the 10 countries worst affected were Somalia, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. Together, they suffered 34 percent of all terrorist fatalities in 2021.[54] The Sahel has been the most heavily affected, with deaths from terrorism in the region rising tenfold since 2007.[55] This rapid rise explains why, despite its abundant resilience and resourceful populations across the continent, sub-Saharan Africa is now considered the global epicentre of violent extremism, with devastating impacts on lives and livelihoods and on prospects for peace and development.

FIGURE 8 **GLOBAL TREND IN TERRORIST ATTACKS** (2011-2021), BY REGION

Number of terrorist attacks
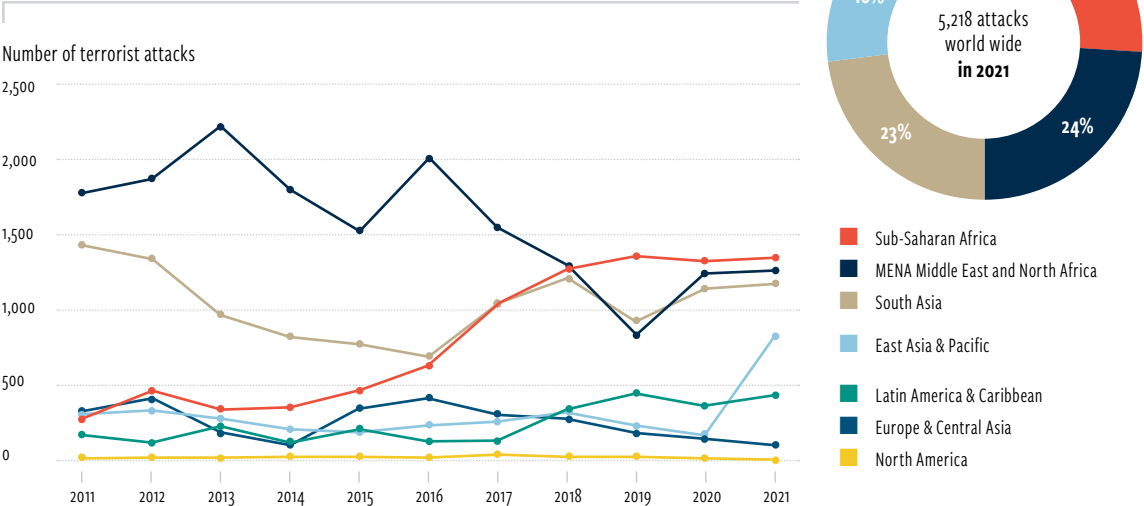
Source: Dragonfly Terrorism Tracker, IEP calculation

FIGURE 9 **FATALITIES RELATED TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA** (2017-2021*)

● Attacks carried out by groups associated with religious ideologies
● Attacks carried out by other groups

Size of bubbles correspond to the number
of fatalities in a single attack, with smaller
sizes reflecting lower number of fatalities.
The number of fatalities during the time
period range from 1 to 587.
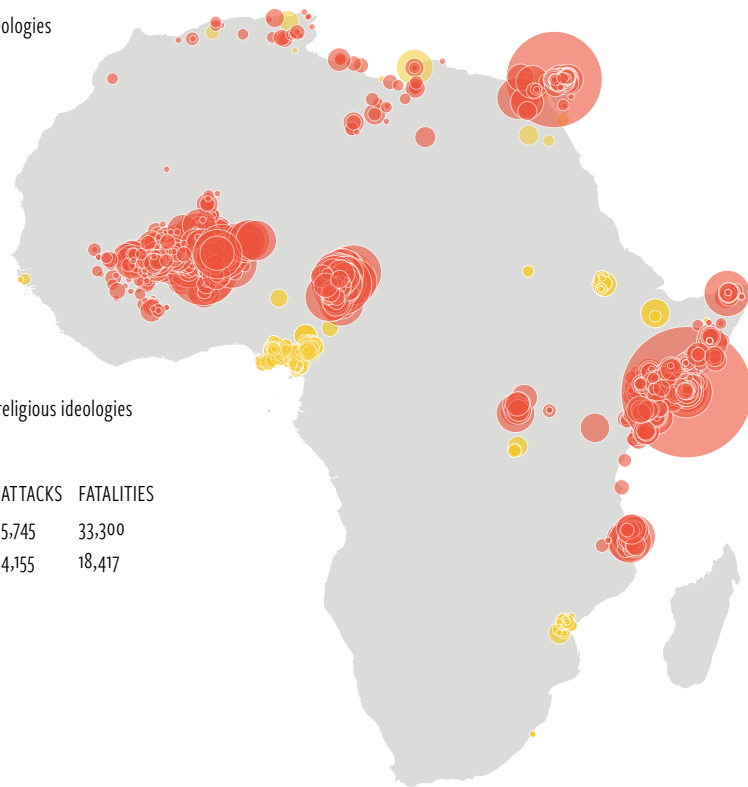
■ Fatilities in attacks carried out by groups associated with religious ideologies
■ Fatilities in attacks carried out by other groups

NUMBER OF FATALITIES, by country**

YEAR	ATTACKS	FATALITIES
2011-2016***	5,745	33,300
2017-2021	4,155	18,417

Countries (x-axis): Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Egypt, Mozambique, Cameroon, Kenya, Chad, DR Congo, Libya, Ethiopia, Algeria, Tunisia, Uganda, Sudan
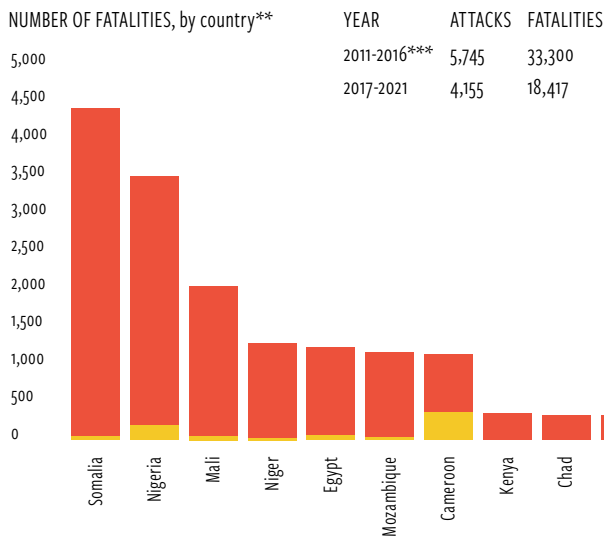
* Does not cover the whole year of 2021
** Burkina not included.
*** Up to February 2016

Source: Dragonfly Terrorism Tracker, IEP Calculations

Subregional trends reveal that while violence committed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin[56] and al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa[57] has declined in relative terms, the spread of violent extremism elsewhere and its spill-over effects on neighbouring countries outweigh that decline. Violent extremist activity has escalated particularly in the Central Sahel area along the Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger borders and in other parts of the Lake Chad basin (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria). In Niger, deaths from terrorism reached unprecedented levels in 2021, more than double those in the prior year, while in 2021, Mali recorded the largest number of terrorist attacks and deaths in the last decade.[58] Meanwhile, beyond traditional hotspots such as the Sahel, evidence points to violent extremist activity spreading to southern Africa, notably Mozambique, and to coastal regions of West Africa, such as Benin and Togo.[59]

Figure 9 illustrates the number of fatalities related to violent extremism on the continent over the past decade. The number of fatalities between 2011 and 2020 totalled 51,717, of which 18,417 occurred since the 2017 study. Compared with the 2017 study, where a significant number of attacks by 'other groups' was recorded, the figure shows that more terror attacks were carried out by groups associated with religious ideologies. While providing only a partial picture of current trends,[60] it highlights that attacks are increasingly spreading into remote, peripheral and cross-border areas,[61] underscoring the transboundary nature and spill-over effects of violent extremism. This has been accompanied by widespread displacement within and across state borders, fuelling pre-existing conflict dynamics and exacerbating already acute humanitarian needs.

Sub-Saharan Africa's landscape of violent extremism is constantly evolving. At present, it is characterized by a multitude of actors operating in different subregions. The emergence of this region as the global epicentre of violent extremism is explained in part by the proliferation of Islamic State ISIS/Daesh) and al-Qaeda affiliated groups, which have spread across the continent since 2010. It is also a result of the former's decline in Iraq and Syria, with 41 percent of all ISIS/Daesh-related attacks globally now occuring in Africa.[62] On the continent overall, this includes the al-Qaeda and ISIS/Daesh factions operating in the Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma regions of the Sahel; ISIS/Daesh-backed insurgencies in Mozambique, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and the nearly 20-year-long al-Shabaab insurgency in Somalia, which is also associated with al-Qaeda. In 2021, the three VE groups responsible for the most fatalities in sub-Saharan Africa were ISIS/Daesh, al-Shabaab and JNIM.[63]

The sub-Saharan region was the only region in the world to experience a worsening of the impact of terror activity in 2021. In the same year, 26 percent of 5,218 terrorist attacks globally took place in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 48 percent of all deaths from violent extremism

ISIS/Daesh has transformed itself from a territory-based group into a broader ideological movement that adheres to a global violent extremist ideology. It adopts an anti-Western interpretation of Islam and promotes violence against those who do not align with its ideology, with branches and affiliates emerging across Africa, Asia and Eurasia. In some cases, it provides more resources for some of its affiliates and attempts to exert greater control over them.[64] Globally, ISIS/Daesh, together with its affiliate groups,[65] was the deadliest terrorist group in 2021, accounting for 29 percent of all deaths from terrorism globally. Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), an ISIS/Daesh affiliate formed in 2016, was the most lethal affiliate in 2021.[66] It was also the most lethal group in the Sahel, responsible for an average of 15.2 deaths per attack in Niger. ISWAP overtook Boko Haram as the deadliest terror group in Nigeria in 2021, with an increased presence in neighbouring countries such as Mali, Cameroon and Niger.

Al-Qaeda now seems to take more of a 'franchise' approach, providing little support or guidance to its affiliates and making relatively few claims on them.[67] In the Sahel, the al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM coalition was the fastest-growing group globally in 2021, responsible for the largest increase in the number of attacks and deaths. While frequently seen as a singular operational entity, it is a coalition of distinct militant Islamist groups with different organizational structures, leaders, and objectives and pursuing local agendas.[68] It was formed in 2017 in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa as a coalition of Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups, including Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, al-Mourabitoun and the Saharan branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.[69] Since it emerged, JNIM has expanded across West Africa while committing acts of violence against civilians, local security forces and counter-terrorism operations composed of international military forces and UN peacekeepers.[70]

Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia and Kenya, is a Salafist militant group active in East Africa. Since it was established in 2006, al-Shabaab has developed a cross-border military strategy, initiating insurgencies across six countries in the Horn of Africa region and carrying out attacks in five of them.[71] It pursues Islamist statehood aspirations in Somalia, with attacks mainly directed at the military, followed by civilians. It remains the deadliest terrorist group in Somalia, responsible for 534 deaths, or 89 percent of all terror-related deaths in the country in 2021.[72]

Examining the dynamics of VE groups in the eight countries under review reveals that while the threat of violence from these groups has been incorporated into the international discourse on ideological or religiously-affiliated global violent extremism, influenced by globalized ideas and discourses, these groups' origins and strategies are highly localized.

In the Lake Chad subregion, for example, Boko Haram originated as a local religious movement in mosques and community circles. It mobilized around deficits in state welfare provision and local grievances, becoming a leading voice in local communities.[73] With the decline of Boko Haram in 2021, ISWAP has increasingly established a foothold in the Lake Chad basin. Both these VE groups have sought to exploit state fragility in the ungoverned territory around Lake Chad, aligning their strategies with local leaders and exploiting inter-communal conflicts to gain recruits.

Elsewhere in the Sahel, JNIM has similarly exploited local grievances over governance deficits and socio-economic conditions to bolster recruitment, particularly in northern and central Mali.[74] Although Katiba Macina has adopted a global violent extremist discourse, it was founded by a respected Fulani preacher in central Mali who built a community presence using a dual tactic of coercion and collaboration.[75] The group uses targeted violence to exploit local resource disputes and foment interethnic conflict, while also positioning itself as an alternative provider of key services, such as justice, security and welfare. As a result, it has become one of the most powerful and lethal groups in the JNIM coalition.

In the Horn of Africa, some Somalis continue to view al-Shabaab, which originated partly as an alternative source of justice in Somalia,[76] as a more reliable provider of justice than the state. Even some residents of Mogadishu, the capital city, are reported to seek recourse to al-Shabaab courts given perceptions of a "slow and corrupt" state judicial system.[77] This highlights the potential appeal of VE groups as alternative service providers, especially in the area of justice, in contexts where the state is absent or weak or is perceived to be corrupt and abusive.

As these VE groups have expanded their areas of control, often in peripheral areas with limited or no state presence, they have in some cases become increasingly like states themselves. Al-Shabaab is described as operating as "both an insurgency and a proto-state power, controlling and governing wide swathes" of the country.[78] Although often highly oppressive and partial 'states', these groups nonetheless hold a quasi-monopoly over coercive force in their areas of control and the ability to enforce their 'laws' reasonably effectively.[79] In this sense, the more structured VE groups have many of the characteristics of a proto-state.[80]

The evolution of such protostates under the control of VE groups is exacerbated by centreperiphery dynamics. For example, some parts of Burkina Faso are symptomatic of Sahel-wide dynamics of state disintegration, where institutions and services increasingly appear to be confined to urban and suburban zones. Faced with escalating violence, state administration, local elected bodies, security forces and state services have withdrawn to capitals and medium-sized cities. Past the security positions at the edge of these enclaves, rural areas have become inaccessible or governed through violence, whether carried out by groups the state can use as proxies or by other groups fighting the state itself.

These dynamics and the evolving character of VE groups into proto-states underscore that one of the most effective prevention methods is to address those deficits in service provision that VE groups claim to fill. This entails strengthening state service provision, which means both the capacity to deliver services and their quality and accountability. It also highlights the importance of understanding the localized origins of violent extremism and adapting PVE strategies so that they are tailored to specific contexts and address local grievances.

While the threat of violence from VE groups has been incorporated into the international discourse on ideological or religious-affiliated global violent extremism, influenced by globalized ideas and discourses, these groups' origins and strategies are highly localized

In addition, violent extremism does not occur in a vacuum, but often emerges within a conflict setting as an attempt to bring about political change. According to the 2022 *Global Terrorism Index*, the dynamics fueling violent extremism are increasingly associated with regions and countries suffering political instability and conflict.[81] The Sahel has experienced a significant up-swing in coups and military takeovers in recent years, with as many as seven successful or attempted military coups countries in the region in the past 26 months.[82] Furthermore, all 10 countries most affected by terrorism in 2021 – which include Somalia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Nigeria – were involved in armed conflict in 2020.

Violent extremism is also spreading in a context ever more affected by climate change and associated ecological threats. Climate change is leading to an exponential increase in extreme weather events in sub-Saharan Africa, including droughts and floods. Somalia, for example, has experienced prolonged drought, leading to the prospect of its worst famine in half a century.[83] According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) *Ecological Threat Report*, six of the 10 countries in the Sahel face extremely high or high risk from ecological threats - including diminishing water resources and food scarcity – which is correlated with vulnerability to terrorism.[84] While further research is required to fully understand the links between climate change and violent extremism, a recent United Nations survey found that 51 percent of recruits in Niger cited climate change-related difficulties as one of their reasons for joining a VE group.[85]

Taken together, these multidimensional factors will stifle Africa's development aspirations unless critical steps are taken now to address the multifaceted drivers and enablers underpinning the continued expansion of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa.

1.2 Security responses to violent extremism in Africa

Responding to the security and development challenges posed by violent extremism has become a major area of policy and programming for both national and international actors over the past two decades. On the African continent, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, national governments and local civil society actors, including faith-based institutions, NGOs and the private sector, are all involved in efforts to tackle violent extremist activity. The international community also plays a significant role, with the United Nations system, the European Union and bilateral partners providing diverse forms of funding and support, alongside numerous international non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors.

A securitized approach to violent extremism has predominated since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US. Under the banner of a global war on terror, it has shaped responses for many years. However, 15 years later, in his 2016 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the United Nations Secretary-General acknowledged that standalone security-driven approaches to countering violent extremism had been insufficient and had often "made things worse".[86] The plan went on to highlight the importance of development approaches in tackling the causes and consequences of violent extremism. Subsequently, UNDP and many other stakeholders have sought to complement the

dominant focus on counter-terrorism with efforts to prevent violent extremism at the source; in other words, by addressing the conditions that give rise to it.

Nevertheless, state-led and securitized responses to violent extremism still predominate and appear to be on the rise. In the Sahel region in particular, an array of multi-country, multi-donor security structures and initiatives have been set up over the past decade to apply counterterrorism-style military force against VE groups. Regional responses with international support include the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Africa Union-backed UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Meanwhile, in Somalia, the long-running regional peacekeeping mission, the African Union Mission in Somalia,[87] has been succeeded by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia. In addition, the French government has carried out military operations against violent extremist activity in the Sahel region with support from other European countries, including Operation Serval in Mali.[88]

Although these counter-terrorism initiatives achieved some initial successes, VE groups continue to expand their presence and their devastating impact across much of sub-Saharan Africa. For example, MINUSMA was considered a "relatively successful peace operation"[89] until 2016, after which VE groups began to attack security forces and the mission sustained a high number of fatalities. MNJTF similarly had initial success in weakening Boko Haram and regaining lost territory, but other VE groups capitalized on reports of human rights abuses against civilians in areas where the task force operated, fuelling anti-government and anti-military grievances among local communities.[90] In other words, more than a decade of standalone security-driven approaches, with substantial military support from the US and Europe, has had limited long-term impact on security and stability in the region.

Although counter-terrorism initiatives achieved some initial successes, VE groups continue to expand their presence and their devastating impact across much of sub-Saharan Africa

Moreover, these international forces have themselves been accused of stoking local conflicts and abuses against civilians in the Sahel.[91] The combined effects of violence perpetrated by VE groups and by regional and national security forces have led to escalating numbers of civilian deaths. While the number of civilians killed in attacks by VE groups in the Sahel has almost doubled since 2020, the number of killings attributed to defence forces has also risen dramatically in recent years.[92]

Indeed, human rights organizations are increasingly raising concerns about the killings of civilians under the banner of counter-terrorism operations.[93]

The limitations of these regional security-driven initiatives can be partly attributed to the fact that militarized approaches tend to "atomize and scatter violent extremists, unintentionally expanding their presence and capabilities".[94] Multilateral structures and operations pose additional challenges. These include the often very limited capacities of state security forces in the countries most affected by violent extremism and the many and often overlapping counter-terrorism forces operating within the same region. This has led to a lack of holistic coordination and inclusive cooperation and left some forces competing for leadership.

More fundamental reasons also explain the limited success of these stateled security-driven responses. UNDP's 2017 study made clear that governance issues, and the distrust and alienation they can engender, are at the core of the growth of violent extremism in Africa. VE groups have a strong appeal in contexts where citizens feel marginalized, receive limited or no government services, and suffer from systemic inequality and pervasive state corruption and repression. Security-driven approaches typically lead with military force. They provide equipment and training that reinforces state security capacities, while largely ignoring governance deficits. Such responses tend to be counterproductive because they bolster governments that many citizens see as corrupt, abusive and unaccountable, thus enhancing the appeal of the perceived alternative offered by VE groups. For example, the French intervention in the Sahel was criticized for revolving mainly around a military-centric strategy, leaving national governments to deal with their populations' underlying grievances.[95]

Given the weakness or absence of national state security capacities, two forms of more informal security responses have also emerged in Africa in response to increased violent extremism: civilian vigilante groups and foreign mercenaries. The former, often based on traditional structures and group identities, have arisen in several areas of the Sahel to tackle violent extremist activity at a more localized level, sometimes with the explicit backing of national governments. In Nigeria's Borno state, for example, vigilante groups emerged in response to Boko Haram in 2013, and were later organized under an umbrella civilian joint task force with limited oversight by the Nigerian military.[96] This model spread to Cameroon in 2014 and to Chad in 2015, where the groups are known as vigilance committees (comités de vigilance).[97] More recently, Burkina Faso legalized and encouraged the formation and deployment of vigilante groups in the fight against violent extremism.[98] Civilian vigilante groups have had some success in repelling attacks at the village and local level, but they are for the most part untrained and ill-equipped. Moreover, they are not subject to any centralized accountability mechanism. This has allegedly led to acts of violence against civilians.[99]

The presence of foreign mercenaries in Africa is also growing. They are deployed ostensibly to counter violent extremist activities and other armed non-state actors, for example, in Mozambique, Mali and the Central African Republic. The Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization, arrived in the Central African Republic in 2017 at the invitation of its president. The group provided weapons and training to the country's weak military in its attempt to combat both VE groups and rebel forces. Although the Wagner Group had some initial success in combatting insurgent groups, they are accused of grave human rights violations against civilian populations. This reinforces already low levels of trust in security actors.[100] Moreover, just as local vigilante groups have little accountability to either the state or its citizens, these foreign mercenary fighters enjoy a high level of impunity.

Notwithstanding the limited success of security-driven responses in the past decade, the vast majority of resources for addressing violent extremism continue to be directed towards security-focused capacities and interventions while prevention efforts remain grossly underfunded

Notwithstanding the limited evidence of the success of relying predominantly on security-driven responses in sub-Saharan Africa and the many challenges referred to above, most international support for addressing violent extremism continues to be directed towards security-focused capacities and interventions rather than being complemented by development-focused ones, which lead to more sustainable outcomes.

The United Nations is clearly a central player in countering and preventing violent extremism, as well as on peace and security issues more broadly. The Secretary-General's 2021 *Common Agenda* includes preventing conflicts and promoting peace as one of its 12 core commitments. This includes a commitment to developing a New Agenda for Peace and reflects learning from UNDP's 2017 study about the need to integrate PVE within peacebuilding. [101]

However, despite this encouraging policy direction, civil society organizations have expressed concerns that in actual practice, the United Nations is reinforcing

militarized and securitized counter-terrorism responses at the expense of peacebuilding and human rights.[102]

In conclusion, despite the proliferation of national and regional initiatives set up to counter violent extremist activity, there is little sign that violent extremism in Africa is declining. Therefore, the need for fresh thinking on approaches and financing mechanisms is even more critical for Member States and the international community.

1.3. Resourcing the response to violent extremism in Africa

The preceding section highlights the limitations of relying on security-driven responses to prevent the spread of violent extremism. Indeed the 2017 study provided important new evidence about the risks of securitized responses to violent extremism. It demonstrated that security-driven responses can be counter-productive if they are conducted in an insensitive manner without accountability and can serve as a prominent accelerator and catalyst of recruitment, rather than the reverse.

There is growing recognition of the need for development approaches to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to join VE groups, as opposed to relying solely on hard security measures. Yet notwithstanding the limited success of security-driven responses in the past decade, the vast majority of resources for addressing violent extremism continue to be directed towards security-focused capacities and interventions while prevention efforts remain grossly underfunded.

In 2020, the world's military spending reached its highest level since the end of the Cold War—almost $2 trillion.[103]

In sub-Saharan Africa, military expenditure totalled $20.1 billion, 4.1 per cent higher than in 2020, but 14 per cent lower than in 2012, according to a study from SIPRI. The 2021 increase was driven primarily by Nigeria, the largest spender in the subregion. Between 2020 and 2021, Nigeria increased its military spending by 56 per cent to $4.5 billion, largely as a result of the country's counter-terrorism operations.[104]

A joint study by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and UNDP founds that the economic cost of terrorism in Africa from 2007 until 2016 was estimated at a total annual cost of USD 97 billion.[105]

In that period, security spending was conservatively estimated to be US$838 billion in Africa, corresponding in absolute terms to almost US$84 billion per year, or the equivalent of immunizing the 117 low and lower-middle income countries for approximately ten years. [106]

The ten years between 2007 and 2016 saw terrorism cost the African continent at a minimum US$119 billion. In reality, this figure is much higher once estimates for GDP losses, lost informal economic activity, extra security spending, and refugee/IDP costs are accounted for [107].

The same study found that countries most heavily affected by terrorism - that is, epicentre countries – are also investing disproportionately more on securitization than other countries.[108] This is reflected in a 3 percent average annual growth rate among epicentre countries since 2007, compared to other African countries, where military spending on average grew about half the pace at 1.6 percent annually.[109]

More recent data from IEP for the period 2011-2020 further suggests that the governments of African states collectively spent over $1.2 trillion on national security, including $607 billion on the military, $664 billion on internal security and $120 billion on private security in that period.[110]

While the sums allocated to counter-terrorism operations cannot be determined with accuracy,[111] and notwithstanding country-specific variations and fluctuations in growth rates over time, the flux in military spending may suggest that such investments remain predominant over the last decade.

The economic cost of terrorism in Africa from 2007 until 2016 was estimated at a total annual cost of USD 97 billion

The affected countries are not the only actors to allocate funding to respond to violent extremism. The international community also does so through ODA. A review of global ODA trends shows that between 2011 and 2020, assistance flowing to African countries totalled $206 billion. The eight countries under review in this study received $47 billion (Figure 10).

While humanitarian assistance has been steadily increasing since 2011, ODA funding to PVE relevant prevention efforts (peacebuilding and secuity-sector reform) has been the least funded by a striking 2% in Africa.[112] In the eight countries under review, peacebuilding and security sector reform - not hard security infrastructure - have

consistently received the lowest share of international development assistance over the past 10 years, receiving only 4 percent of total ODA. This further suggests that the international community is still responding to the challenge of violent extremism in Africa in a reactive manner, rather than adopting a preventive approach

The prioritization of security-driven responses over prevention also applies to other aspects of international resourcing. In recent years, civil society actors have been vocal about the need for the United Nations to invest in complementary peacebuilding and peace-focused efforts, rather than standalone securitized approaches.[113]

FIGURE 10 **TOTAL AND TRENDS IN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA)** (2011-2020)

- ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE
- HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
- PRODUCTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE
- SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
- PEACEBUILDING AND SECURITY-SECTOR REFORM
- OTHER

TOTAL ODA ACROSS CATEGORIES IN AFRICA, 2011-2019

IN AFRICA ACROSS CATEGORIES, 2011-2021

Billions, Constant 2019 USD

TOTAL ODA IN EIGHT SURVEY COUNTRIES, 2011-2019

IN EIGHT SURVEY COUNTRIES ACROSS CATEGORIES, 2011-2021

Billions, Constant 2019 USD

Note: The categories are defined within the OECD DAC donor creditor reporting system (CRS)

Source: IEP Calculations

PILLAR 1
PILLAR 2
PILLAR 3
PILLAR 4

PILLAR 4:
Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all the rule of law
$6.372.056

3%

24%

PILLAR 1:
Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
$57.288.694

PILLAR 3:
Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism
$170.028.817

70%

3%

PILLAR 2:
Measures to prevent and combat terrorism
$7.512.170

Moreover, as shown in Figure 11, the proposed allocation of resources within the United Nations counter-terrorism budget is heavily skewed towards addressing terrorism rather than the conditions that give rise to it. Seventy percent of financial contributions pledged under the 2020-2021 Counter-Terrorism Strategy are allocated to "preventing and combatting terrorism," compared to 24 percent to "addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism".[114] This is despite the Secretary-General's call for balanced implementation of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy's "overlooked" pillars I (prevention) and IV (human rights)."

Notwithstanding the trends towards more reactive and securitized approaches to preventing violent extremism, in the last five years, an emerging evidence base has begun to capture both the tangible economic costs of terrorism and violence reflected in gross domestic product (GDP) and the cost-effective multiplier effects of preventive efforts and investments in sustainable peace.[115]

The evidence base in the *Global Peace Index* illustrates that preventive efforts and investments in 'positive peace',[116] as a measure of societal resilience associated with many desirable socio-economic outcomes such as higher income, greater economic stability and more efficient, transparent and inclusive governance, are highly cost-effective. It also suggests that countries that are more peaceful have higher GDP levels.[117] According to the *Global Peace Index* measure, over the last 70 years, GDP growth in highly peaceful countries has been three times higher (about 2.8 per cent per annum) than in countries with low levels of peace.[118] Furthermore, investments in prevention activities, especially in geographic areas under threat of violent

extremism spill-over, are found to be a key protective factor in reducing state losses by about 2 and 8 percent of GDP per year.[119]

In contrast, beyond the immeasurable cost of lives and livelihoods, countries affected by the impact of violent extremism experience significantly greater declines in GDP per capita.[120] Analysis has shown that on average, between 2002 and 2016, epicentre countries experienced a 17 percent decline in GDP per capita, while other African countries grew their GDP per capita by up to 47 percent.[121] Key sectors such as tourism and foreign direct investment experienced an overall decline of 43 percent in the same period. Informal economic activities in key sectors such as agriculture, on which many livelihoods depend, were severely disrupted. In that period, the share of female employment in the agricultural sector fell nearly three times more than that of male employment, indicating the disproportionate indirect impacts of violent extremism on women's livelihoods and living conditions.

As such, the rationale for halting further growth of violent extremist dynamics is based not only on threats to peace and security, but also on the threat to development prospects at macro and community levels.Based on the notion that prevention is better than cure, it is further estimated that every $1 invested in prevention and peacebuilding activities can reduce the cost of conflict and violent extremism by $16 over the long term.[122] Projected forward from 2017 to 2027, this would save $2.94 trillion in direct and indirect losses from conflict. Achieving this outcome would, however, require an approximate doubling of peacebuilding expenditure in the 31 most fragile and conflict-affected nations of the world.[123]

Some signs are emerging of a more preventive and developmental approach taking shape in national and regional frameworks and strategies. Since 2016, the UNDP's developmental approach to preventing violent extremism has influenced national action plans and strategies in 13 African countries: Benin, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Tunisia, Chad, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda.

At a regional level, UNDP's development-focused PVE agenda has informed the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region. The Liptako Gourma Stabilization Facility as well as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism also reflect the incorporation of a more preventive lens into regional responses to violent extremism. In addition, some development programs have begun working in concert with regional security responses, for example, USAID/West Africa's Peace and Governance program, which supports the G5 Sahel.[124]

At an international level, in 2016, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development updated its guidelines for defining how development aid can be used and recorded. Thus, activities undertaken to prevent violent extremism are now eligible for ODA. The creditor reporting system categories eligible for funding under the broader development-based PVE approach include: education; livelihoods programming; investing in infrastructure; restoring the social contract between states and citizens and increasing social cohesion; investing in prevention by establishing community dialogue platforms and early warning and early response systems; improving the state's public service delivery; deepening democratic institutions and processes; and, reintegration and reconciliation programming. The corresponding ODA donor categories include social infrastructure and services, economic infrastructure and services, production sectors, and humanitarian assistance.

Despite these indications that some stakeholders have changed their approach, eradicating violent extremism in Africa will require a more far-reaching paradigm shift. This will entail moving from viewing violent extremism primarily as a security problem to taking a more holistic view of the phenomenon, with a focus on addressing underlying causes by adopting a prevention approach. To do this will require a major recalibration of approach and resourcing.

Chapter 1: Key findings

1.1. THE SPREAD OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA

- With almost half (48 percent) of all terrorism deaths globally occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, the region has emerged as a new global epicentre of violent extremist activity.

- Violent extremist activity is concentrated in the Sahel region, where four of the 10 countries most impacted by terrorism are located (Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali and Niger), but it is spreading elsewhere in Africa, for example, to Mozambique.

- The VE groups responsible for the most fatalities in sub-Saharan Africa in 2021 were ISIS/Daesh and JNIM in the Sahel and al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa.

- Despite adopting the rhetoric of global violent extremist ideologies, most VE groups in sub-Saharan Africa have their origins in local socio-economic conditions, inter-community dynamics and grievances against the state.

- By providing some degree of local services where the state is absent or not trusted, especially in the areas of justice and employment, VE groups can present themselves as alternative proto-states.

- This is occurring in the context of widespread governance instability, reflected by seven military coups or coup attempts in the Sahel over the past three years.

- The Sahel and Horn of Africa are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, with Somalia currently experiencing unprecedented famine.

**1.2. SECURITY RESPONSES
TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA**

- For the past 20 years, responses to violent extremism have been shaped by the discourse of the global 'War on Terror' leading to security-driven militarized responses.

- Sub-Saharan Africa is characterized by an array of regional counter-terrorism military coalitions, supported by massive international funding.

- These military coalitions have had mixed success in combatting specific VE groups with limited succes in addressing the root causes of violent extremism across the continent.

- Human rights organizations are increasingly raising concerns about the killings of civilians under the guise of counter-terrorism operations.

- Governments' growing use of non-state civilian defence forces and foreign mercenaries has led to increasing abuses and lack of accountability.

- Notwithstanding the limited evidence of the success of relying predominantly on security-driven responses in sub-Saharan Africa, most international support for addressing violent extremism continues to be directed towards security-focused capacities and interventions rather than being complemented by development-focused ones, which lead to more sustainable outcomes.

**1.3. RESOURCING THE RESPONSE
TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA**

- Analysis of flows of national spending on securitization in the last decade reveals that countries most heavily affected by terrorism – epicentre countries - are investing disproportionately greater amounts in securitization than other countries categorized in Africa.

- Support to African states from the international community in the form of ODA is heavily weighted to reactive measures, including humanitarian assistance, rather than to preventive approaches, such as peace-building. This, despite evidence that the latter is far more cost-effective.

- Within the United Nations system as well, funding is disproportionately allocated towards militarized counter-terrorism capacities and operations rather than towards preventing violent extremism by addressing the conditions that give rise to it.

- However, there are some signs are emerging of more preventive, development-focused approach shaping national and regional frameworks for addressing violent extremism in Africa as well as emerging evidence highlighting the cost-effectiveness of a preventive approach.

- Based on the notion that prevention is better than cure, evidence from IEP shows that every $1 invested in prevention and peacebuilding activities can reduce the cost of conflict and violent extremism by $16 over the long term. Projected forward from 2017 to 2027, this would save $2.94 trillion in direct and indirect losses from conflict. Achieving this outcome would, however, require an approximate doubling of peacebuilding expenditure in the 31 most fragile and conflict-affected nations of the world.

- Positive examples of collaboration in the PVE domain include 'Whole-of-government' support to national action plans and for the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in the Lake Chad Basin Region.

"I joined because I felt frustrated with the conditions of everyday life, the life that I lead. I was so poor and vulnerable, with a family to take care of. I thought that in the group I would have a better status as a scholar, I would be better off and in the worst case scenario I would die as a martyr."

Moustapha, *39 years old, Niger*

CHAPTER 2:
PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT
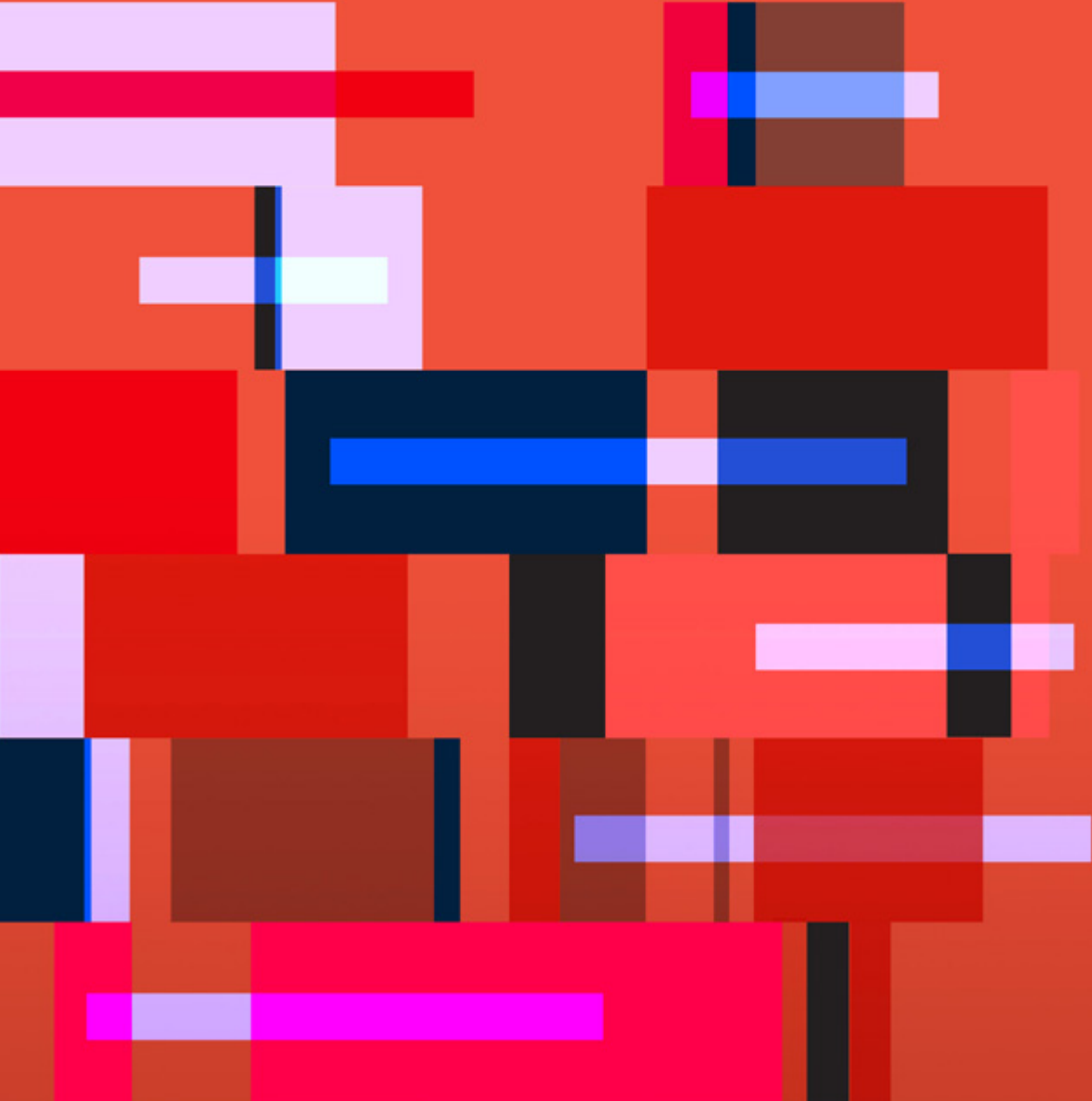
The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report is based on the approach taken in the 2017 study, which seeks to unravel the complex pathways that lead individuals to join VE groups based on the theory of political socialization.[126] Recognizing that a wide range of factors drive and shape each person's pathway through life, this theory refers to a "lifelong process through which a person develops its own unique frame of reference and worldview that guides choices and views on key issues such as politics, religion and ideology."[127] It offers a way to understand the journey towards and away from extremism as a function of the circumstances and key incidents that an individual experiences, as well as the ideas, values and belief systems that he or she is exposed to. The research also investigates factors that affect the speed of recruitment in order to discern the factors that may accelerate the recruitment process. Based on this approach, the research team was able to uncover each respondent's journey map, identifying the enabling conditions, driving factors, incentives and incidents that led them to join a VE group or not to do so. Like the first study, it focuses on four broad clusters – upbringing and education; economic factors; religion and ideologies; and state and citizenship – and examines how these interact and influence an individual's life journey.

2.1. Upbringing and education

Building on the notion of political socialization theory, which relates to "the [development] process by which children, born with an enormous potential for different types of behaviour, come to adopt the specific standards of their own society,"[128] this research explores respondents' family circumstances and early childhood. It seeks to examine the connections between early childhood development, where identity formation occurs and one's world view begins to take shape, and subsequent susceptibility to recruitment.[129] Findings in this cluster are grouped under the following subheadings: peripheries and isolation; family circumstance and childhood happiness; and secular (public) education.

2.1.1 PERIPHERIES AND ISOLATION

UNDP's 2017 study focused on the acute vulnerabilities of peripheral areas and borderlands, which are often vulnerable to the direct and indirect spillover effects of violent extremist activity. These are geographically large territories that are difficult to govern and their borders are porous. In addition, their remoteness from the centre is also a defining feature of socio-economic and political life, associated with neglect by the state, marginalization and underdevelopment, despite community resourcefulness and resilience. Accordingly, such areas provide fertile ground for VE groups, which exploit governance vacuums and mobilize grievances through compelling narratives that tap into the narrative of state neglect and marginalization. Indeed, the influence and conditions of place of birth on life prospects and the implications for access to basic services and opportunities are well established in academia and the development field more broadly.[130]

Building on the 2017 study, the *Journey to Extremism* 2.0 dataset confirms that conditions relating to geographic location, such as remoteness, are significant factors in shaping an individual's life path, both in terms of upbringing and of prospects and opportunities later in life.

As Figure 12 illustrates, most respondents grew up in some of the most remote and peripheral areas of the countries under review with 62 percent growing up in villages, only 7 percent in cities. This compares to the reference group respondents of which 42 percent grew up in villages and 27 percent in cities.

While this reflects, in part, the sampling method, the data-set also reveals a noticeable difference between the primary group and the reference group in terms of exposure to other ethnicities and religions when growing up, suggesting this may influence future susceptibility to join a VE group.

Notwithstanding variance across the eight countries under review, 53 percent of reference group respondents and 50 percent of forced recruits stated that they had had friends from other religions while growing up. However, the proportion for voluntary recruits was only 40 percent, as Figure 13 illustrates. A similar observable difference was recorded between the reference group and the voluntary group in terms of having friends from other ethnic groups and tribes. Individuals in the voluntary groups reported mixing less with friends from other ethnicities than did their reference group counterparts, again suggesting the significance of peripheral location in shaping vulnerability to violent extremism.

FIGURE 12 **WHERE RESPONDENTS SPENT HIS/HER CHILDHOOD (UNTIL 15TH BIRTHDAY)** BY VOLUNTARY AND REFERENCE

■ VOLUNTARY
■ REFERENCE

VILLAGE 62%

CITY 7%

BIG TOWN 13%

SMALL TOWN 18%

VILLAGE 42%

CITY 27%

BIG TOWN 17%

SMALL TOWN 14%
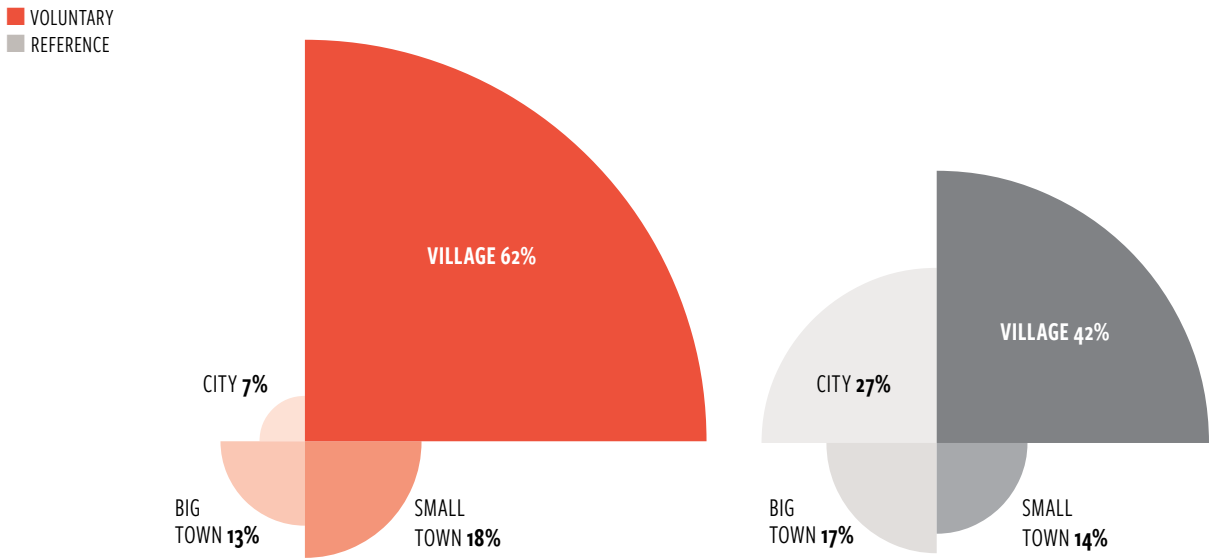
FIGURE 13 **GROWING UP, DID YOU HAVE FRIENDS FROM OTHER RELIGIONS?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

Answered by 2177 out of 2186

YES	NO
40%	60%
50%	50%
53%	47%
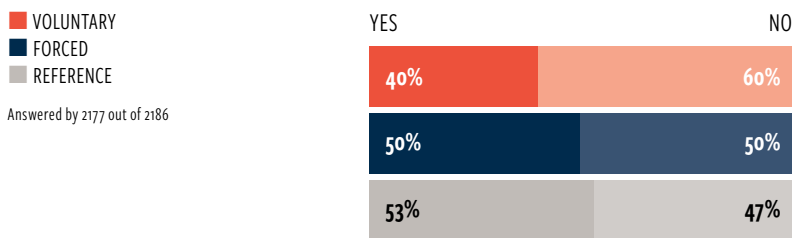
As Section 2.2.1 will highlight, primary group respondents were also considerably more inclined to perceive their religion to be under threat, as well as to express negative views about religious diversity. As such, the new dataset robustly corroborates the findings of the 2017 study, which suggested that greater mobility and socio-ethnic exposure to others may contribute to greater resilience against violent extremism. Likewise, it found that the nature of a child's upbringing shapes underlying threat perceptions and can lead to a hardening of attitudes towards others, which may contribute to future recruitment.[131]

2.1.2. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CHILDHOOD HAPPINESS

The role of upbringing in contributing to inherent or underlying predispositions and vulnerabilities towards 'terrorist' behaviours or at-risk mindsets has been the subject of considerable psychological analysis. In addition, an emerging evidence base on mental health and psychosocial support has shown how neglect and violence in early childhood may have devastating impacts on life prospects and affect violent behaviour later in life.[132] However, few studies have focused directly on childhood experiences as a factor in joining VE groups. Studies that have examined this aspect found high levels of experience of childhood violence among adults involved in violent extremism.[133] This is not to say that traumatic childhood experiences will necessarily determine who will go on to engage in violent extremist activity or that those who do not have such

experiences will be immune from radicalization. However, it does deepen the understanding of vulnerabilities and risk factors and the likelihood of involvement in VE groups.[134] Moreover, although the role of family is generally recognized as a crucial aspect of a person's socialization process, early experiences related to susceptibility to recruitment to VE groups across different country settings has not been thoroughly examined.

As in the 2017 study, the new dataset finds that parental involvement and interest in a respondent's childhood is statistically significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. The same applies for perceptions of childhood happiness. This result shows that the likelihood of voluntary recruitment decreases with increased perceptions of either childhood happiness or parental involvement in childhood.

Depending on exact model specification, the econometric analysis presented in Models 7-9 in the Annex shows that, all else being equal, a one-point increase in the childhood happiness rating decreases the odds of voluntary recruitment by around 10 percent, while a one-point increase in the parental involvement rating decreases the odds of voluntary recruitment by around 25 percent. This finding is highly consistent with the 2017 study, which found that individuals rating 7 or higher in childhood happiness were between 9 and 28 percent less likely to be among the voluntary recruits.[135]

FIGURE 14 **RATING OF CHILDHOOD HAPPINESS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE
Answered by 2182 out of 2191

RATING ON A SCALE OF 1 (not happy) TO 10 (very happy)

6.0   6.8   6.2
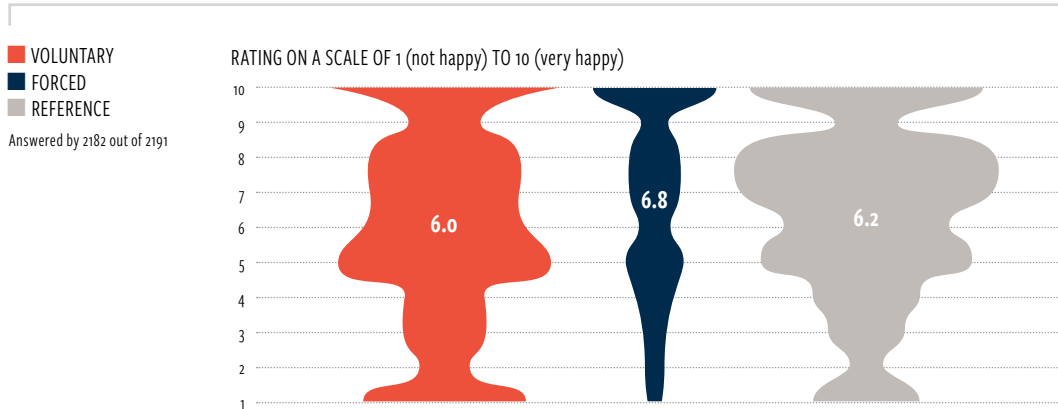
2.1.4. EDUCATION

The relationship between education and extremism has been described as a double-edged sword given its paradoxical potential, as education can serve to both counter violent extremist narratives and to radicalize.[136] On the one hand, it can contribute to indoctrination, reinforcing attitudes that predispose people to accept univalent, reductionist understandings of the world. On the other, it can be an important lever for fostering civic engagement, diversity and critical thinking and thus offer vital protection against extremist ideas. Prior evidence points to access to education services, and their duration and quality, as a key factor in building resilience to violent extremism. By contrast, peripheral areas and borderlands, often characterized by socio-economic marginalization and limited welfare services, including access to education, are known to be more prone to the spread of extremist ideologies and narratives.

UNDP's 2017 study suggested that susceptibility to future recruitment is significantly influenced by the lack of even basic education.[137] Echoing the findings of the previous study, the new research unequivocally confirms that levels of education are statistically significantly lower among voluntary recruits than among individuals in the reference group. Despite cross-country variations in terms of both access to and quality of education, a significantly higher proportion of reference group respondents had received some secular (public) education (59 percent), compared to both voluntary recruits (33 percent) and forced recruits (33 percent).

As Figure 15 further illustrates, a significant gender difference exists in terms of secular (public) education between the forced recruits and the reference group. Among the reference group, 62 percent of males reported having received some secular (public) education, compared to 52 percent of females. For forced recruits, the proportion was much higher for females (36 percent) than for males (30 percent). The targeting of schoolgirls by VE groups, notably Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, as a deliberate organizational tactic based on ideological beliefs regarding the rejection of Westernstyle education and the role of women and girls in society, is likely to explain this significant variation in the pool of forced recruits.

When posing the question, *Why did you not attend?*, to those who reported that they had not attended secular (public) school, the most common response among the reference group and the voluntary recruits was their parents' or families' decision not to enrol them. While this may reflect the gender roles of young men and women within the household and the family, the data do not reveal a significant gender variation. For forced recruits, the primary reason given was the lack of schooling, likely reflecting the peculiar vulnerabilities linked to forced recruitment patterns, where the targeting of children in many cases is used as an illicit tactic, depriving youth, in particular young women and girls, education and access to schooling.[138]

FIGURE 15 **SECULAR EDUCATION (PUBLIC)** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 2183 out of 2191

BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

33%   33%   59%

BY GENDER

34% 31%   30% 36%   62% 52%
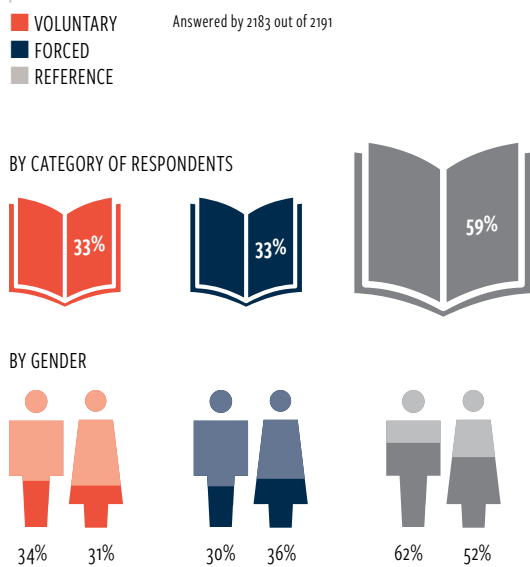
FIGURE 16 **WHY DID YOU NOT ATTEND SCHOOL?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

Answered by 930 out of 1213

Parents decision not to enroll	39%	30%	44%
Lack of finacial means			
Death of parents/orphan			
Personal decision not to study			
Absence of school	21%	32%	21%
Work duties (housework, pastoralist, farming)			
Preferred only Quranic education			
Only boys recived education in the household			
Grew under the influence of a VEG			
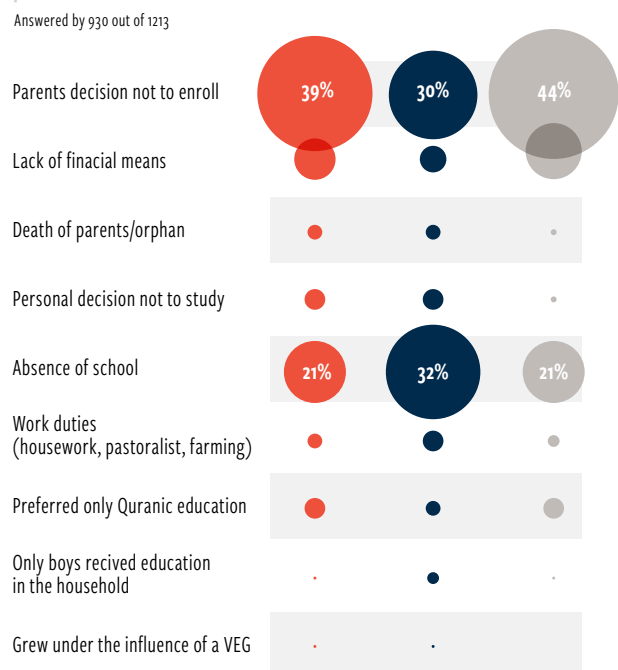
FIGURE 17 **LEVEL OF SECULAR EDUCATION (PUBLIC)** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

- **VOLUNTARY**
- **FORCED**
- **REFERENCE**

Answered by 948 out of 948
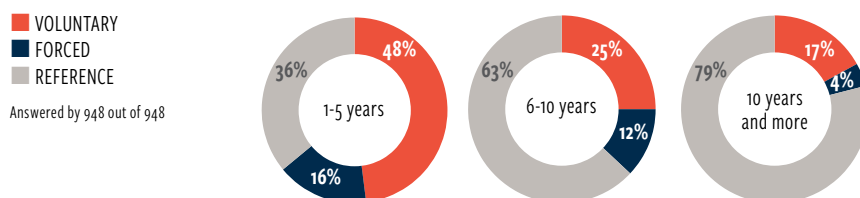
More years of secular (public) education is statistically significantly associated with a lower likelihood of voluntary recruitment. All else being equal, results from econometric Models 7 – 9 in the Annex suggest that an additional year of secular (public) education reduces the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by approximately 13 percent.

As illustrated in Figure 17, the distribution of years of secular (public) education among voluntary recruits is weighted towards one to five years as compared to the reference group, where a discernibly higher proportion reported that they received six to 10 years of education or 10 years or more (79 percent in the reference group, compared to 17 percent in the voluntary). Similarly, when comparing education levels across respondent groups, 63 percent of reference group respondents had six or more years of secular (public) education, while the primary respondents reported that only 25 percent of voluntary recruits and 12 percent of forced recruits had completed these levels.

These findings are similar to those in the 2017 study, which found that a significantly higher percentage of voluntary recruits reported the lowest levels of secular (public) schooling compared to the reference group. However, the distribution in this study is markedly higher: 56 percent of the reference group reported having received five to 10 years of education, as compared to 39 percent of voluntary recruits.

Moreover, when comparing those who join a VE group withing one month of first contact to those who join within one year, the data further show that receiving relatively less education tends to affect the speed of the recruitment process. The group of 'quick recruits' is associated with less education than recruits who are slower to join. Those who joined quickly had four years of schooling on average, compared to almost seven years (6.8 years) among those who joined more slowly.

As a case in point, a recent study on recruitment into al-Shabaab in Somalia found that the educational profile of recruits skewed heavily towards little to no education, leading to vulnerability to recruitment among those individuals.[139] This underscores the role of education as an important source of resilience and a corresponding vulnerability factor where individuals have no or only limited access to education. Boko Haram's strategy of targeting young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds who have limited formal education is also a case in point, in which the group's preaching about Islam and its glorification of Islamic societies fill a profound knowledge gap. This helps to explain Boko Haram's appeal in the states of Borno and Yobe, for instance, which have the lowest literacy rates in Nigeria. The continuing slow pace of development in northeastern Nigeria, where education and literacy levels are low, provides fertile ground for Boko Haram to preach to those who are most vulnerable to its rhetoric.[140]

However, growing up in environments characterized by limited access to education does not alone provide the most powerful explanation for recruitment to violent extremism. Ultimately, the quality of teaching and education matters. Good quality education, whether religious or secular (public), that contributes to the development of critical thinking and cognitive skills enables individuals to become informed and to identify disinformation. Furthermore, the value of education as a key source of resilience to violent extremism extends to include the aspect of socialization that is provided through schooling and its quality. As a result, education in itself is not sufficient to prevent extremism and cannot be conflated with PVE or peace education. Rather, it must be addressed holistically through broader, long-term support to instil critical thinking, values for citizenship and respect for diversity, as reiterated by researchers and practitioners in the field.

"...They were preaching that if we join them, we will go to Heaven and their ideology is the only way to worship Allah"

Kurama, 38 years old, Cameroon

2.2. The role of religion and religious Ideologies

Against a backdrop of rising Islamophobia, VE groups are often associated with religious ideologies linked to a globalized extremist discourse. However, UNDP's 2017 study revealed that VE groups in Africa tend to have highly localized roots and unique trajectories, which interact with a wide range of social, cultural and political factors. To deepen the understanding of the role of religion in relation to violent extremism, the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report thus adopts a nuanced approach, distinguishing between the significance for recruitment of perceptions about radical religious ideologies on the one hand, and actual religious education and literacy levels on the other. Findings in this cluster are grouped under two subheadings: perceptions of religious ideologies and religious education.

2.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES

The post-9/11 global discourse on terrorism approached religious beliefs and ideologies as intrinsic drivers of violent extremism. A growing body of evidence has since come to deepen the understanding of the relationship between religion and radicalization. By approaching it as an interactive, social process and as an expression of identity, it can be understood as the outcome of an individual's psycho-social journey.[141] As markers of identity, ideologies and religion can be understood as a vehicle for channelling, expressing, reconstructing and performing individual and group identity. This is evident in contexts where religious identities collide and compete with state authority and individual identity. It is especially the case when charismatic individuals are able to instrumentalize religion as a vehicle for mobilizing existing grievances, feelings of alienation, marginalization and frustration through compelling narratives and representations, however much they may distort the religion's original texts and values.[142] Other evidence points to the significant role of religious institutions and networks, which can be leveraged to build a footprint locally and establish credibility, while exploiting ethnic or other group identities to drive recruitment and expansion.[143]

Provided with a multiple-answer format question about their primary reasons for joining VE groups, the 2017 study found religious factors – specifically, '*the religious ideas of the group at the time of joining*' – to be the most significant driver of voluntary recruitment, as cited by 40 percent of respondents.[144] In the new dataset, this falls sharply, with 17 percent of voluntary recruits citing the group's religious ideas as the primary reason motivating them to join a VE group. Belief in the group's religious leader accounted for 6 percent, or half than in the first study, where 13 percent pointed to this as a determining factor. Accordingly, religion does not emerge strongly as the first response in explaining recruitment to VE groups, as found in the 2017 study.

Rather, other factors, such as joining with family and friends (22 percent) and employment (25 percent), emerge as more significant factors shaping pathways towards recruitment, underlining the behavioural and socialized dimensions and underlying socio-economic incentives in the recruitment process. Moreover, as will be further elaborated in Chapter 3 on the recruitment process, some significant gendered variation emerges: while 'religious ideas of the group' emerged as a more influential factor among male respondents, it did not appear to be as salient for female respondents.

When asked whether, on joining, respondents felt that their religion was under threat, 36 percent of voluntary respondents stated yes, compared to 24 percent in the reference group.[145] This represents an interesting variation when compared to the 2017 study, which did not show a statistically significant relationship between the voluntary recruits and reference group but found much higher levels of perceived threat in respondents' outlook (63 percent in the voluntary groups, compared to the 70 percent in the reference group).

After controlling for other factors in the econometric analysis, Models 7-9 show that the significance of a perceived threat to religion on the likelihood of voluntary recruitment remains. Holding all other variables constant, the effect of not perceiving one's religion to be under threat decreases the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by 48 to 50 percent.[146] This further underscores the value of religious diversity in strengthening cohesiveness and the importance of trust building measures.

FIGURE 18 **PRIMARY REASONS FOR JOINING THE VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUP** BY VOLUNTARY GROUP

Multiple-answer question. Shows percent of individuals who selected reason.

Answered by 519 out of 756

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES **25%**

RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE GROUP **17%**

BEING PART OF **SOMETHING BIGGER** THAN MYSELF **12%**

JOINING WITH FRIENDS/FAMILY **22%**

BELIEVED MY **RELIGIOUS LEADER 6%**

POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE GROUP **5%**

ADVENTURE 5%

ETHNIC PRINCIPLES OF THE **GROUP 4%**

BELIEVED MY TEACHER 2%

SECURITY 2%
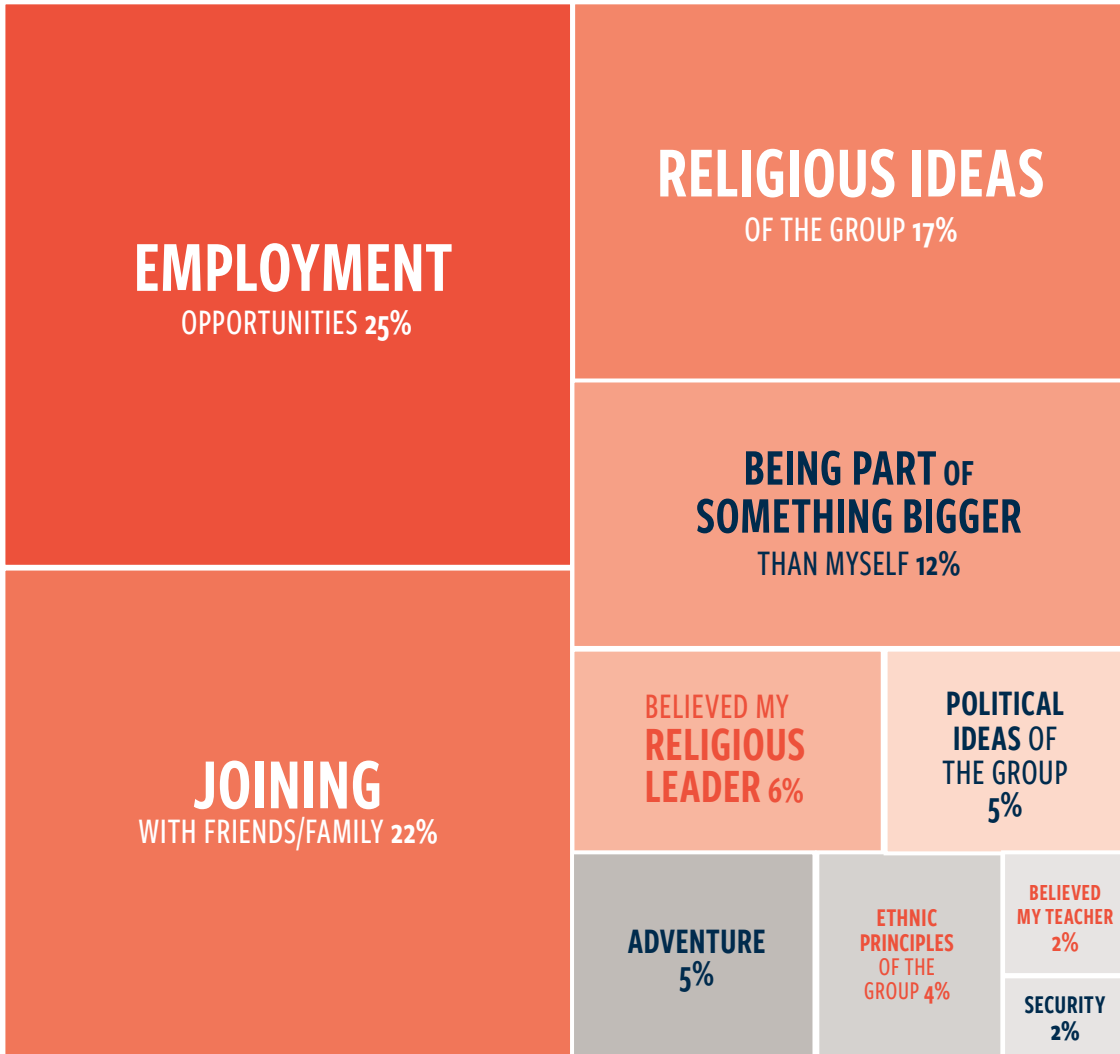
FIGURE 19 **DID YOU PERCEIVE YOUR RELIGION TO BE UNDER THREAT?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

YES   NO
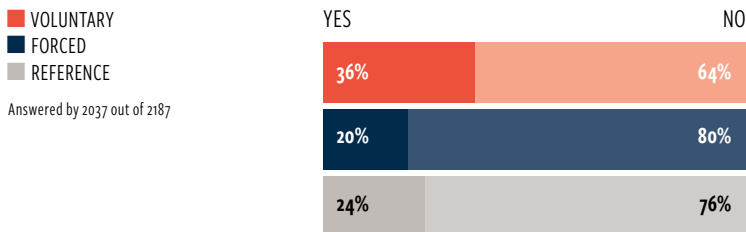
Answered by 2037 out of 2187

	YES	NO
VOLUNTARY	36%	64%
FORCED	20%	80%
REFERENCE	24%	76%

When asked what kind of threat they perceived to their religion, 30 percent of voluntary recruits stated that it was both physical and ideological.[147] These findings support other analyses, which illustrate that by approaching religion as a social identity anchored in a system of guiding beliefs, it serves a dual function. It offers both a distinctive sanctified belief system and perpetual group membership that transcends identification with any other social groups.[148]

This suggests that when religion operates as a powerful expression of individual and group identity and offers a way to channel existing grievances and perceived threats, the likelihood of recruitment increases. The sense of perceiving one's religion to be under threat may present a source of future risk with regard to the potential of violent extremism expanding further, with populists' narratives further serving to inflame and deepen such threat perceptions.

Recalling the initial factors that shape identity formation early on – including the association between limited exposure to others and negative tolerance and perceptions of other ethnicities and religions – the new dataset further reveals a lower degree of tolerance towards religious diversity later in life in the outlook of voluntary recruits.

When asked whether they believed that religious diversity in their country was a good thing, 54 percent of voluntary recruits answered yes, in contrast to the large proportion of reference group respondents (82 percent) and forced recruits (75 percent). This marks a shift from the initial research, which found no substantial difference between the outlook of those in the voluntary and reference groups.

Among primary respondents who expressed a negative perception of religious diversity, the open-ended responses show that voluntary recruits, in particular, identified the ideology of the VE group they joined, stating, for example, that 'Islam was the one true religion' (49 percent). Respondents also pointed to religious diversity as a cause of conflict or distrust (46 percent), significantly higher than corruption, for example (5 percent).

The findings may reflect the broader socio-political environment in many of the surveyed countries, where religion is intertwined with politics and is co-opted by elites as part of their competition for power. It also underlines how VE groups can appropriate and exploit the globalized ideology of religion as a vehicle to weaponize and reignite existing tensions and conflicts along religious and ethnic lines. In particular, the absolutist rejection of religious diversity underlines the success of extremist narratives in hardening

FIGURE 20 **DID YOU/DO YOU THINK RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN YOUR COUNTRY IS A GOOD THING?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 1840 out of 2188

YES · NO

	YES	NO
VOLUNTARY	54%	46%
FORCED	75%	25%
REFERENCE	82%	18%
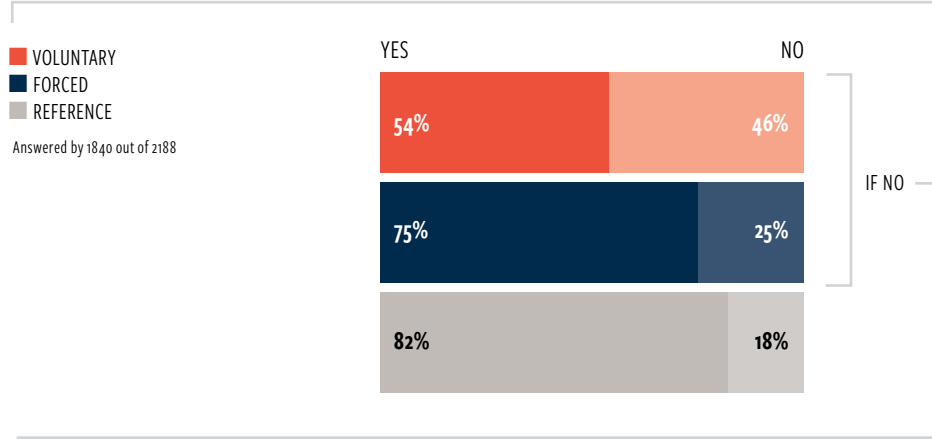
IF NO

IF NO. WHY DO/WHY DID YOU THINK RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN YOUR COUNTRY IS NEGATIVE?

Answered by 214 out of 231

Cause of conflict/violence/distrust/marginalization/division — 46% / 68%

Islam is the only true religion/cannot live among infidels — 49% / 32%

It contributes to corruption — 5%
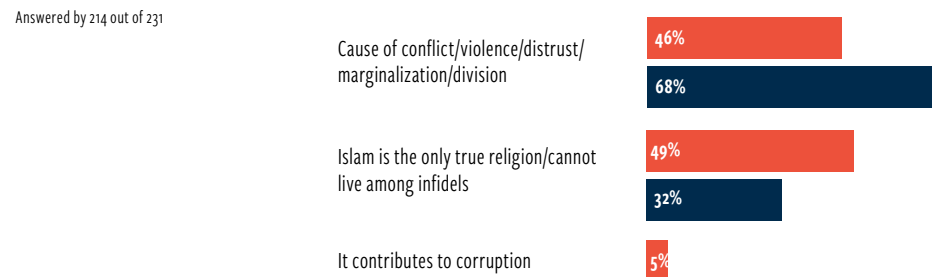
social and religious attitudes, which can potentially serve to justify the use of violence. This strategy is evident in the approach of Boko Haram, which managed to build a powerful movement by systematically exploiting ethnic identities and divisions. While framing the group as 'an Islamic movement', it mobilized Kanuri populations along ethnic lines. This enabled it to recruit members beyond those populations' religious fold and from communities with similar ethic identities, including across the border in Niger, Chad and Cameroon.[149] Similarly, while Katiba Macina, a JNIM-affiliated group, initially focused on recruiting among the Fulani ethnic group, it too increasingly tapped into local grievances and inter-ethnic tensions, drawing on religion's egalitarian aspects and exploiting feelings of victimization and injustice. This has had a broad appeal, particularly when juxtaposed with the state.[150]

Looking beyond the notion of a passive individual swayed by compelling narratives of violent extremism, research has sheds light on how individuals may use the VE groups' counter-narratives to construct both individual and group identities as a counterpoint to the prevailing gerontocratic and patriarchal norms and traditional structures, which limit individuals' agency. As illustrated elsewhere, the positionality of both women and youth in terms of religion is both ambiguous and distinct: ambiguous due to the disconnect between the role and status accorded to women and youth and to their lived experience, and distinct in that VE groups may provide space and means for a reimagined identity, one that is detached from historical and, often, patriarchal roots.[151]

For example, evidence from central Mali suggests that VE groups impose 'jihadist governance' and challenge non-Islamic traditions linked to hierarchical rankings, social prohibitions and increases in bride price. This strategy may resonate with the aspirations of young men and women,[152] underscoring how extremist narratives may be seen as a means of reconstructing and expressing identities, channelling frustration and grievances, and increasing agency.

2.2.2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS LITERACY

This section focuses on the role of religious education and religious literacy. As noted above (see "Education"), the ambivalent relationship between education and radicalization shows that education can serve both as a weapon to radicalize and a shield against extremist ideas.

The 2017 study found that both voluntary and forced recruits on average had received fewer years of religious education than those in the reference group. It further found that receiving at least six years of religious schooling can sharply reduce the likelihood of voluntary recruitment within the sample.[153] The new study confirms the statistically significant relationship between a lack of religious education among voluntary recruits compared to the reference group, yet it does not find additional years alone to have a significant effect, thus highlighting the importance of the quality of religious education, not simply the number of years.

FIGURE 21 **HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

Answered by 2186 out of 2189

Some religious education — 77% — 71% — 80%

No religious education — No 23% — No 29% — No 20%
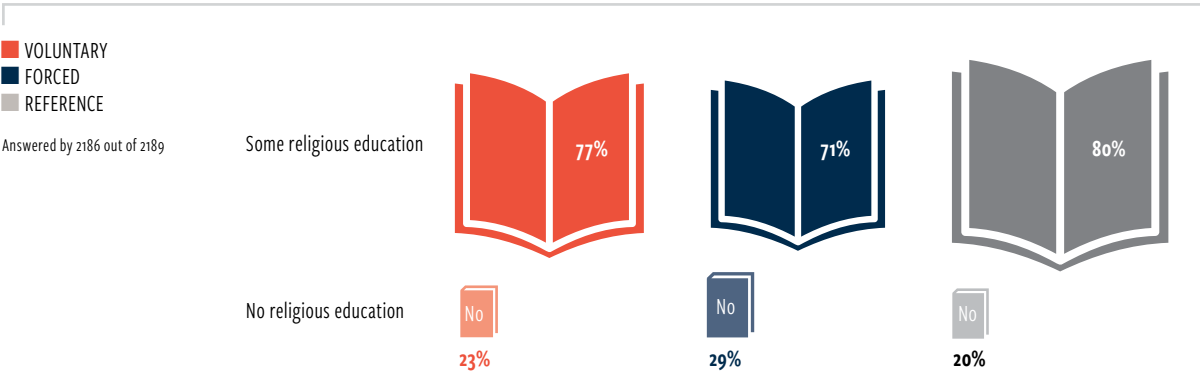
FIGURE 22 **PROPORTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAVING RECEIVED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION,** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS and GENDER

■ MALE
■ FEMALE

Answered by 2186
out of 2189

VOLUNTARY — 78% 72%

FORCED — 64% 79%
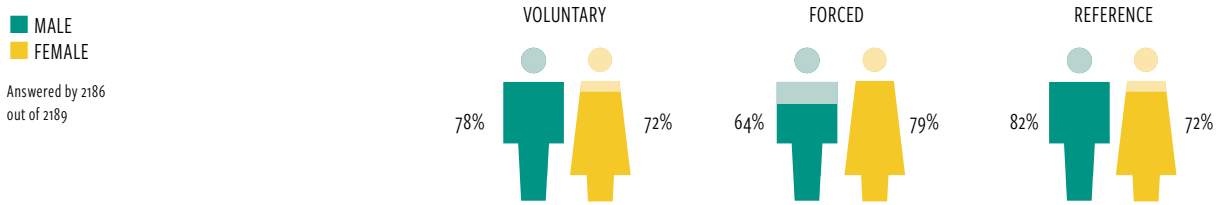
REFERENCE — 82% 72%

FIGURE 23 **YEARS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

Answered by 1639
out of 1704

1-5 years: 48% 13% 39%

6-10 years: 28% 12% 60%

10 years and more: 28% 9% 63%
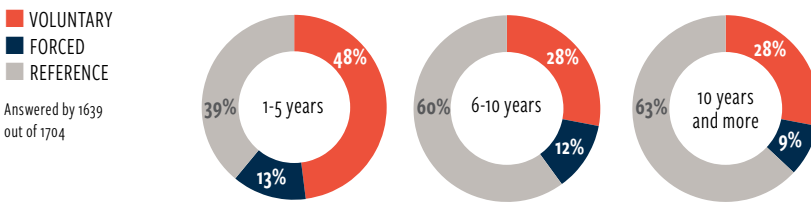
In the new dataset, the proportions of recruits who received any religious education appear similar between voluntary recruits (77 percent) and reference group respondents (80 percent) as a result of growing up under similar conditions. It might further reflect some degree of religious heterogeneity among the countries under review. Yet, the study finds that a statistically higher proportion of voluntary recruits received no religious education (23 percent) compared to the reference group (20 percent).

The dataset reveals a significant gender disparity in terms of religious education when comparing voluntary recruits with forced recruits, as highlighted in Figure 22. A higher percentage of female forced recruits had received religious education (79 percent) compared with their male counterparts (64 percent). This likely reflects the relatively higher proportion of schoolgirls in the sample of forced recruits from Nigeria, who were abducted by Boko Haram as part of their purported strategy to destabilize and destroy 'Westernized' education facilities and symbols.[154] However, more males had received religious education than their female counterparts in both the voluntary and reference groups.

As highlighted in Figure 23, voluntary recruits are more likely to have received fewer years of religious education than the reference group.

48 percent of voluntary respondents state to have received between one and five years, compared to 39 percent of the reference group and 13 percent of forced recruits. Reference group respondents are also more likely to have 6 to 10 years of education or 10 or more, relative to the primary group counterparts.

The level of religious education also appears to have some effect on the speed of recruitment. Similar to the finding on secular (public) and religion education presented above, recruits with relatively less religious education tend to join a VE group more quickly than recruits with more education; that is, the group of 'quick recruits' received less education than those who were slower to join. Of recruits who joined within one month, 76 percent had some religious education, compared to 79 percent of those who took more than a month to join. Additionally, the average years of religious education were statistically significantly fewer for those who joined quickly (4.7 years) than those who took longer to join (5.5 years).

The 2017 study highlighted the way in which religious literacy – defined here as the ability to read and interpret religious texts, as opposed to religious education and studies – influences susceptibility to recruitment.

Answered by 107 out of 110

Do you read the Quran by yourself?

YES			NO
9%	27%	22%	42%
Always	Sometimes	Never	

Do you always understand what you read?
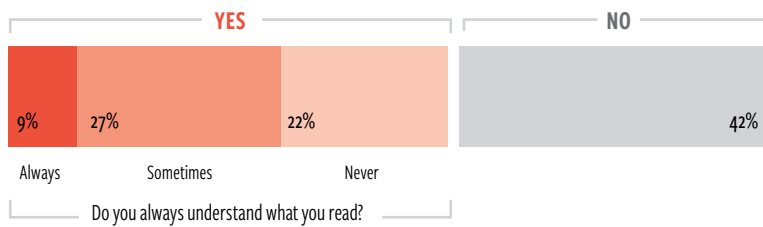
This is premised on the notion that voluntary recruits, who are associated with lower levels of education and literacy levels, are further hampered by the difficulty of accessing religious texts in their own language, as the Quran is predominantly available only in Arabic. This leads to a higher degree of dependency on intermediaries to both read and interpret religious texts. Accordingly, the 2017 study posited that a lower degree of literacy and knowledge of religious texts was associated with greater dependency on the interpretations of preachers and other religious conduits, rendering these individuals more vulnerable to recruitment.

As in the 2017 study, the new dataset identified a distinct gap among voluntary recruits between reading and understanding the Quran, with a total of 64 percent saying they either did not read the religious texts by themselves (42 percent) or 'never' understood the texts when reading (22 percent), as Figure 25 illustrates. Only 9 percent stated to 'always' understand the texts they read. This compares to the 2017 study where a total of 57% of voluntary recruits admitted that they either didn't read or had little to no understanding of the religious texts or interpretations.

The *Journey to Extremism* findings are significant in a global context of rising Islamophobia, in which violent extremism is often conflated with Islam. Rather than the studies themselves being a risk factor, they in turn highlight religious education as a significant source of resilience for countering extremist narratives.

The Journey to Extremism findings are significant in a global context of rising Islamophobia, in which violent extremism is often conflated with Islam. Rather than the studies themselves being a risk factor, they in turn highlight religious education as a significant source of resilience for countering extremist narratives.

This conversely implies that religious proselytizing is a more effective recruitment tool when it targets those with a low level of both secular (public) and religious education. The research further brings attention to how reliance on intermediaries may influence vulnerability towards imported dogma and indoctrination, whether in the school, the family, or other social and religious settings. This further contributes to underscoring the relevance of understanding the milieu in which radicalization takes place and the social context in which it shapes an individual's trajectory toward violent extremism.

2.3. Economic factors

This section focuses on the economic situation of respondents at the time of recruitment to highlight the economic needs and incentives that may have influenced their decision to join a VE group. This is explored through questios relating to respondents' economic situations at the time of recruitment and their rating of the pertinence of economic factors to their decision to join the violent extremist group.

2.3.1. ECONOMIC FACTORS AS DRIVERS OF RECRUITMENT

Despite a widespread assumption that youth unemployment is linked to violent extremism, the evidence on the relationship between employment and violent extremism is mixed. [155] Theories such as the youth bulge theory suggest that surplus populations of 'idle youth' excluded from economic opportunity are especially prone to being radicalized and pulled into violent (and other) forms of extremism. Others, however, have warned against an overly deterministic understanding of the relationship between poverty, unemployment and violence.[156] While income inequality, poverty and underemployment may contribute to grievances that create an environment conducive to violent extremism, empirical evidence suggests that economic deprivation as a driver of extremist violence remains inconclusive.[157] Indeed, as emphasized in the 2017 study, and elsewhere, it is widely accepted that VE groups exploit

perceptions of economic hardship or socio-economic marginalization,[158] underpinned by grievances animated by the shortcomings of the state itself, including its inability to generate sustainable growth and dignified jobs. Economic factors may thus be difficult to disentangle from other grievances and aspirations, which is why they are often described as one among a number of issues driving recruitment of individuals into VE groups.

Perhaps less surprisingly, in an overall context of socio-economic hardship, deprivation and underemployment that emerges in the countries under review, economic incentives appear in this dataset to have been an important element underpinning the decisionmaking of respondents with regard to joining a VE group. Recalling Figure 18 (page 67) highlighting the mosaic of primary reasons cited for joining VE groups, 'employment opportunities' now emerge as the most cited determinant driver for joining, over ideological and religious factors. It is also cited as the most immediate need at the time of joining.

Yet, contrary to the 2017 study, which found the economic status of respondents, notably unemployment, to significantly influence the likelihood of joining a VE groups, no significant variation was found in this sample between the reference and primary groups.

Rather, economic deprivation appears to translate into a generalized sense of hardship and grievances affecting the outlook of all respondents, further underpinned by gender roles and identities affecting the socio-economic incentives and motivations.

Figure 25 highlights the distribution of livelihood status according to the categories of respondents. When asked 'What did you do before you joined or got involved with the group?', the figure shows that such livelihood status varies, although marginally, between the voluntary recruits the groups and the reference group prior to joining the VE groups.

Most voluntary recruits self-identified as having some level of employment at the time of joining, compared to their reference group counterparts.[159] Yet when further examining the economic status of voluntary recruits, the analysis confirms that the majority of those employed were in the informal sector, largely unskilled or semi-skilled.

Forty-four percent of voluntary recruits who identified as employed at the time of joining were working primarily in the informal sector, in largely unskilled or semi-skilled roles (vulnerable employment).

FIGURE 25 **LIVELIHOOD OF RESPONDENTS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

Answered by 1950 out of 2150

Student **11%**   Employed **49%**   Unemployed **40%**

Student: 32%, 21%, 47%
Employed: 44%, 9%, 47%
Unemployed: 34%, 13%, 53%
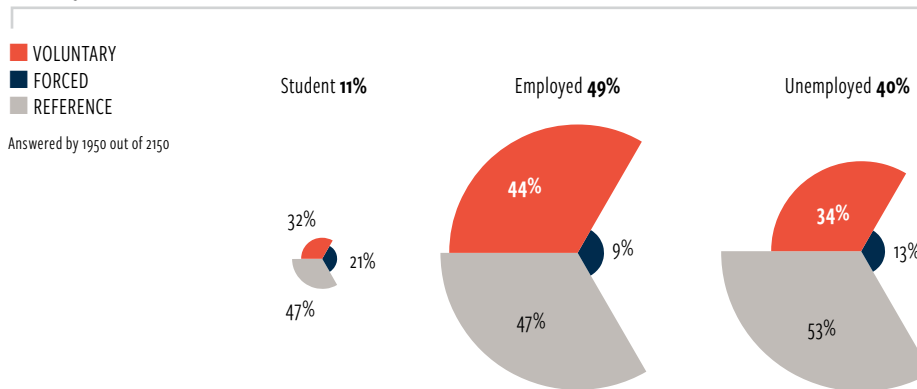
" After my father lost his job, I wanted to financially support my family being part of something that really exist. I also wanted to have power over people and take the controlling lead so that people would respect me."

Hasan, *18 years old, Somalia*

This compares to the reference group, where 47 percent reported being employed, presenting a minor variation from the economic status of the voluntary recruits. In contrast, 34 percent voluntary recruits reported that they were unemployed at the time of joining, compared to a relatively larger proportion of the reference group (53 percent).

Accordingly, the analysis does not find a significant variation in the respondents' outlook , why livelihood status is not found to be a sufficient predictor for explaining the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. This is significant, as this finding runs counter to the 2017 study, which found that individuals who were working or studying were between 3 and 27 percent less likely to be among the group of voluntary recruits. This may reflect the context of widespread multidimensional poverty found in peripheral areas, often associated with more limited opportunities for income-generating activities and livelihood prospects, affecting both the primary and reference groups.

The findings may further be explained by the fact that the average earnings of those who were employed were highly variable. Thus, employment may not necessarily equate with financial security and may not alone be a decisive resilience factor against recruitment.

Figure 26 illustrate average monthly incomes prior to joining the VE groups by gender.[160] Male voluntary recruits stated they earned significantly less prior to joining a VE group compared with those who were recruited by force or with reference group respondents.

Surprisingly, the dataset suggests that the average monthly income among female voluntary recruits were the highest of all groups prior to joining.[161] This may reflect the estimated wages of the household as a whole, given that most of the women in question described themselves as homemakers. It may also reflect the economic status of the families of the female respondents, who, are more likely to join with members of family or with their husbands. Finally, there could be a response bias in the survey responses, as is common for survey questions regarding incomes.

Figure 27 further underlines the pertinence of employment status by gender. When examining the primary reasons for joining a VE group through a gender lens, the figure reveals that while economic factors, notably 'employment opportunities', emerge as the most cited factor for men, it is much less significant for women. Women primarily point to the decision of their family/friends.

" Most of the youth who were part of the group had wives and kids leading a financially stable life"

Ali, *24 years old, Somalia*

AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME BEFORE JOINING
FIGURE 26   **THE VE GROUP** BY GENDER

- MALE
- FEMALE
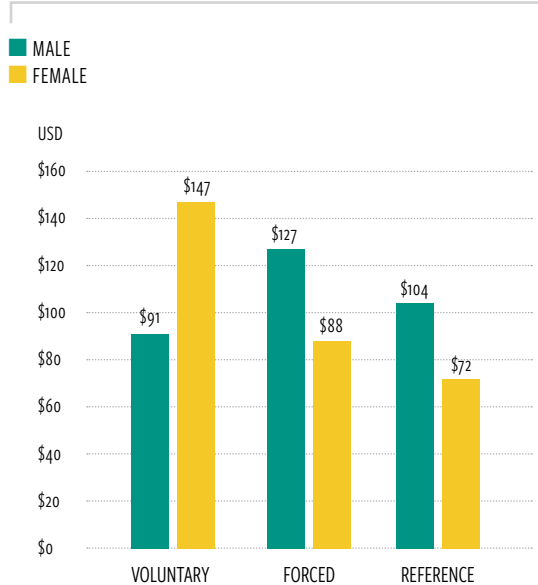
FIGURE 27   **PRIMARY REASONS FOR JOINING THE VE GROUP** BY GENDER

- EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- JOINING WITH FAMILY / FRIENDS
- PRELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE GROUP
- BEING PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF
- BELIEVED MY RELIGIOUS LEADER
- ADVENTURE
- POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE GROUP
- ETHNIC PRINCIPLES OF THE GROUP
- BELIEVED MY TEACHER
- SECURITY
- SEEKING JUSTICE

Answered by 524 out of 765
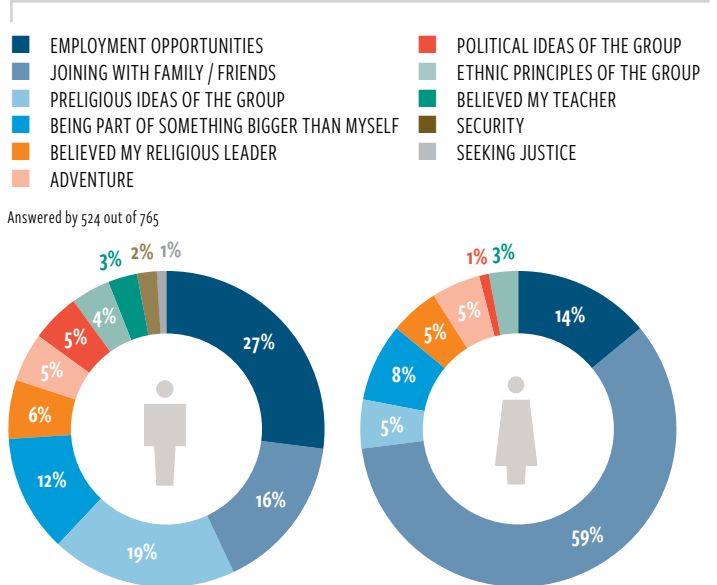
This may suggest that the men in many of these contexts reviewed in this sample are expected to provide financially for their families, which may lead them to seek alternative income-generating opportunities.

Conversely, women may be regarded as financial dependents who are expected to accompany their husbands and partners. While this ignores the vast amount of invisible and unpaid household work, childcare, and domestic food production that women in sub-Saharan Africa typically undertake, it nevertheless highlights how constructs of gender roles and responsibilities may affect recruitment dynamics.

A growing body of work suggests that the appeal of these groups is derived, in part, from pressure on men to demonstrate their manhood and that joining is seen as a social duty bound up with male identity, with violent, toxic masculinities fuelling men's wish to join VE groups being intrinsically linked.[162] VE groups may exploit these gender stereotypes and play on social and cultural expectations regarding men's roles in their recruitment approach, by, for instance, exploiting women's willingness to join as a means of shaming men into recruitment.

Figure 28 highlights the most immediate need of primary respondents at the time of joining the VE group. Voluntary recruits cited employment most frequently (31 percent), as did forced group respondents (22 percent). This was followed closely by security, which emerged as the second most immediate need at the time of joining. Seven percent of voluntary recruits stated that Jihad was their most immediate need. This reflects the significance of economic hardship in primary respondents' outlook.

Figure 29 highlights the associatation between livelihood status and speed of recruitment. Reflecting the distribution of livelihood status found in Figure 25, recruits who stated that they were 'employed' at the time of joining a VE group were more likely to join within a month. Sixty-two percent of recruits who self-identified as 'employed' joined within a month, compared to only 50 percent of students and 51 percent of unemployed individuals. Thirty-eight percent of recruits who took longer than a month to join stated that they were employed at the time, compared to 49 percent who stated that they were unemployed and 50 percent who were students.

FIGURE 28 **MOST IMMEDIATE NEED AT THE TIME OF JOINING THE VE GROUP** BY VOLUNTARY vs. FORCED RECRUITS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED

Answered by 792 out of 1147

| Employment | Security | Education | Jihad | Housing | Healthcare | Money |
| 31% / 22% | 29% / 26% | 11% / 19% | | | | |

| Access to water and electricity | Wife/husband | Freedom /searching for paradise | Nothing | Justice | Protecting animals | Food |
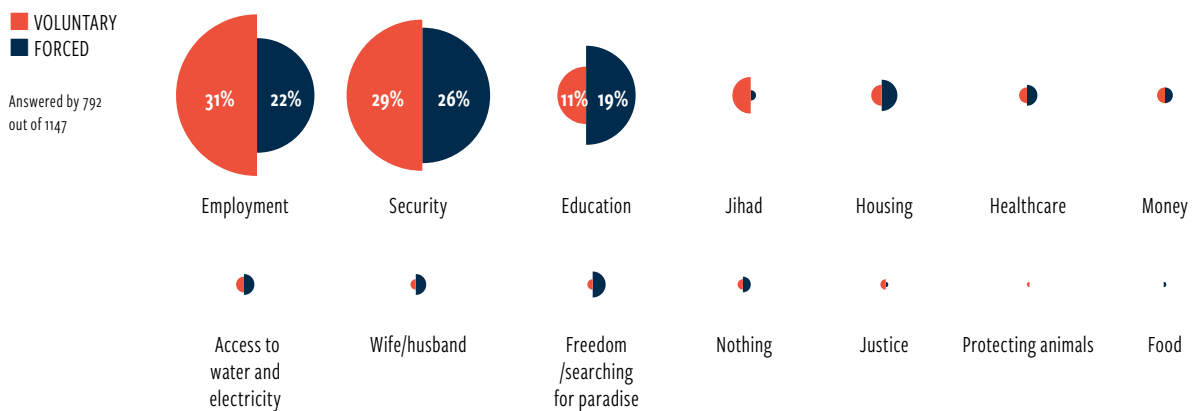
FIGURE 29 **HOW QUICKLY VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS** BY LIVELIHOOD

■ WITHIN A MONTH
■ LONGER THAN A MONTH

Answered by 570 out of 864

	Within a month	Longer than a month
Student	50%	50%
Employed	62%	38%
Unemployed	51%	49%

100%

This may be related to the fluctuations in earnings noted earlier, which means that employment per se may not be such an influential factor. However, it may also uncover the frustrations experienced by most respondents who identify to a great extent as working in the informal sector, characterized by vulnerable employment, and their related aspirations and immediate needs for stable employment. Respondents' personal testimonies provide further context, including expressing their dreams of buying a house, providing for their family, being financially stable and gaining respect or being able to marry as key factors behind this seemingly materialistic incentive to recruit.

Indeed, as Chapter 3 will highlight, those who followed the violent extremism trajectory more quickly were also more likely to be married and have key responsibilities within the family. This may speak to the additional pressures faced by married men to provide for their families in a context of high socio-economic deprivation and poverty.

It further suggests that unstable income, underemployment and unpredictability may render those individuals more susceptible to many VE groups' promises of quick material (and immaterial) rewards. As described else-where, membership in a VE group may appear to offer an opportunity for individuals to establish themselves as socially and economically productive citizens. Especially for young people in gerontocratic societies, the promise of material rewards may be intrinsically linked to the pull of greater societal status, respect and upward mobility.[163] As such, the promise of material rewards may offer a way out of the impasse that many perceive in such communities, where the lack of assets, such as marriage and stable employment, hinder many youth from advancing from the protracted socially constructed category of 'youth' into adulthood.

The promise of material rewards may offer a way out of the impasse that many perceive in such communities, where the lack of assets, such as marriage and stable employment, hinder many youth from advancing from the protracted socially constructed category of 'youth' into adulthood

These findings challenge essentialist notions of unemployed youth as more susceptible to recruitment into VE groups. It draws attention to the reality of underemployment, rendering economic factors a major source of frustration among those who join VE groups, with such groups emerging as a more viable alternative. As such, these findings further contribute to understanding how economic dependency, traditional gender roles and the pressure of community, together with grievances associated with lived realities of unemployment and underemployment and prospects for social mobility, converge and may affect recruitment patterns in critical ways.

2.4. State and citizenship

Political socialization theory describes how an "individual learns political relevant attitudinal dispositions and behaviour patterns which help him comprehend, evaluate and relate to the political world around him."[164] This dataset explores those aspects of governance that shape political dispositions and behaviour patterns, further enriching the map of drivers and factors that shape individual pathways towards violent extremism. The 2017 study firmly established that limited confidence in, and grievances towards, government are associated with the highest incidence of violent extremism in Africa, emphasizing the importance of governance for preventing violent extremism. This section examines respondents' perspectives regarding different authorities of the state, as well as democratic participation and self-identification with the nation-state. It also considers contextual evidence on the role of VE groups as alternative service providers and competitors of the state. Findings in this cluster are grouped under these subheadings: trust in the state and institutions; service delivery; grievances towards security actors; and democratic participation and identification with the nation-state.

The relationship between governance and violent extremism has been widely examined through qualitative and quantitative studies, underscoring the significance of state strength, governance type, and state stability in relation to violent extremist attacks.[165] Moreover, the quality of statecitizen relationships across a range of indicators is increasingly acknowledged as an important driver of violent extremism. Correlation analysis from the *Global Terrorism Index* reveals that human rights protection, internal conflict, group grievances, control of corruption, equality and individual liberty before the law, and religious and ethnic tensions are the variables most highly correlated with terrorist activity, as Figure 30 on next page illustrates.

FIGURE 30 **CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MACRO FACTORS** and **TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN AFRICA**

Correlation matrix
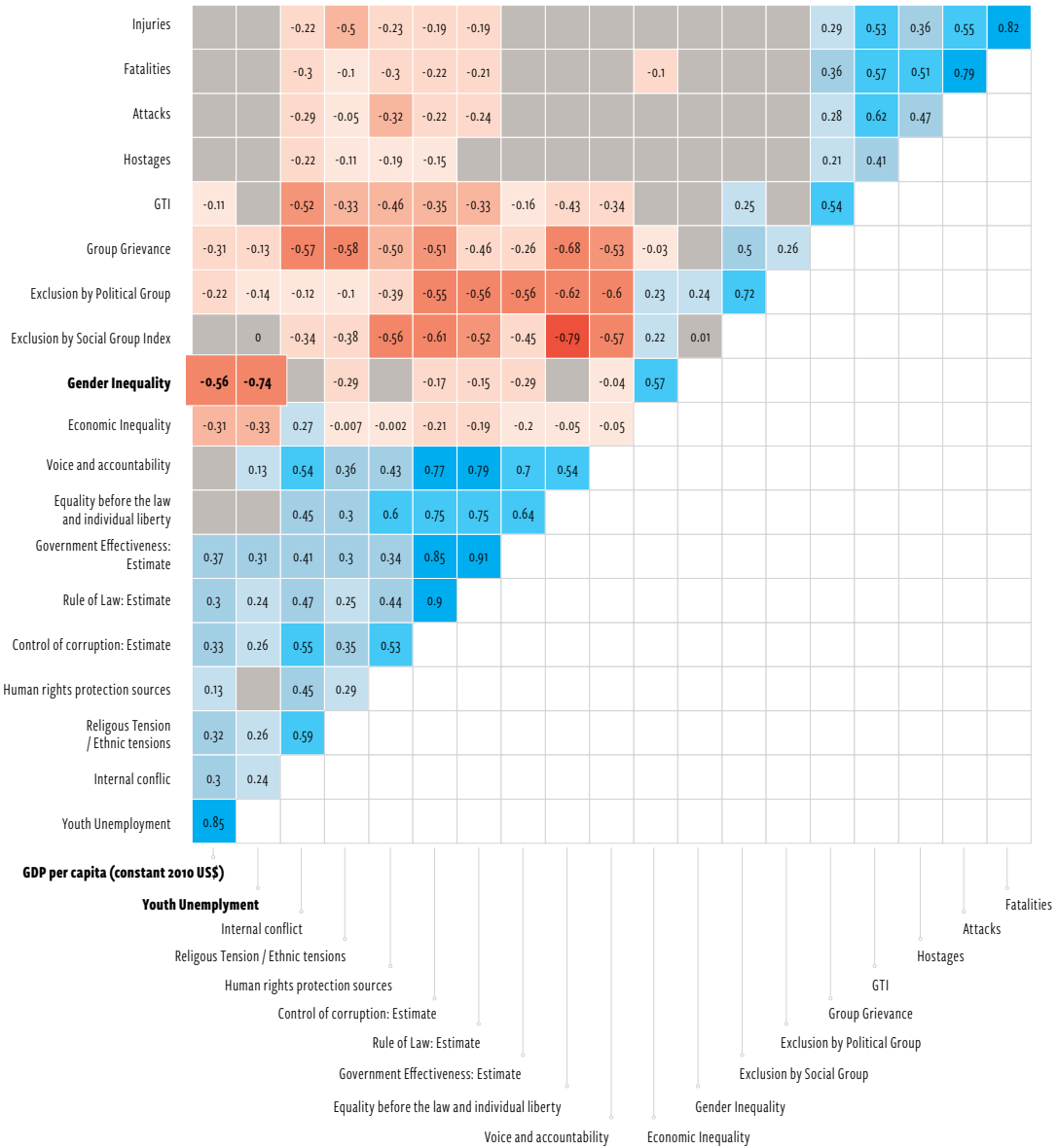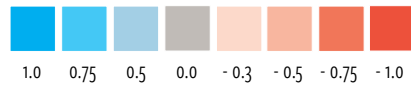
As indicated in Figure 30, internal conflict is positively correlated with a higher level of terrorism impact, and a negative human rights score is positively correlated with an increased terrorism impact.[166]

When controlling for factors that may influence terrorist activity and impact, econometric analysis shows that both factors (the level of internal conflict and the level of human rights protections) are significant predictors of the impact of terrorism, including attacks, fatalities and injuries. As in the 2017 study, despite their heterogeneity and country specificity, many of the countries under review are affected by similar conditions and share characteristics.

2.4.1. TRUST IN THE STATE AND INSTITUTIONS

It is widely recognized that corruption, elite impunity and exclusion from political participation lead to marginalization and generate grievances that VE groups can exploit. In sub-Saharan Africa, research has found that grievances stem from endemic corruption, including within local government and justice systems, the flagrant display of wealth by elites, and political discrimination. These combine to limit opportunities for youth in terms of employment, self-realization and decision-making. Poor governance also provides an enabling environment in which VE groups can operate.[167]

Figure 31 illustrate the distribution of trust levels by respondents. When asked to rate their level of trust in different state authorities at the time of joining a VE group, the data show that the outlook of all respondent groups is fractured and divided, likely reflecting a context of poverty, socio-economic marginalization and political instability in the countries under review.

This differs from the 2017 study, which consistently found significant differences between the respondents' categories, particularly the voluntary and reference group.[168] The new dataset does, however, reveal that trust among those in the voluntary group was consistently lower than among reference group counterparts, similar to the first study.

FIGURE 31 **TRUST IN STATE ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS
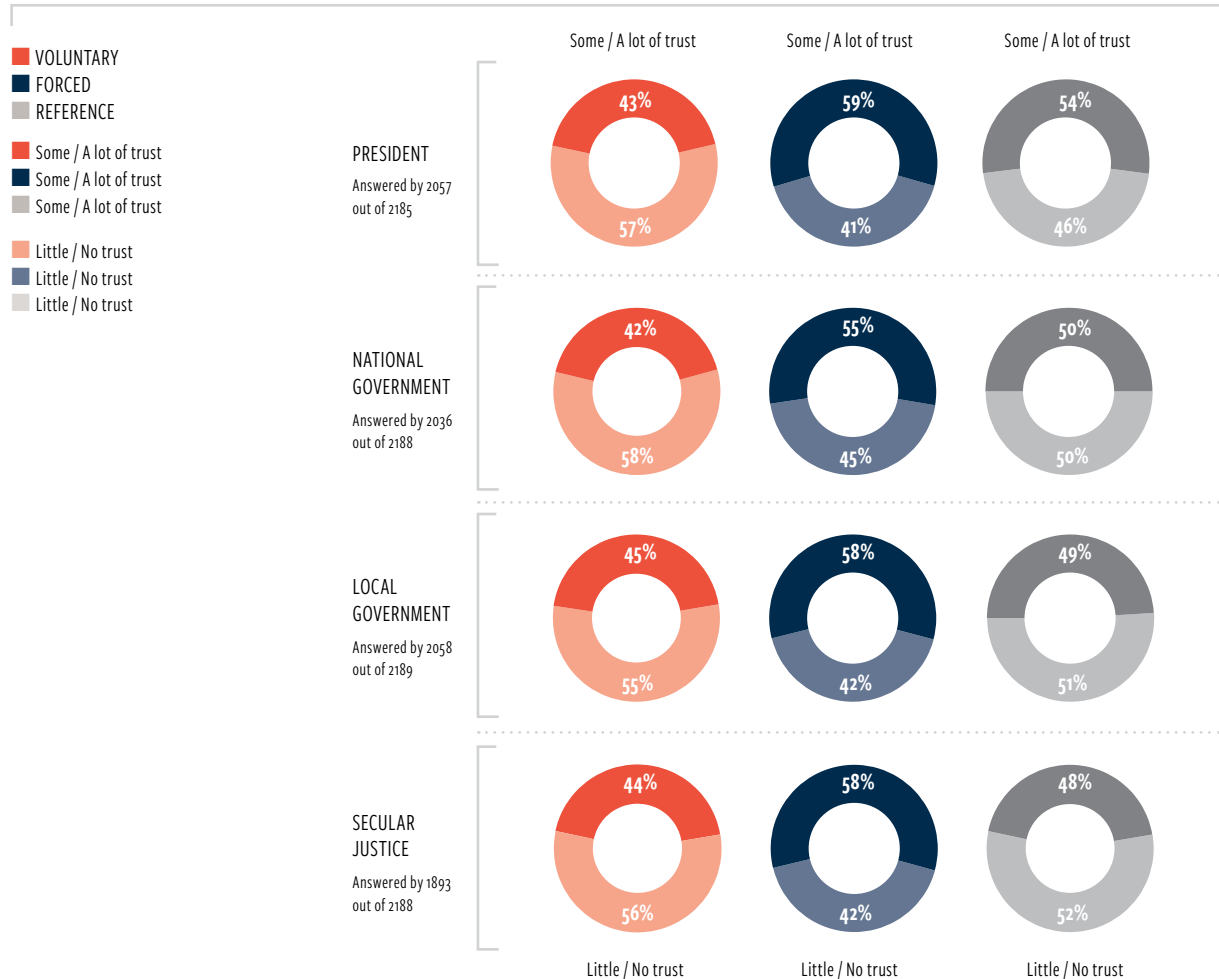
This is found in levels of trust towards state institutions (such as justice, security, politics) when compared to the reference group. For instance, while 58 percent of voluntary recruits note 'little' or 'no trust' in the national government, 50 percent of the reference respondents noted 'some/a lot of trust'.[169]

The reference group reported the highest levels of trust in the presidency (54 percent reporting 'some/a lot of trust') and the lowest levels of trust in the secular (formal) justice system (52 percent reporting 'little/no trust')[170]. Forced recruits have the highest levels of trust in state institutions. This is statistically significantly different from the responses of the voluntary recruits and reference group, yet also reflects a much smaller sample size.

In the reference group, perceptions of trust emerge as highly fractured and polarized, with divisions between those who report having 'some/a lot of trust', compared to those on the other end of the spectrum, who indicate 'little/no trust'. For instance, trust in national and local government is almost evenly split. This is consistent with the 2017 study.

While perceptions of trust in the various governance sectors among voluntary group respondents also appear fractured, this group show a greater inclination towards having 'little/no trust'. Although these overall are reflective of a relative increase in trust levels from the 2017 study, the polarized nature of such perceptions may be a corollary of growing up in contexts of political marginalization, while also symptomatic of contexts marked, by varying degree, by political instability feeding into divisions in levels of trust.

Levels of trust in state actors among forced recruits differ by gender, with female recruits reporting higher levels of trust on average than male recruits. For example, 52 percent of female forced recruits expressed 'some/a lot of trust' in national government, compared to only 37 percent of their male counterparts. This may reflect the relationship between forced recruits and the state, as most forced recruits in the sample were female, rather than more representative attitudes by gender and among women. This gender difference is not apparent in the respondent reference group, where trust levels toward national government was almost split between 48 percent for males and 50 percent for females.

Figure 32 highlight levels of trust in religious and community leaders. It shows that levels of trust towards religious and community actors are higher by significant margins in the outlook of all three respondent groups, similar to the 2017 study. In particular, religious actors are favoured by more than 80 percent of all respondents with trust levels rated by 'some/a lot of trust', relative to the community actors, with 63 percent selecting 'some/a lot of trust'.[171]

These relatively high levels of trust suggest that local leaders can play an important role as a bulwark against the encroachment of violent extremism. They also speak to the importance of reinvigorating existing infrastructures for peace, as critical entry points in efforts to prevent and respond to the threat of violent extremism that benefit from the greater legitimacy and support from local communities needed to build whole-of-society resilience at community-level.

FIGURE 32 **TRUST IN LOCAL ACTORS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

Legend:
- VOLUNTARY
- FORCED
- REFERENCE
- Some / A lot of trust
- Some / A lot of trust
- Some / A lot of trust
- Little / No trust
- Little / No trust
- Little / No trust

RELIGIOUS LEADERS
Answered by 2075 out of 2184

- Some / A lot of trust 80% — Little / No trust 20%
- Some / A lot of trust 85% — Little / No trust 15%
- Some / A lot of trust 84% — Little / No trust 16%

COMMUNITY LEADERS
Answered by 2098 out of 2183

- Some / A lot of trust 63% — Little / No trust 37%
- Some / A lot of trust 78% — Little / No trust 22%
- Some / A lot of trust 75% — Little / No trust 25%

Conversely, these findings also show that the further spread or retreat of violent extremism in Africa will depend on how states are able to deal with the fractured levels of trust. If left unchecked, the fractured social contract may warrant future prospects of an even greater spread of violent extremism on the continent than previously.

2.4.2. SERVICE DELIVERY

A common feature of weak governance is government inability to provide essential services such as health care, water and electricity, education, employment and welfare. This is widely recognized as a potential push factor.[172] Government negligence in service delivery, which is often exacerbated in remote and peripheral areas, allows VE groups to act as alternative service providers, challenging the state's legitimacy and building support and loyalty among local populations.[173] Many accounts illustrate how such groups may step in as providers in these contexts. Accordingly, perceptions of government service delivery are used in this study as a proxy for confidence.

Contrary to the 2017 study, which found lower levels of satisfaction with government service provision among recruits than among reference group counterparts, this dataset did not identify a significant variance in the outlook of respondents. Thus, dissatisfaction with service delivery does not emerge as a significant predictor of likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Nevertheless, the new findings clearly reveal widespread negative perceptions in the outlook of all groups. Responses regarding the three areas of service delivery identified – employment, education and everyday safety – are disproportionately negative in terms of satisfaction with government provision.

Figure 33 illustrates the level of satisfaction with government provision in the area of employment, education and everyday security. Levels of dissatisfaction with state service provision at the time of joining VE groups are high among both voluntary recruits and the reference group respondents, particularly regarding employment. Forced recruits expressed the most negative views of government service provision across all groups.

Regarding employment, 73 percent of voluntary recruits stated that they thought the government was doing a bad job providing employment compared to 71 percent of the reference group. Female recruits were more critical of the government than male recruits, with 74 percent of females in the reference group stating the government was doing a bad job, compared with 66 percent of voluntary recruits. The perceived inability of the state to provide this key service underscores people's low confidence in governance.

Regarding education, 51 percent of voluntary recruits believed the government was doing badly compared to 43 percent of the reference group. In the 2017 study, dissatisfaction with the provision of education was much higher in the voluntary group, with 67 percent expressing disapproval.

Regarding everyday safety, 51 percent of voluntary recruits believed the state was doing a bad job compared to 45 percent of the reference group. Male recruits were more critical of the government in terms of providing safety than female recruits, with 48 percent of the former and 42 percent of the latter stating that it was doing a bad job.

FIGURE 33 **SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND EVERYDAY SAFETY** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 2189.
% based on those that gave answers

	Bad			Moderate			Good		
EVERYDAY SAFETY	51%	50%	45%	30%	26%	31%	19%	24%	24%
EDUCATION	51%	55%	43%	26%	30%	35%	23%	15%	22%
EMPLOYMENT	73%	77%	71%	18%	17%	17%	9%	6%	12%
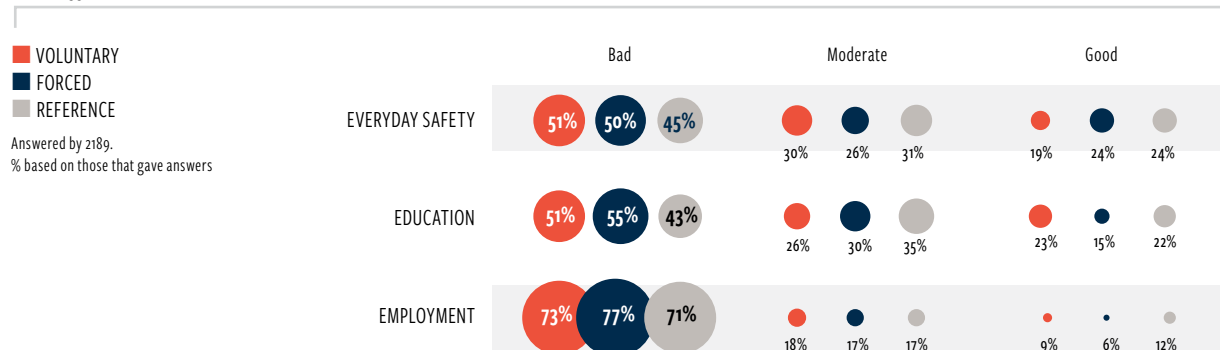
The findings highlights the need to improve the quality and accountability of institutions across the areas of employment, education and security as a way of addressing root causes of violent extremism.

Contextual data from Somalia and Mali, two countries whose sample sizes are representative of the broader sample, shed light on the question of the perception of VE groups as alternative service providers given dissatisfaction with service delivery by the state. In Mali, a high proportion of voluntary group respondents (80 percent) felt at the time of joining that VE groups would provide them with a greater sense of belonging to their country, pointing to improved service provision in key areas, particularly mediation of local conflicts (70 percent), justice provision (46 percent) and everyday security (71 percent). Additional data support this dynamic, highlighting how certain interpretations of 'jihadist governance' provide opportunities to challenge existing power relations characterized by an extremely patriarchal culture. The approach of Katiba Macina in central Sahel provides an example; it is based on the 'conditioned' model of collaboration and coercion.[174] Other examples include VE groups acting as intermediaries in conflict resolution at a local level, resolving disputes where the state has had limited succes in doing so, as in the case of regulating access to pastures for farmers and herders in the Macina region.[175]

Findings from Somalia also show that a high proportion of voluntary recruits had positive perceptions about the 'success' of the VE groups in providing services when they joined the group. On a scale from 'not provided' to 'excellent', the data show that a vast majority consider key services delivered by VE groups to be average or excellent, particularly regarding mediating local disputes (57 percent), providing justice (58 percent) and ensuring everyday security (62 percent). The findings also illustrate the positive perceptions of VE groups in providing a greater sense of belonging to their country (46 percent). These findings are consistent with other analyses that attribute al-Shabaab's enduring appeal to the fact that it offers a comparatively attractive alternative to the Somali government.[176]

This includes its ability to settle disputes in areas under its influence, which is especially appealing in peripheral or remote areas that citizens believe has been neglected by a weak government. Al-Shabaab operates courts, including mobile courts, to punish crimes and resolve disputes and some Somalis regard it as relatively honest and efficient. Somalis point, for example, to the roads that al-Shabaab controls, where it maintains checkpoints that reportedly require set payments, offers a receipt to passengers and keeps the roads relatively safe.[177]

These context-specific examples provide insights into the process whereby a deterioration in government service provision and the progressive delegitimization of the state present opportunities for VE groups to assume the mantle of service provider. Nevertheless, further research is required to understand the complex dynamics of such processes, which are a blend of coercion, collaboration and conditionality and are highly context dependent.

2.4.3 GRIEVANCES WITH SECURITY ACTORS

Government repression and human rights violations are often correlated with poor governance.[178] Grievances arising as a result of corrupt and abusive security forces are known to deepen distrust and alienation from the state, as well as to create entry points for VE groups that can tap into these sentiments to boost recruitment.[179]

The *Global Terrorism Index* corroborates this, showing that high levels of group grievances, as well as state human rights abuses, lead to increased impacts of violent extremist activity. This evidence also shows that group grievances increase the likelihood of recruitment, demonstrating how VE groups often take advantage of existing tensions and conflicts to recruit, arm themselves and carry out attacks.[180]

These findings highlights the need to improve the quality and accountability of institutions across the areas of employment, education and security as a way of addressing root causes of violent extremism
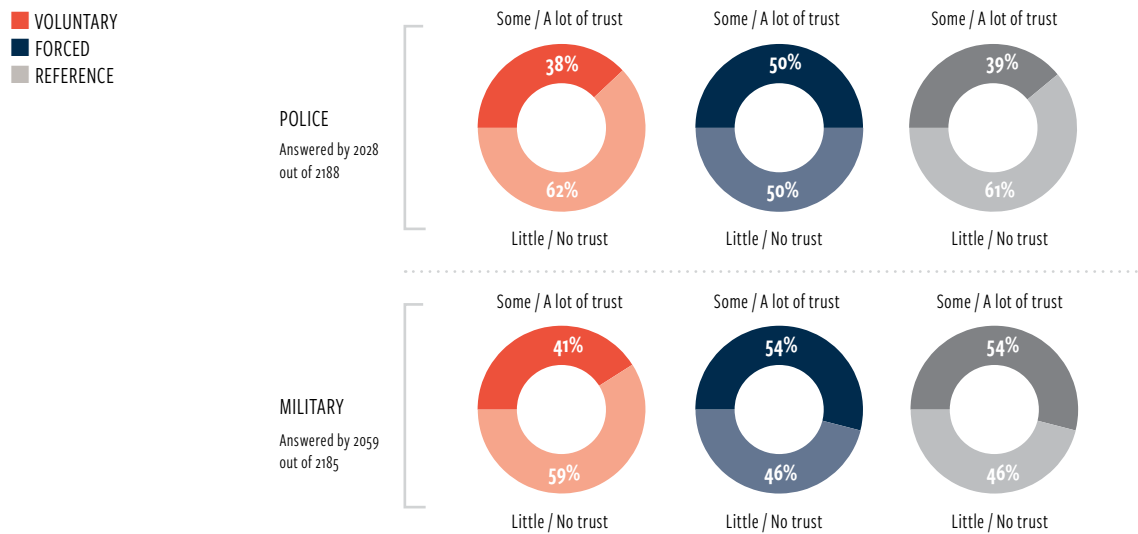
The *Journey to Extremism* research has helped to highlight how this dynamic plays out in Africa, especially through its examination of the 'tipping point into violent extremism. The 2017 study revealed that counter-terrorism operations and the conduct of state security actors have often catalysed or accelerated recruitment, rather than the reverse. In examining levels of trust towards different state security actors, the new dataset confirms low trust in security sector actors, as illustrated in Figure 34. Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their level of trust in different security authorities at the time they joined the VE group.

Contrary to the 2017 study findings, which found a significant variation between the voluntary and reference groups, these levels are low across in the outlook of all respondents, with trust in the police significantly lower than in the military. Accordingly, the regression analysis does not find trust in security actors to be a significant predictor of voluntary recruitment.

62 percent of voluntary recruits reported to have 'little or no trust' in the police, with 61 percent of the reference group responding similarly, likely reflecting profound divides between communities and security actors in the outlook of both groups, which is known to offer fertile ground for recruitment into VE groups. Forced recruits have higher levels of trust in both the police and military than either voluntary recruits or the reference group.[181]

In the primary group of respondents, female recruits have higher levels of trust in the state security apparatus than male recruits (55 percent of females report some trust in the military, compared with 37 percent of males). No visible gender difference was found in the reference group.

These findings underscore the need to pay greater attention to the broader relationship between the conduct of state security forces and the growth of violent extremism. While the variation between the voluntary and reference groups is less pronounced than in the 2017 study, it does reflect the level of frustration and lack of trust in the police and military. Further evidence of this crucial aspect of the journey to extremism, including emotive factors, personalized and attitudinal aspects, is further examined in Chapter 3 relating to the 'tipping point' for recruitment and the recruitment process.

2.4.4. DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND IDENTIFICATION WITH THE NATION-STATE

Democratic participation is a common feature of governance, reflecting the relationship between state and citizen, as well as the opportunity to address grievances through the democratic process and the underlying perception of the possibility of change. Self-identification with the nation-state and the notion that national identity is a precondition for stable, well-functioning states is another well-established feature of theories of governance.[182] Moreover, national self-identification is an important source of demarcation, revealing perceptions of in- and out-group identities, sentiments of inclusion and exclusion, and notions of legitimacy, with the potential to foster either unity or fragmentation. It follows that political exclusion and fragmentation are considered key push factors towards violent extremism.

They are associated with marginalization from society, community and family, leading to a personal search for identity, meaning and purpose, which could be addressed by membership in an extremist network.

In exploring respondents' voting experience and their views regarding whether elections could bring about positive change, the research found some variation between the reference group and voluntary recruits, partly related to nationality or country of upbringing. At the aggregate level, notwithstanding country variations, 49 percent of the voluntary recruits had never voted in democratic elections, compared to 34 percent of the reference group. The proportion of forced recruits was 55 percent. This is highlighted in Figure 35.
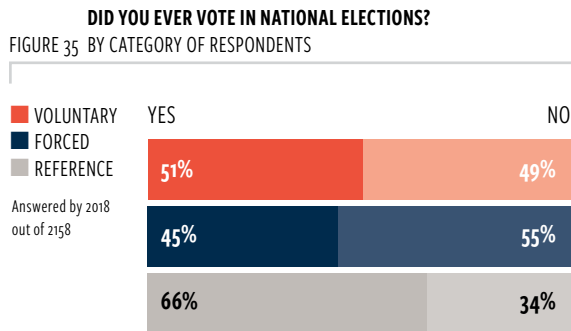
As illustrated in Figure 36, while many respondents were too young to have voted in elections, some responded that they did not have time to vote. Overall, all groups had very low expectations about the impact of the democratic process and low levels of trust in political parties and their ability to represent their views. This contrasts with the 2017 study, which found a significant variation in the voting experience among reference group and voluntary respondents.[183]

Importantly, a lack of democratic participation was not found to have a significant effect on the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. This is significantly different from the first study, which found democratic participation to be a significant predictor of the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. It suggested that deep sentiments of distrust and alienation engendered early in childhood appeared as a distinct feature for the voluntary group, maturing in adulthood into greater pessimism.

However, the new dataset points to a more fractured, divided relationship between state and citizen, reflected in the sense of apathy in the outlook of all respondents regarding the impact of elections and the possibility that they could bring positive change. This could be related to the multiple coups in the countries under review in recent years, which may have led to disillusionment with the democratic process overall. It may also reflect a more profoundly fractured social contract between the state and citizens extending beyond elections to other areas of service provision and trust.

DID YOU EVER VOTE IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS?
FIGURE 35 BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 2018 out of 2158

YES — NO

	YES	NO
VOLUNTARY	51%	49%
FORCED	45%	55%
REFERENCE	66%	34%

FIGURE 36 **WHY DID YOU NOT VOTE IN THE LAST ELECTION?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 862 out of 977
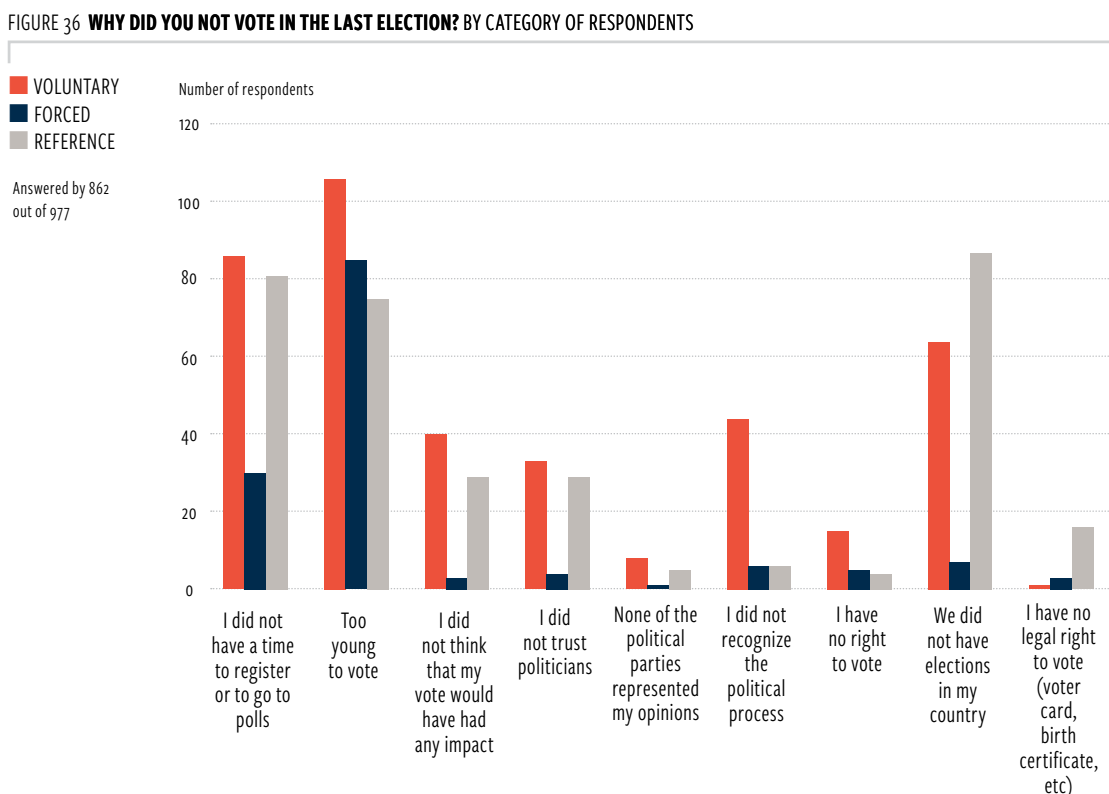
The findings show that the further spread or retreat of violent extremism in Africa will depend on how states are able to deal with the fractured levels of trust. If left unchecked, the fractured social contract may warrant future prospects of an even greater spread of violent extremism on the continent than previously
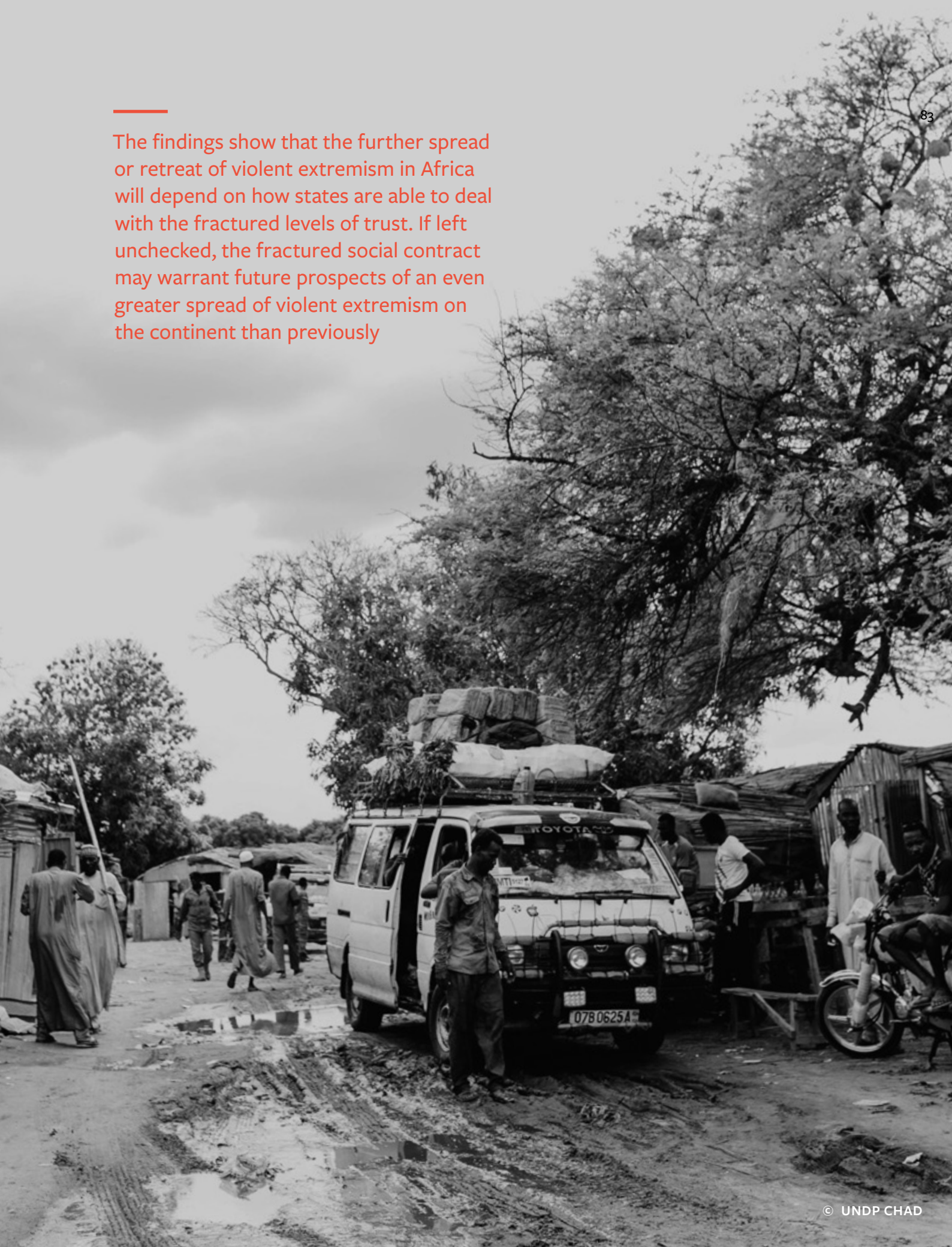
Chapter 2: Key findings

UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION

- Higher levels of parental involvement in a respondent's childhood or higher overall childhood happiness reduce the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Living in the periphery of a state is associated with relatively lower exposure to people from other ethnicities and religions, lower tolerance towards religious diversity, and a relatively lower degree of mobility and education levels. This again suggests the relevance of the conditions in peripheral and border areas as a key factor shaping vulnerability to violent extremism.

- The relevance of education and access to information further proved critical in this data sample both in terms of the likelihood of joining a group and the speed of joining. As in the first study, levels of education (both religious and secular/public) and access to quality education were significantly lower among voluntary recruits. More years of exposure to secular (public) education was found to be statistically significantly related to lower likelihood of voluntary recruitment

ECONOMIC FACTORS

- Economic factors on their own appear to have limited explanatory power in a context largely marked by multidimensional poverty contributing to generalized hardship and deep-seated grievances within communities. However, they do continue to deepen the understanding of the underlying incentives and decisions that drive individuals towards extremist groups.

- Consistent with the first *Journey to Extremism* report, the new dataset shows that voluntary recruits identified 'employment opportunities' as their most cited immediate need at the time of joining. This represents only an incremental increase since the first study. Twenty-five percent of voluntary recruits surveyed identified employment opportunities as their primary reason for joining, making this the leading push factor cited by respondents.

- Employment was also found to continually affect the speed of joining, albeit in surprising fashion: those who identify as having been employed (vulnerable employment) at the time of joining tend to join more quickly than those who were unemployed and students. This likely reflects the economic status of respondents who were working primarily in unstable jobs in the informal sector, thus increasing the socio-economic pull of VE groups. This is further reflected in respondents' testimonies highlighting dreams of becoming financially stable to be able to provide for their families, with associated benefits of being able to marry and gain respect, thus reflecting how economic incentives are intrinsically tied to identity, mobility and socio-economic status.

RELIGIOUS FACTORS

- This study further contributes to challenging and deepening the nuances in the relationship between religion and violent extremism. It does so by clearly distinguishing between perceptions of radical religious ideologies, and their significance for recruitment, on the one hand, and actual religious education and literacy levels on the other.

- While the first study found that religious factors – specifically, 'the religious ideas of the group at the time of joining' – were the most important incentive for voluntary recruitment (by 40 percent), they now constitute the second most influential factor by 17 percent, after employment. Instead, ideological factors appear to be intrinsically linked to group grievances and the perceived (ideological and physical) threat to one's religion, which was found to be statistically significantly associated with a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment.

- Consistent with the first study, a significant proportion of 64 percent of voluntary recruits acknowledged that they heavily relied on others to interpret religious texts, or had a limited or no actual understanding of the texts. Religious education levels were significantly lower for those who joined quickly, while a higher average number of years of religious schooling again appears to be an important source of resilience. This shows how religion, in its dual function as a foundational social identity marker and a social belief system and intersecting with other key grievances, represents a unique dimension of vulnerability as well as an important pathway for renegotiating social mobility and agency. Religion is thus a particularly effective pull factor in the construction and mobilization of VE groups' narratives.

STATE AND CITIZENSHIP

- The 2017 study firmly established that limited confidence in, and grievances towards, government are associated with the highest incidence of violent extremism in Africa, emphasizing the importance of governance for preventing violent extremism.

- While this study highlights the importance of governance deficits in recruitment patterns, it finds a more fractured relationship between the state and citizen across the outlook of three groups of respondents as reflected in fractured trust in state actors and institutions, including security and military actors, as well as satisfaction with public services and democratic participation. However, trust levels appear to be relatively lower among the voluntary recruits. Thus, the data do not show that trust levels are a significant or sole predictor of the likelihood of voluntary recruitment. Reflecting a fractured social contract with key divides, these findings do, however, put in stark relief the apparent trust deficits in the countries under review.

- Conversely, the study also identifies higher levels of trust in religious leaders and community actors across all groups (voluntary, forced recruits and the reference group) compared to other actors and authorities as a source of resilience, although lower levels were observed among voluntary recruits. This further underscores the importance of proximity and local factors as well as of vibrant infrastructures for peace as key bulwarks against the threat of violent extremism. This suggests the need to reinvigorate and reimagine the social contract between the state and its citizens from the bottom up.

"A police officer caused me a brutal beating. I was on my way to Burhakabo from Baidoa, he shoot a bullet at me while I was driving. Fortunately, I was not injured but he hit me with the gun"

Abdi 25 years old, Somalia

CHAPTER 3:
THE TIPPING POINT AND THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The 2017 study proposed the notion of a transformative trigger, a 'tipping point', that creates disorientation in belief and knowledge systems, prompting individuals to search for new certainties. This process may lead individuals in the at-risk category to take the ultimate step of joining a VE group. It presented the striking finding that 71 percent of voluntary recruits pointed to specific 'government action' as the incident that prompted them to join. The research questions were expanded from the first study to clarify the nature of these 'tipping points' and to explore their significance in greater depth. As such, the new dataset shines important light both on what finally prompted people to join violent extremist groups and on those situations in which a trigger event did not occur prior to recruitment. It also deepens our understanding of the social and behavioural factors that influence the recruitment process, including assumptions regarding the influence of internet use. This chapter examines the factors that influenced individuals' decisions not to join, as well as the influence of PVE initiatives. Findings are grouped under these subheadings: the 'tipping point', the recruitment process, and prevention initiatives and resilience factors.

———

"I experienced the unfair attacks and killings of my sisters and brothers by the government"

Ali, *25 years old, Somalia*

3.1. The 'tipping point'

According to political socialization theory, the decision to become involved in violent extremism does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is usually the result of a multitude of factors, a dialectical process of experiences and events that gradually propel an individual to violence over time. The ultimate decision to act on pent-up anger or frustration is sometimes attributable to a final event that tips an individual into perpetrating violent acts.[184] Nonetheless, recognizing that not every decision to join a VE group is triggered by a specific event, this analysis also explores situations where a 'tipping point' event did not occur to examine the relative importance of such events and their influence on recruitment.

A variety of lenses may be used to explore the process whereby individuals develop their political knowledge, values and ideology, including those of political science and psychology. Among these, transformative learning theory posits that radicalization may be understood by analysing the blend of personal, emotional and cognitive shifts that lead to the gradual reconstruction of earlier beliefs, identities and behaviours.

Others have put forward the view that radicalization can be understood as "an interactive process between theological and social-psychological journeys," which may be catalysed by identity crises that prompt a cognitive opening, into violent ones over time.[185] Therefore, rather than approaching radicalization as an end result, a robust evidence base supports analysing it as a highly social process influenced by a myriad of complex dialectical, intersecting factors at the macro, meso and micro levels. Accordingly, while the 2017 study primarily examined the occurrence of a transformative trigger event that drove individuals to join a VE group, the new expanded and refined dataset examines whether or not trigger events influenced the decision to join and the statistical significance of this relationship.[186]

Figure 37 thus provides critical new insights into the 'tipping point' for recruitment. In response to the question, '*Did anything specific happen that finally motivated you to join the group?*', 48 percent of voluntary recruits answered they had experienced some form of trigger event or 'tipping point' that influenced their final decision to join. In other words, 52 percent did not state that they had experienced a trigger event. This finding adds nuance to the result of the 2017 study and shows that while trigger events may have some important explanatory power regarding recruitment into VE groups, recruitment is also a highly socialized process shaped by a variety of factors over a lifetime.

Figure 38 highlights the drivers behind the 'tipping points' based on respondents' own understanding. When asked, '*Did anything specific happen that finally motivated you to join the group*', the highest proportion (32 percent) of those who reported that they experienced a trigger event identified 'government action' as the catalyst for recruitment. The two other most significant factors were the 'killing of a family member or friend' (29 percent) and the 'arrest of a family member or friend' (10 percent). In total, these three categories make up 71 percent of all responses, similar to the 71 percent of responses expressed in the 2017 study, which simply cited 'government action' as a broad category of trigger events.

FIGURE 37 **DID ANYTHING SPECIFIC HAPPEN THAT FINALLY MOTIVATED YOU TO JOIN THE GROUP?** BY VOLUNTARY

Answered by 631 out of 785
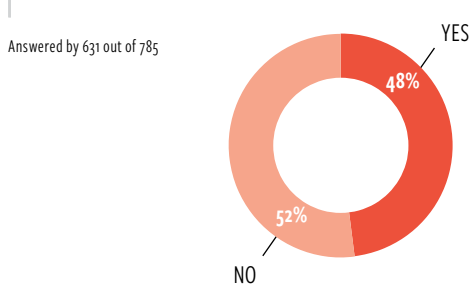
FIGURE 38 **WHAT SPECIFIC INCIDENT HAPPEN THAT FINALLY MOTIVATED YOU TO JOIN THE GROUP?** BY VOLUNTARY

Multiple-answer question. Shows percent of individuals who selected reason.

Answered by 155 out of 375
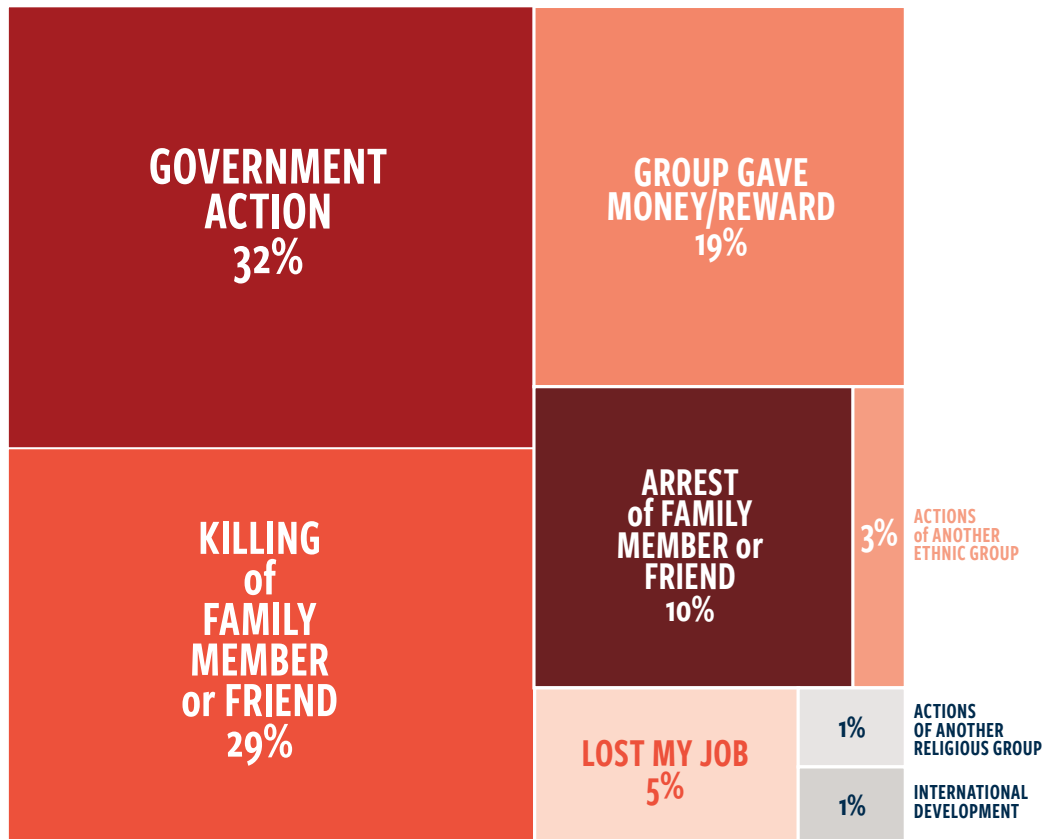
HOW QUICKLY VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS
FIGURE 39 BY TRIGGER EVENT

■ WITHIN A MONTH
■ LONGER THAN A MONTH

Answered by 550 out of 864

TRIGGER EVENT

38% 62%

NO TRIGGER EVENT

46% 54%
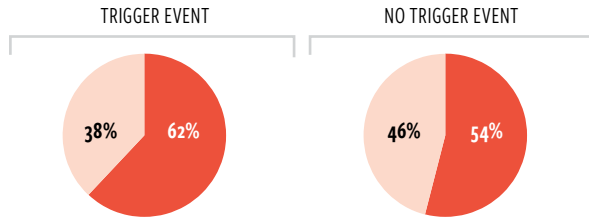
"A military jet attacked my village and killed many of my people was when I decided to join and followed my husband in other to avenge the killing"

Fatima, *35 years old, Nigeria*

PRIMARY FEELING AT THE TIME OF JOINING
FIGURE 40 BY SPEED OF RECRUITMENT

Multiple-answer question.
Shows individuals (percent of category)
who selected the emotion.

Answered by 968 out of 968

	Longer than a month	Joined within a month
Fear	17%	22%
Hope/Excitement	29%	16%
Anger	16%	19%
Hate	11%	12%
Vengeance	8%	11%
Contempt	7%	8%
Guilt	12%	12%

As such, the new dataset provides a more detailed picture of the nature of ′tipping point′ events and illustrates, paradoxically, that in most cases, state action, accompanied by a sharp escalation of human rights abuses, appears to be the prominent factor finally pushing individuals to violent extremism in Africa.

In addition to examining ′tipping points′, the research substantiates and qualifies the relationship between trigger events and susceptibility to violent extremism. Remarkably, it reveals that for those who stated that they had not experienced a particular ′tipping point′ event, the likelihood of voluntary recruitment is sharply reduced by between 40 and 50 percent. It illustrates the importance of addressing grievances, revealed as state action and human rights abuses in this data sample, as a critical bulwark to counter and address vulnerabilities that may lead to violent extremism. It thus yields critical new perspectives on the importance of prevention responses to effectively address the threat of violent extremism.

Figure 39 further reveals the pertinence of ′tipping points′ in affecting the speed of recruitment. The dataset shows those who experienced some form of trigger event or ′tipping point′ were more likely to join a VE group.

Of those recruits who stated that they had experienced such an event, 62 percent joined a VE group within one month of introduction, compared to 54 percent of those who did not.

The dataset also explores the emotions that drove recruits to join a VE group and how these affect the speed of joining, as illustrated in Figure 40. Among those who joined a group quickly, 'anger' and 'fear' were the most cited, while those who joined more slowly were more likely to mention 'hope'.

This may suggest a need for greater reflection regarding what VE groups offer in terms of change; that is, the appeal of VE groups as offering the potential to alter the status quo for 'slow recruits', compared with a reactive, emotiondriven decision taken by 'quick recruits' driven by pent-up anger and motivations that could be the result of specific traumatic or life-altering incidents. The 'fear' factor may, in turn, reflect the ambiguities and complexities related to the decision to join a VE group.

The new research thus underscores the 2017 study's finding that against a backdrop of alienation from the state and grievances regarding its impunity, government actions appear as a significant factor pushing individuals to join VE groups and accelerating their recruitment, rather than the reverse. It further suggests the pull of such groups in creating opportunities to frame and channel grievances into the cause of violent extremism.

The study also examines the influence of trigger events in preventing individuals from voluntarily joining VE groups. Figure 41 shows that when asked, '*Did anything specific happen that convinced you not to get associated with the group*', 38 percent responded that they had experienced a specific event that had convinced them not to become associated with a group.

As the following chapter will highlight, the research suggests that factors of resilience to violent extremism are highly determined by a confluence of socialized factors, heavily informed and shaped by preconditions and peer influence.

3.2. The recruitment process

Notwithstanding the complex web of micro-meso-macro factors that combine to shape an individual's journey to extremism, research into radicalization and recruitment also emphasizes the highly socialized nature of such processes, including the crucial role of peer networks. Moreover, in a digital age where interaction occurs and influence is exercised increasingly in online spaces, a growing body of evidence exists regarding the role of the internet and social media in radicalization processes.[187] However, this evidence has focused primarily on urban settings, giving less attention to how these issues play out in remote rural areas of Africa. Therefore, this research helps to expand and add nuance to the analysis of the socialized and behavioural factors that shape recruitment into VE groups. Findings are grouped under these subheadings: the encounter with the group; the power of peers; the need to belong; and connectivity and isolation.

FIGURE 41 **DID ANYTHING SPECIFIC HAPPEN THAT CONVINCED YOU NOT TO GET ASSOCIATED WITH THE GROUP?** BY REFERENCE GROUP

Answered by 941 out of 1003

YES
38%

NO
62%
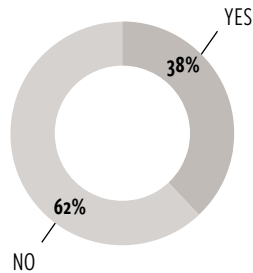
'The life my housemate was living gave me a hope that if I join the group, I will be financially stable like him and lead a life that people would respect me because of the weapon.'

Dubow, 23 years old, Nigeria

FIGURE 42 **YEAR OF JOINING** BY VOLUNTARY vs. FORCED RESPONDENTS
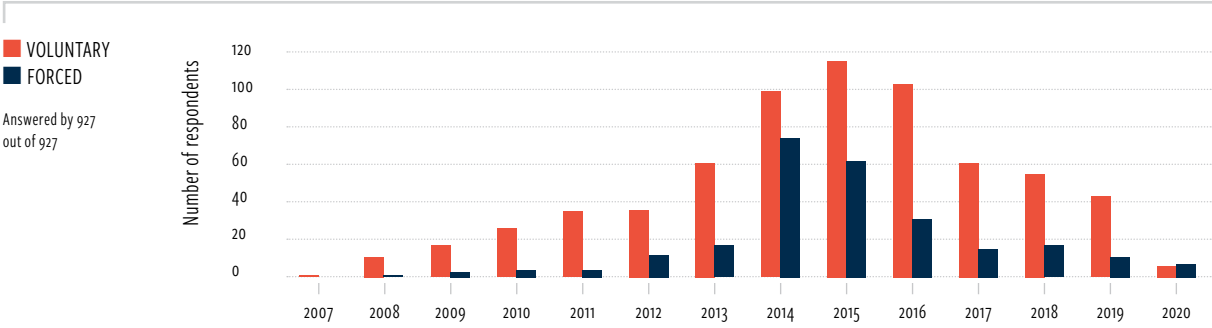
FIGURE 43 **HOW QUICKLY VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS** BY VE GROUP
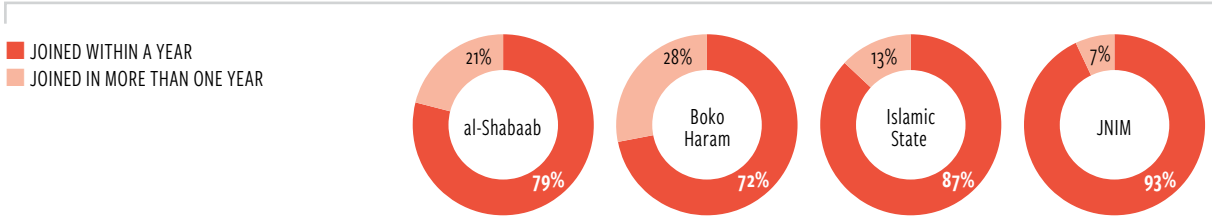
3.2.1 THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE GROUP

When asked to indicate the time between being introduced to a VE group and joining, the voluntary recruits offered a wide range of responses from 'immediately' to five or more years, reflecting the diverse ways in which recruitment occurs. This is captured in Figure 42.

This dataset highlights that 40 percent of voluntary recruits stated that they had joined a violent extremist group within one month of being introduced and 67 percent within one year. These proportions are consistent with the 2017 study, where 48 percent of recruits joined in less than a month and 80 percent in less than a year.

Moreover, as illustrated in Chapter 1, the landscape of VE groups is constantly evolving with changes in their growth, geographic focus and strategy over time. The diverse violent extremist groups should not be conflated, as they have very different organizational structures and modus operandi. Nevertheless, it is instructive to examine the 'effectiveness' of the various groups in their ability to quickly recruit individuals, ranging from one month to within a year, as illustrated in Figure 43.

Among those VE groups operating in the countries under review, JNIM appears to be able to recruit more quickly than others, in keeping with its reputation as the fastest-growing group in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa more broadly.

This is qualitatively different from the findings in the 2017 *Journey to Extremism* report, which found that al-Shabaab recruits were more likely to state that they had joined the organization within a month than recruits to any other group. This could be due to several factors, including changes in the groups' recruitment tactics, and could reflect the dynamics in the geopolitical landscape, where extremist groups such as ISIS and the al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM coalition, in the Sahel in particular, are striving to assert dominance and compete for influence.[188]

HOW VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS
FIGURE 44 BY GENDER

Answered by 680 out of 822

MALE

| 61% | 17% | 22% |
| Joined with a friend | Joined with family | Joined alone |

FEMALE

| 36% | 50% | 14% |
| Joined with a friend | Joined with family | Joined alone |
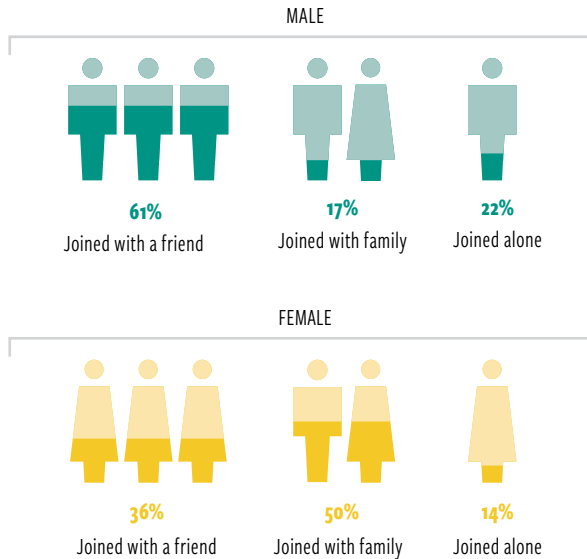
HOW VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS
FIGURE 45 **v.s SPEED OF JOINING?** BY VOLUNTARY GROUP

Answered by 633 out of 692

JOINED **WITHIN** A MONTH

| 58% | 20% | 22% |
| Joined with a friend | Joined with family | Joined alone |

JOINED **AFTER** A MONTH

| 60% | 23% | 17% |
| Joined with a friend | Joined with family | Joined alone |
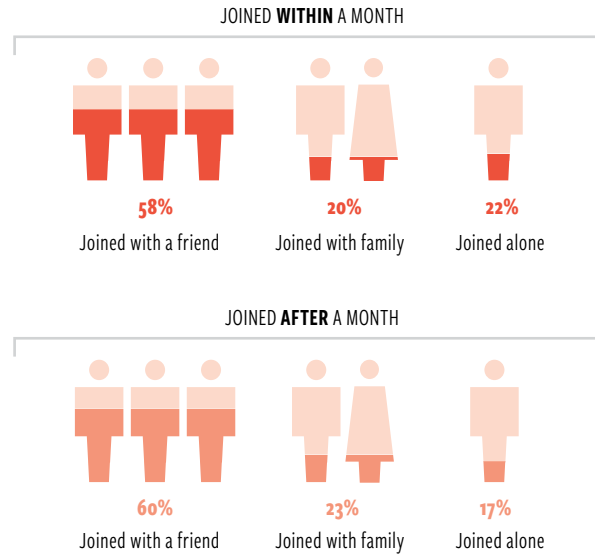
3.2.2. THE POWER OF PEERS

Previous research has shown that people whose family or peer group includes violent extremist sympathizers are more likely to become violent extremists themselves. Three-quarters of those who joined ISIS or al-Qaeda, for instance, did so in groups that "involved pre-existing social networks and typically cluster in particular towns and neighbourhood."[189] It has also been argued that extremist ideas are more likely to be adopted from peers and influential figures than from schools or universities. This dataset finds that the influence of the family itself, particularly for women, and of peer networks for men, are major factors shaping the decision to join a VE group. In other words, it finds that such dynamics are highly gendered.

Recalling the primary factors for joining noted in the previous chapter, 22 percent of respondents answered that joining with family and friends was a key reason. When comparing those who joined alone and those who joined with others, the data show that the majority (45 percent) of voluntary recruits joined a VE group with friends, while 15 percent joined with family and 16 percent joined alone. Further examining the socialized nature of the recruitment process, Figure 44 illustrates the gendered variations in the recruitment process.

The gender-disaggregated data show a clear difference between in the trajectory of men and women. Male recruits were more likely to join with friends (61 percent), while female recruits tend to join with family (50 percent). The data also reveal that most male recruits were introduced to the group by friends (50 percent), while most females were introduced through their husband (46 percent). This difference likely reflects the gendered roles and responsibilities within family structures and networks in the countries under review.

Figure 45 further illustrates the socialized nature of the recruitment process and the speed of joining. It indicates that among the voluntary recruits that joined within a month, a higher proportion of recruits joined with a friend (58 percent), compared to those who joined alone (22 percent). Similarly, among those that joined after a month, 60 percent joined with a friend, compared to 17 percent who joined alone.

When examining gendered variations in the relationship between recruitment and the pace in which this occurs, a significantly higher proportion of male recruits joined a violent extremist group within a month than their female counterparts.

HOW QUICKLY VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS

FIGURE 46 BY MARITAL STATUS AT TIME OF JOINING

Answered by 585 out of 864

JOINED WITHIN A MONTH

1%
Divorced

62%
Married

37%
Single

JOINED AFTER A MONTH

1%
Divorced

51%
Married

48%
Single

AFTER JOINING THE GROUP, DID YOU RECRUIT OTHERS TO JOIN?

FIGURE 47 BY VOLUNTARY GROUP

Answered yes by 69 respondents

YES   NO

90%   **2%**

IF YES, WHO DID YOU RECRUIT?

Children **10%**

Unknown individuals **5%**

Friends **25%**

60% Family
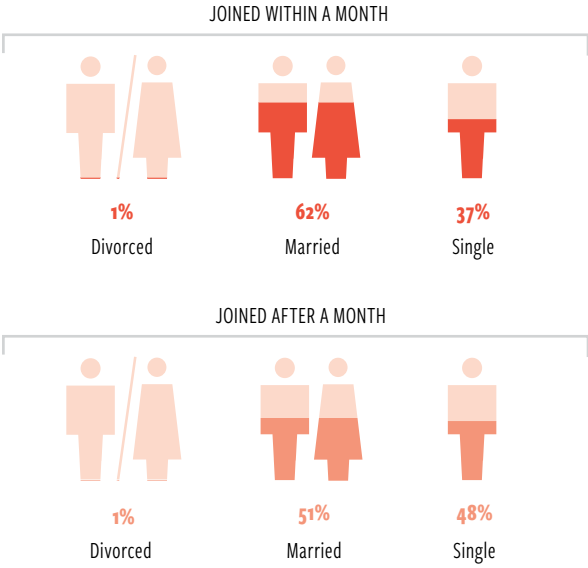
While female recruits were almost equally divided between joining within a month and a longer period, 65 percent of male respondents joined within a month. The difference may be explained in part by evidence suggesting that women often become associated with VE groups through marriage. Thus, their pathway to recruitment in those cases may depend on the speed with which their spouse joins. However, this may not always be the case as women's roles and responsibilities are proven to be highly diverse within VE groups.[190]

Figure 46 further show the relationship between speed of recruitment and marital status. Interestingly it reveals that married recruits joined VE groups more quickly than either single or divorced recruits, and married recruits made up a higher proportion of 'quick recruits' than single or divorced recruits. While recruits who took longer than a month to join a VE group were almost evenly divided between single and married, 62 percent of recruits who joined within a month were married. Of recruits who were married at the time of joining, 62 percent joined within a month of introduction, compared to 37 percent of single recruits. This finding may speak to the additional pressures faced by married men to provide for their families in a context of high socio-economic deprivation and poverty.

The social dimension also appear significant when it comes to recruiting others. Of the respondents of the relevant sample who acknowledged recruiting more people after joining the group, family members were cited most frequently, followed by friends, as illustrated in Figure 47.

3.2.3 THE NEED TO BELONG

Traditionally, the journey to extremism has been regarded primarily as an ideological process. However, this study shows that the journey begins as a social one. Whatever the context, people have a fundamental need to create a sense of belonging that helps give meaning to their life.[191] In contexts characterized by socio-economic and political marginalization, distrust of and alienation from the state reinforce the desire for an alternative group identity. In this situation, the compelling narratives espoused by VE groups, together with the alternative lifestyle they offer, the prospect of increased selfesteem and a sense of belonging and connectedness, are widely recognized as potent draws for recruitment.[192] A growing body of research in psychology, as well as other fields, has focused on the importance of identity formation for radicalization. Common social-psychological motivations to explain participation in VE groups and movements have been identified, such as a need for belonging and validation.[193]

This emphasizes the importance of social and identity factors associated with VE groups that resonate with an individual's need for belonging. In the quest for an alternative identity and a sense of belonging beyond the family, the data show that individuals - particularly youth - are more susceptible to joining VE groups.

Figure 48 shows the association between a sense of belonging experienced by voluntary recruits at the time of joining and while in the group.

When asked to rate their sense of belonging within the group, both at the time of joining and while in the group, the data show that on average a relatively higher proportion indicate a medium or higher sense of belonging compared to those who indicate a low sense.

This relationship is revealed by the findings of the econometric analysis. It shows a statistically significant relationship between positive perceptions of a VE group as providing a sense of belonging and a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment, thus confirming the significance of identity formation in the recruitment processes.

Although the decision to join a VE group proved to be influenced by variety of factors such as employment, the answer, '*Being part of something bigger than myself*', emerged as the fourth most-cited reason (12 percent) motivating voluntary recruits to join. This finding is consistent with the 2017 study.

However, positive perceptions of a VE group in terms of providing a greater sense of belonging did not necessarily affect the speed of recruitment and result in quicker recruitment. Econometric models 10-14 in the Annex show that no strong correlation exists between how recruits perceived the VE group, including its ability to provide a sense of belonging, and how quickly they joined the group. Figure 49 illustrates this.

FIGURE 48 **RATE YOUR SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE GROUP (0 IS LOW, 10 IS HIGH),** BY VOLUNTARY GROUP
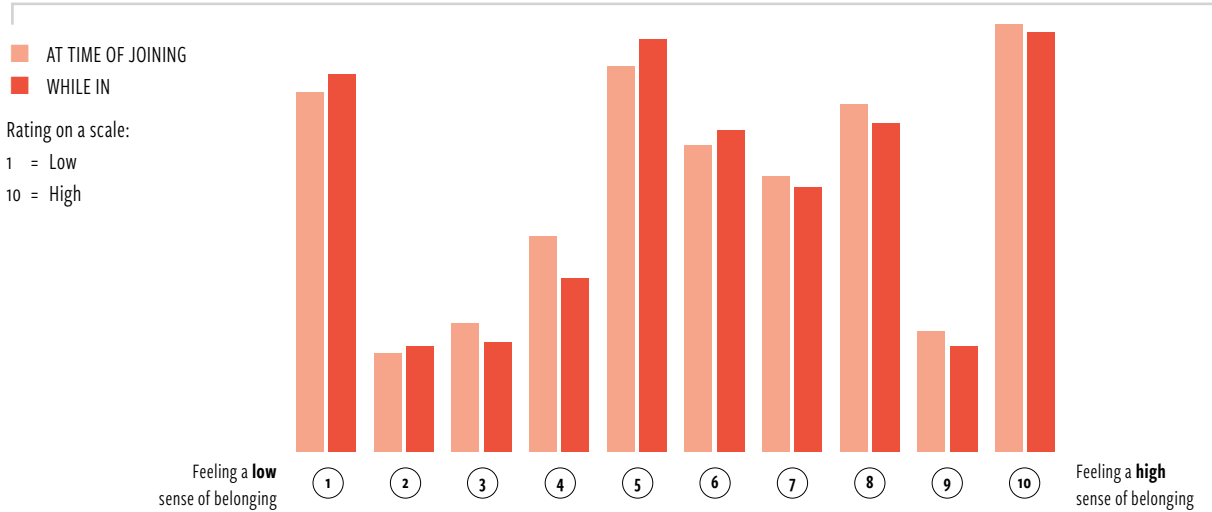
FIGURE 49 **HOW QUICKLY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS and PERCEPTIONS OF VE GROUP PROVIDING SENSE OF BELONGING** BY VOLUNTARY GROUP
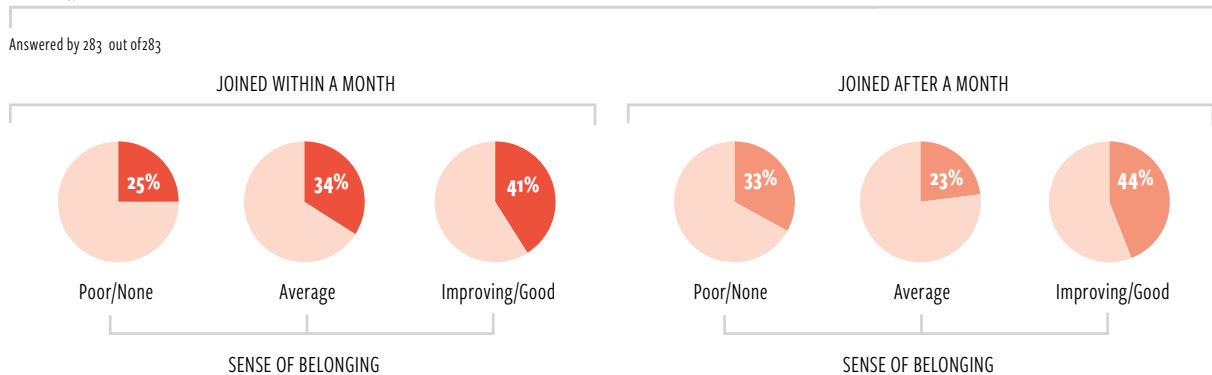
FIGURE 50 **FREQUENCY OF INTERNET USAGE,** BY RESPONDENT TYPE

NEVER
EVERY MONTH/ONCE IN A WHILE
EVERY DAY/EVERY WEEK

Answered by 1995 out of 2185

VOLUNTARY FORCED REFERENCE

77% 90% 48%

3%

7%

4%

16% 6% 48%

These findings may be understood as the outcome of living in a context where governance deficits, deprivation and a deeply fractured and eroded relationship between the state and its citizens may leave individuals feeling disconnected, lacking value, and experiencing a greater need to belong

This may suggest that although a VE group's compelling narrative may provide a pull opportunity to address deep-rooted grievances and marginalization, the urge to belong may be highly shaped by powerful sentiments of marginalization. As has been noted elsewhere, to be marginalized is more than a state of exclusion. It encompasses feelings of not being a valued member of a community, not being able to make a valuable contribution and have an influence on society, and lacking access to a variety of opportunities that may be open to others. In other words, it means to feel — and to be — excluded.[194]

As such, these findings may be understood as the outcome of living in a context where governance deficits, deprivation and a deeply fractured and eroded relationship between the state and its citizens may leave individuals feeling disconnected, lacking value, and experiencing a greater need to belong. This may be especially so when faced with the promise of upward mobility and the opportunity to channel deeper feelings of marginalization, alienation and frustration into the cause of violent extremism

3.3.4. CONNECTIVITY AND ISOLATION

The internet is widely assumed to play a central role in radicalization processes in this digital age.[195] Some studies suggest that the internet creates more opportunities to become radicalized, constituting an 'echo chamber' where individuals find their ideas supported by like-minded people. Thus, it can be a catalyst for shaping and accelerating the radicalization process. Other literature has pointed to the internet's potentially harmful effects in terms of creating opportunities for self-radicalization. However, very limited evidence is available to assess this assumption and much of the research has been undertaken in European contexts, leaving this issue under-explored in African contexts.
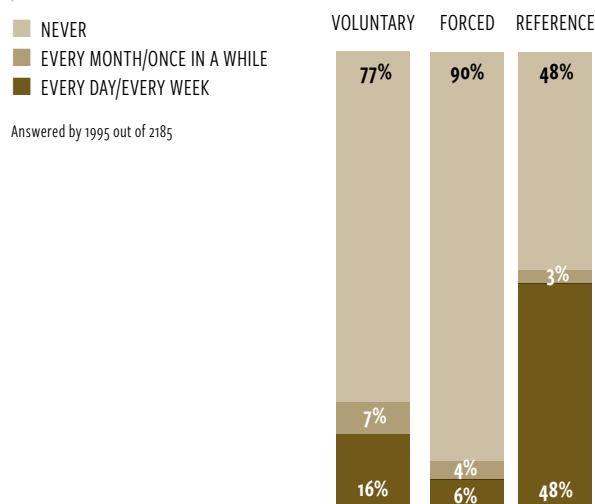
Chapter 2 posited that the sense of isolation arises early in life, with conditions of geography significantly affecting socio-economic opportunities, such as education, as well as exposure to others, especially those from different ethnic and religious groups. These data suggest that a sense of remoteness may also be further compounded by the digital disconnect from the outside world and isolation, leaving individuals more vulnerable to the ideas and beliefs propagated by VE groups. These findings are different from the 2017 study which in most countries under review (Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria) found internet use to be 9 percent higher among the voluntary group. In other cases it found internet-based recruitment to be far less prominent, although not insignificant. It suggested that as connectivity rates improve, the potential for online recruitment, having far wider reach than localized processes, can also be anticipated.[196]

In contrast to the assumption that access to and use of the internet leads to increased opportunities for radicalization, the econometric analysis undertaken as part of this research found that the less frequently a respondent used the internet, the higher the likelihood of voluntary recruitment.[197] In fact, any less-than-daily frequency of internet use is statistically significantly associated with a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment.

Figure 50 illustrates this relationship, highlighting the frequency of internet use across respondent types. It underscores the observable variation within the primary and reference groups: an overwhelming majority of the voluntary recruits report no or limited internet use at the time of joining, compared to the reference group at the time of interview.

FIGURE 51 **FREQUENCY OF INTERNET USAGE** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

■ VOLUNTARY   Answered by 1995 out of 2185
■ FORCED
■ REFERENCE

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS **DID *NOT HAVE ACCESS TO* INTERNET,** BY GENDER

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS **DID *NOT USE* INTERNET,** BY GENDER
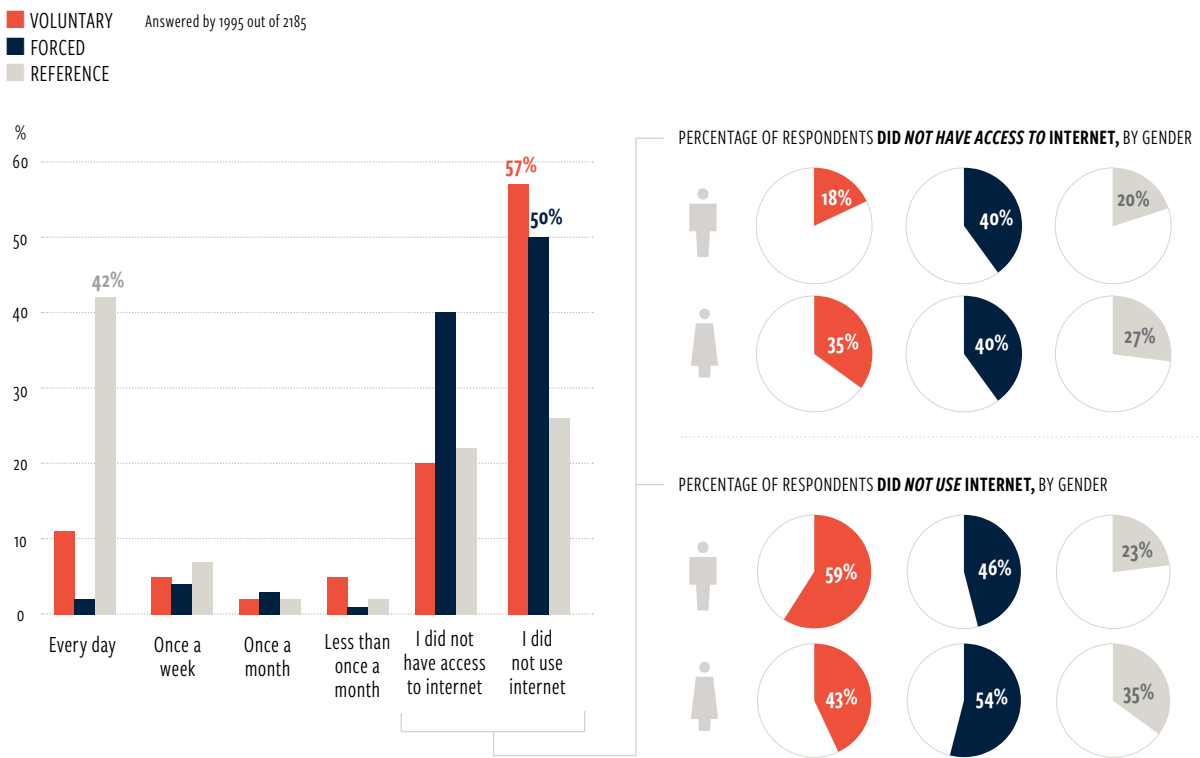
Figure 51 further illustrates the gendered variations in internet access, as well as internet use. The figure shows that a greater proportion of women in the category of voluntary recruits and reference group report a lower degree of access to the internet. However, this differs slightly with regard to internet use. While women in the forced recruit and reference groups report lower use than men, men in the voluntary group show lower levels of internet use than women.

This gendered variation in the group of voluntary recruits may reflect that use is relatively higher among the markedly lower proportion of women with access to internet, as opposed to the larger proportion without access, compared to levels for men in the relevant survey sample.[198]

Digital disconnect and isolation from the world also appear to significantly affect the speed of recruitment among voluntary recruits, who show the lowest use. A majority of voluntary recruits who stated that they had never used the internet also joined more quickly; that is, within one month of introduction to the group. Conversely, a majority of those who stated that they had used the internet to some degree joined within a year.

Figure 52 (on next page) illustrates the association between internet usage and the socialized nature of recruitment patterns. The data suggest that voluntary recruits with no or limited internet usage join with friends to a greater extent, rather than alone. Those who have not used internet at all join with family to a greater extent.

This may suggest that lower levels of internet use are associated with a greater vulnerability to peer influence in the recruitment process. As indicated above, this emerged as the key influential pathway to introduction and recruitment among male respondents.

Moreover, when respondents were asked where they find most of their information on current events, ranging from traditional to online sources and the influence of peer networks, 'friends' also emerged as the most important source of information among voluntary recruits by far, followed by radio (14 percent).

The dataset also shows that sources of information differed for quick and slower recruits. Of those who described traditional media as their main sources, 58 percent joined within a month of introducton, compared to 40 percent of those who referred to social media as their main source. In the pool of 'quick recruits', traditional media, such as community radio, newspaper and television, were the main sources of information.

Thus, contrary to widespread assumptions, these findings suggest that online radicalization may play a less significant role in VE groups' recruitment processes and tactics, at least in the countries under review. Rather, they suggest that digital disconnection and being cut off from the world, with an associated greater reliance on peer networks and having limited access to credible, independent information, may increase vulnerability to recruitment. They highlight the distinctive vulnerabilities associated with living in remote peripheral areas, where internet penetration is markedly lower.

The findings speak to the need for offline messaging and alternative/counter-narrative messaging, such as through radio, as well as efforts to strengthen traditional community-level information mechanisms in areas where the availability of credible, independent information may be more limited. [199] It further underscores the important role that local civil society or traditional leadership mechanisms may play in the fight against recruitment, particularly in more remote areas with low levels of internet penetration. They also speak to the importance of tailoring such responses to women and girls, considering the gendered dynamics.

FIGURE 52 **HOW VOLUNTARY RECRUITS JOINED VE GROUPS** BY INTERNET USAGE
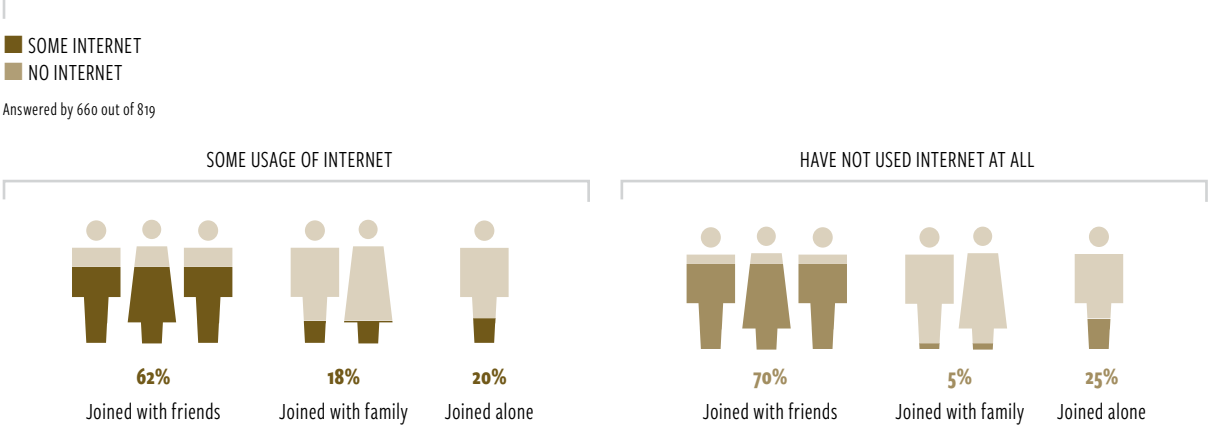
■ SOME INTERNET
■ NO INTERNET

Answered by 660 out of 819

SOME USAGE OF INTERNET			HAVE NOT USED INTERNET AT ALL		
62%	18%	20%	70%	5%	25%
Joined with friends	Joined with family	Joined alone	Joined with friends	Joined with family	Joined alone

Contrary to widespread assumptions, these findings suggest that online radicalization may play a less significant role in VE groups' recruitment processes and tactics (..). They highlight the distinctive vulnerabilities associated with living in remote peripheral areas, where internet penetration is markedly lower.

3.3. Prevention initiatives and resilience factors

The research also sought to identify factors that may have prevented some individuals from joining VE groups compared to other individuals facing otherwise similar circumstances who did join.

As highlighted in Figure 53, the research shows that only a small share of the reference group respondents reported that they had been approached to join an extremist organization.[200] Although these numbers may appear low, they may serve as a proxy, illustrating that violent extremism could expand its reach and spread significantly if those responses reflect those of the population at large.

The two most common reasons cited by reference group respondents for not joining were disagreeing with the group's actions and ideologies relative to other factors, such as fear of being killed and the influence of elders' or parents' advice, as illustrated in Figure 54.

Forty-two percent of reference group respondents who pointed to the 'actions of the groups' mentioned their experiences with the destructive and fatal impact of such groups within their communities and families. Interestingly, government awareness campaigns intended to prevent individuals from joining were cited least (1 percent).

Moreover, similar to the 2017 study, a significant share of respondents (35 percent) pointed to ideological factors. They described a disconnect between the ideologies propagated within the group and the individuals' own values and beliefs. Accordingly, these results may suggest that the reference group was less susceptible to the narratives propagated by the VE groups. Recalling the previous chapter, which highlighted the importance of education as a source of resilience, this may be an outcome of the relatively higher levels of secular and religious literacy observed among this respondent group.

FIGURE 53 **HAVE YOU BEEN APPROACHED TO JOIN THE GROUP?** BY REFERENCE GROUP

REFERENCE
Answered by 660 out of 819

YES
14%

NO
86%
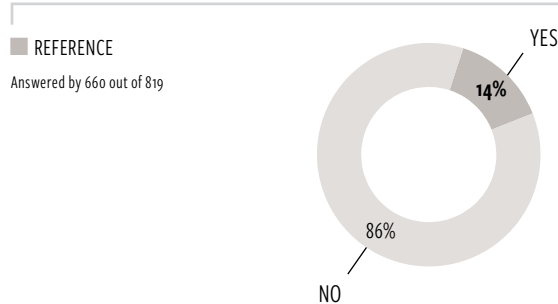
FIGURE 54 **WHAT WAS THE REASONS THAT PREVENTED YOU FROM CONSIDERING TO JOIN THE GROUP?** BY REFERENCE GROUP

REFERENCE
Answered by 594 respondents

Fear of being killed	Group's attroco-ties commited against family/ friends	Diagree with group's actions	Disagree with group's ideology	Focus on my life/career	Elders or parents counseling	Too young to join	Government awareness campaign
10%	1%	42%	35%	3%	7%	1%	1%
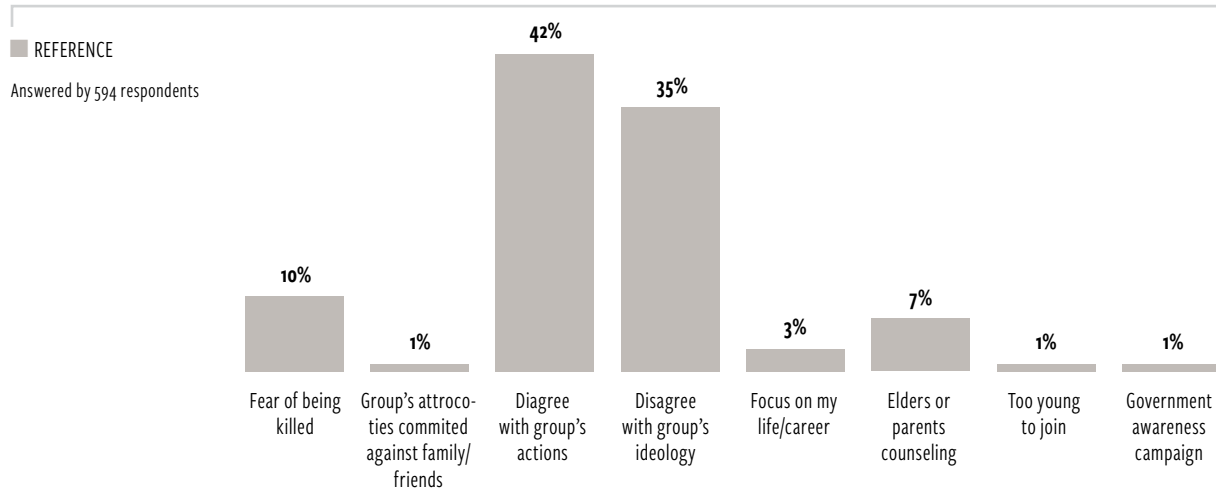
The research also examines respondents' perceptions regarding their awareness of and participation in initiatives to prevent violent extremism in their communities, as well as the initiatives' perceived impact. Such interventions are heavily context dependent,[201] making it impossible to define their specific activities and approach.[202] However, the research finds a marked difference between the voluntary recruits and the reference group, with a significantly larger share of reference group members stating that they were aware of prevention initiatives, as indicated in Figure 55.

Figure 55 illustrates levels of awareness among voluntary recruits respondents. When asked *'Were you aware of any initiatives to prevent people from joining the group at the time of joining?'*, as many of 70 percent indicate no awareness of such initiatives as the time of joining. Figure 56 illustrates the breakdown of awareness levels across the categories of respondents. The voluntary recruits' response shows that a smaller proportion are aware compared to the reference group respondents, who indicate a greater awareness of such initiatives.

Furthermore, when asked, *'How often did you participate in any initiatives to prevent people from joining the group?'*, the share of respondents who rated their level of participation as 'always' was significantly higher among the reference group (75 percent), compared to only 13 percent of voluntary recruits who rated their level of participation before they joined the VE group, as illustrated in Figure 57. Similarly, among respondents who had answered 'sometimes', the ratio was significantly higher among reference group respondents relative to the primary groups. Finally, the variation was still visible among respondents who had rated their level of participation as 'never', albeit less pronounced between the two groups. Thirty-five percent of voluntary recruits indicated that they had 'never' participated in PVE initiatives before joining, compared with 53 percent in the reference group.

However, the regression analyses did not find that the level of levels of engagement in PVE activities had a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of voluntary recruitment in any of the econometric models.

FIGURE 55 **WERE YOUR AWARE OF PVE INITIATIVES AT THE TIME OF JOINING?** BY VOLUNTARY
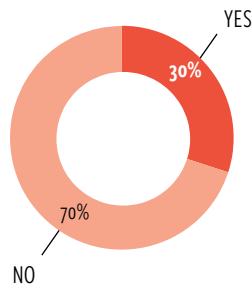
FIGURE 56 **ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY INITIATIVES TO PREVENT PEOPLE FROM JOINING THE GROUP?** BY CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS

VOLUNTARY
FORCED
REFERENCE

Answered by 1901 out of 1901

AWARE   **NOT** AWARE
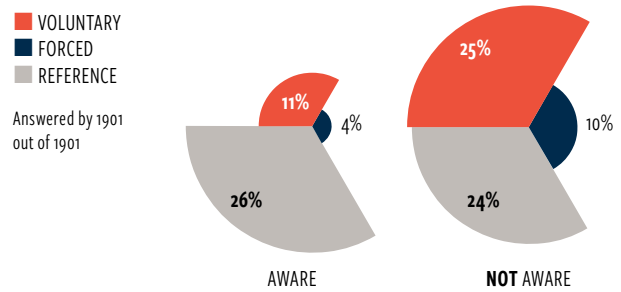
FIGURE 57 **HOW OFTEN DO YOU/DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN PVE ACTIVITIES?** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

Never   Sometimes   Always
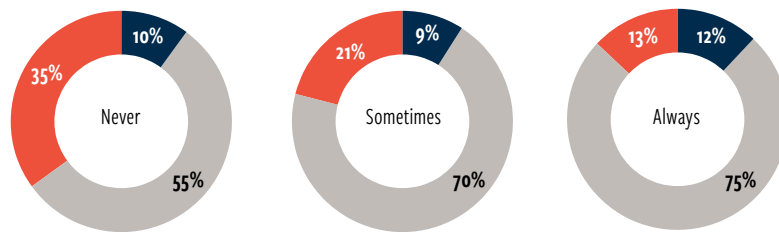
FIGURE 58 **ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY INITIATIVES TO PREVENT PEOPLE FROM JOINING THE GROUP?** BY GENDER, RECRUITS V.S REFERENCE GROUP

- MALE
- FEMALE

RECRUITS
Answered by 948 out of 1154

YES

25%
42%
24%
51%

REFERENCE
Answered by 953 out of 1001

FIGURE 59 **'WHO SHOULD LEAD PVE INITIATIVES?'** BY VOLUNTARY RESPONDENTS

- POLICE
- WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS
- YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS
- CIVIL SOCIETY
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- MILITARY
- COMMUNITY and RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Answered by 971 out of 971

3%
8%
13%
15%
23%
10%
28%

This differs from the 2017 study, which found that respondents who were aware of initiatives to prevent people from joining were recruited at a slower pace.[203]

Some significant gender variations were detected in this dataset regarding levels of awareness of PVE activities, as illustrated in Figure 58. While both males and females in the primary group were almost equally likely to be aware of PVE initiatives before joining the group, a higher proportion of men in the reference group reported being aware of PVE initiatives compared to women in that group.

However, a relatively higher proportion of females indicated a higher level of participation in PVE initiatives in both the primary and reference groups, with the variation more pronounced in the reference group. Of voluntary recruits, 57 percent of female respondents claimed that they had participated, versus 18 percent of male voluntary recruits. These shares were 58 percent for females and 21 percent for males in the reference group.

This may suggest that the relatively smaller proportion of women who are able to participate in such initiatives, are more actively engaged than their male counterparts, thus underscoring women's important and often untapped potential in empowering communities in PVE initiatives.

Finally, when asked who should lead PVE initiatives, the dataset shows that voluntary recruits were most enthusiastic and favourable towards local government and community leaders leading PVE programmes, which relates to their role as key actors for building resilience. They responded least favourably to the prospect of security actors, police and military playing a role in PVE initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 59.

These findings thus highlight the challenges of reinvigorating and sustaining trust between security actors and communities on the ground as part of efforts to prevent violent extremism and the need to empower local actors and place local solutions at the forefront.

Chapter 3: Key findings

THE TIPPING POINT

- Regarding specific 'tipping point' factors — those that ultimately prompted some individuals to make the final decision to join when others did not — the data show that 48 percent of voluntary recruits experienced a specific trigger event that ultimately led them to join. Of those, a significant proportion (71 percent) experienced a sharp escalation of human rights abuses, such as government action and killing of family or friends, as a critical trigger events prompting them to join (compared to 71 percent of responses among voluntary recruits in the first *Journey to Extremism* 2017 study).

- Furthermore, such trigger events proved to be leading accelerators of recruitment, with higher levels of anger and fear among those who joined more quickly. This is in comparison to others who joined more slowly and reported experiencing fear and anger, primarily, compared to those who take longer to join, who mostly express hope. This indicates the diverse pull opportunities for change, social mobility and agency that VE groups appear to offer and underscores the highly personal, localized and social aspect of recruitment drivers.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

- The finding shows that of the 40 percent of voluntary recruits who stated that they joined a VE group within one month after their first encounter with the group, 67 percent joined within one year after introduction. This is relatively consistent with the findings of the first *Journey to Extremism* dataset.

- However, when assessing the VE groups' effectiveness in terms of recruitment speed, the findings show that JNIM was able to recruit more quickly than others VE groups. This is qualitatively different from the findings in the first *Journey to Extremism* report, which found that those respondents affiliated with al-Shabaab were more likely than any other group to state that they joined the organization within a month.

- The findings also show the power of peers. For example, family itself, particularly for women, and peer networks among men are key pull factors, presenting the two most cited reasons for joining such groups and one of the predominant factors affecting the actual speed of such recruitment, compared to those who join alone. As a case in point, voluntary recruits also noted that they recruited primarily from among other family members and to some extent, friends. This underscores how significantly recruitment patterns intersect with individual, peer and collective identity formation and socialization processes. It also shows the effectiveness of highly localized, community-embedded recruitment strategies used by VE groups.

- The need to belong emerges here, too, as a significant push factor in the recruitment process, reflected in a significant association between the positive perceptions of a VE group as providing a sense of belonging and a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment. While positive perceptions of VE groups are not shown to be a significant push factor towards recruitment, the urge and need for belonging may instead be understood as a function of deep-rooted sentiments of marginalization and exclusion from society itself, strengthening the appeal of VE groups as offering opportunities for change and upward mobility.

- Contrary to widespread assumptions about online radicalization, the findings uncover a significant correlation between lack of internet use and the likelihood of joining a VE group voluntarily. In fact, recruits who never used or lacked access to the internet at the time of joining tend to join more quickly than others. Among the quick recruits, traditional media, such as radio, were cited as the main source of information, after friends. This accentuates the critical link between connectivity and isolation (both geographically and online) as key features in recruitment dynamics.

PREVENTION INITIATIVES AND RESILIENCE FACTORS

- The research shows that only a minor share of the reference group respondents reported being approached to join an extremist organization, similar to the first 2017 study.

- The two most common reasons cited by reference group respondents for not joining related to disagreeing with the group's actions and ideology, rather than other factors, such as fear. This indicates a level of resilience in the reference group in the face of the narratives propagated by the VE group. It may be a result of the higher levels of secular and religious education recorded among reference group respondents.

- When examining perceptions of respondents' awareness of and participation in and the impact of programming that seeks to prevent violent extremism within their community, this dataset reveals that reference group members indicate a significantly higher level of awareness and participation in such initiatives compared with voluntary recruits. Nevertheless, the regression analyses did not find a statistically significant impact of awareness and participation in PVE activities on the likelihood of voluntary recruitment in any of the econometric models. This differs from the first study, which found that respondents who were aware of preventative initiatives were recruited more slowly.

- Significant gender variations were detected in this dataset regarding levels of awareness and participation in PVE activities. Although no significant variation was found between men and women in the primary respondents' group regarding awareness of PVE initiatives, the reference group did show such a variation, reflected in a lower level of women's participation. However, women who are aware of such initiatives show a higher rate of participation in them than their male counterparts. This highlights the need for gender-sensitive programming and underscores womens important roles and potential in empowering communities in PVE initiatives.

" They lied to us that government was our enemy, but we later discovered it was just due to their selfish reasons."

Maryam, *23 years old, Nigeria*

CHAPTER 4:
PATHWAYS OUT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

While considerable research has been conducted on how individuals enter VE groups, the disengagement process has not been examined extensively. As a result, the journey out of violent extremism remains poorly understood, particularly in the African context.[204] While the 2017 study took a first step in examining drivers of demobilization,[205] the new research also explores the factors that motivate and incidents that trigger disengagement. It compares the experiences of former recruits who voluntarily surrendered and applied for amnesty with those captured through arrest. Thus, it goes a step further in examining the underlying drivers, incentives and motivations that shape an individual's decision to leave a VE group, as well as the conditions that enable the disengagement process. Relating this process to political socialization theory[206] and with further insights from role exit theory, the study presents an expanded conceptual framework for understanding the journey out of violent extremism as a dialectical process in which a multitude of experiences, occurrences and perceptions interact. Findings are clustered under these subheadings: drivers of disengagement; the turning point; and the disengagement process.

"We were told we will get money and wives when we join the group. We were told we will go to heaven when we die in battle."

Goroma, *23 years old, Nigeria*

4.1 Drivers of disengagement

The understanding of disengagement and deradicalization is informed by contributions from multiple fields, including psychology, sociology and criminology, and by specific frameworks, such as deviance theory. They offer explanations of why and how people voluntarily exit violent extremist groups.[207] Such studies have examined the process of withdrawal from radical political movements, cults and religious organizations, including exit from groups associated with violent extremist ideologies.[208]

Notwithstanding the clear variations among these processes and recognizing disengagement and deradicalization as two distinct processes that are not necessarily synchronous and may yield different outcomes, role exit theory suggests a common trajectory for members who consider leaving, attempt to leave and ultimately succeed in leaving a VE group. According to this theory, a trigger launches the disengagement process. It may be a traumatic event, an emotional crisis or as the result of generalized disillusionment. This sparks a cognitive opening, which both generates doubts about remaining in the group and increases receptivity towards new ideas.

During this period of reflection and questioning, individuals may weigh the pros and cons of exiting, taking into consideration the relative strength of push and pull factors and any barriers to exit. This process may lead to a turning point,[209] a cognitive shift in values, fundamental beliefs and sense of identity, suggestive of deradicalization or generating new incentives to disengage, whether by exiting or changing one's role and positionality within the VE group. Concurrently, the outcome of this process may inform if and to what extent an individual reestablishes a new identity either within the group or as an exrecruit. This may later shape the individual's reintegration into mainstream society.[210]

While this theory of role exit may suggest a certain linearity, it is consistent with the conceptual framework underpinning the *Journey to Extremism* research, which regards political socialization as a highly dialectical process through which a person's worldview is constantly evolving.

It is both practically and conceptually very difficult to dis-entangle the interrelated processes of deradicalization and disengagement.[211] Nevertheless, the comparative design of this study has sought to compare the perspectives of those who disengage by choice and by force. As illustrated in the methodology chapter, 12 percent of primary group respondents - 10 percent of whom who surrendered and 2 percent of whom applied for amnesty - are considered to have disengaged voluntarily as per their formal status. This compares to 31 percent of primary respondents captured through arrest, who are considered to have disengaged involuntarily.[212] While these categorizations are inevitably blurred and imperfect and make up a much relatively smaller proportion of the entire survey sample relative to the preceding chapters, the findings may prompt and guide future research into exit pathways from VE groups in Africa.

4.1.1. FALSE PROMISE AND UNMET EXPECTATIONS

The two preceding chapters showed that where deprivation, injustice and desperation exist, violent extremist ideologies offer a means of channelling grievances and rebelling against the status quo and a distant and distrust-ed state. They also showed that recruitment is a highly socialized process, influenced by family and friends, and often underpinned by an unfulfilled need to belong. The testimony of the voluntary recruits reveals how the nar-ratives of VE groups can exert a powerful pull effect, in-spiring visions of a new identity, a clear purpose, improved life-style and greater status.

However, examining patterns of disengagement, the data and qualitative evidence clearly show that these high expec-tations were not met for most recruits.

Figure 60 shows the association between expectations and categories of respondents. When asked if their expecta-tions of being a member of the group had been met, a high proportion (77 percent) of those who voluntarily disen-gaged indicated that they had not been. For those who were arrested, 60 percent indicated that their expectations had not been met, compared to 40 percent who stated that that they had. This relationship translates into a statistically sig-nificant association between voluntary disengagement and unmet or unfulfilled expectations, suggesting the signifi-cant influence of initial expectations and considerations on the decision to disengage.

The respondents were asked to provide further explanation by responding to the question, *'What exactly was not met in the group?'*, as illustrated in Figure 61. The distribution of the open-ended responses between those who disen-gaged voluntarily and arrested through capture shows the promise of material rewards to be the dominant factor in the outlook of both groups, although this unmet expecta-tion was significantly higher for individuals who disengaged voluntarily. This outcome contrasts with the salience of employment and material rewards uncovered in the path to radicalization. This was shown in Chapter 2, with voluntary recruits most commonly citing employment opportunities as their primary reason for joining a VE group.

EXPECTATIONS MET IN THE GROUP
FIGURE 60 ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGEDD

■ ARRESTED
■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)

Answered by 170 out of 842
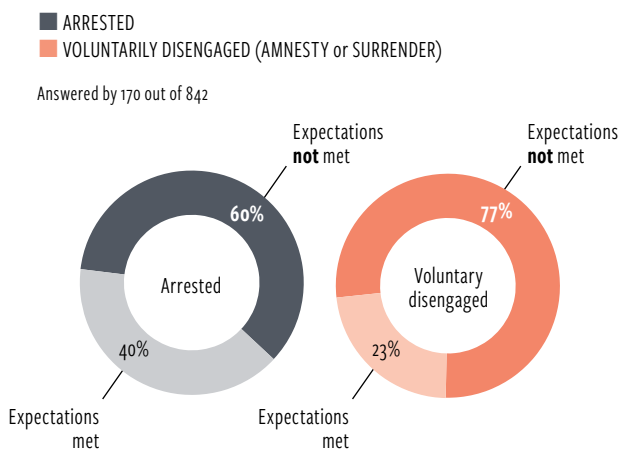
WHAT EXACTLY WAS NOT MET?
FIGURE 61 ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGEDD

■ ARRESTED
■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)

Answered by 45 out of 411
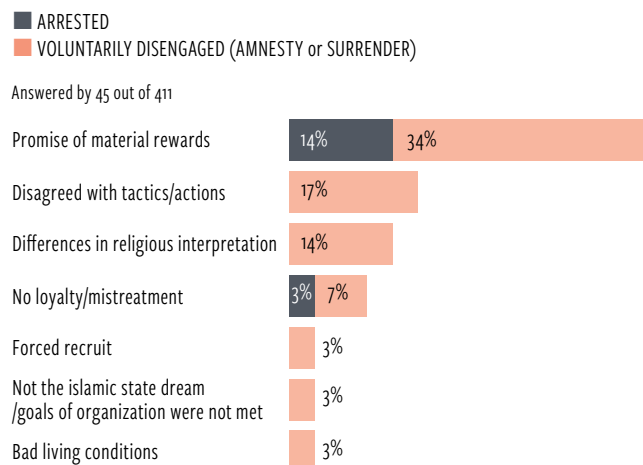
"They promised me to get all what I want when I joined the group, eventually I end up lacking a lot of necessity."

Alhaji Karube, *18 years old, Nigeria*

Figure 60 shows that for the 60 percent of respondents captured through arrest who stated that their expectations had not been met, the false promises related primarily to material rewards and, to a lesser degree, the recruits' positionality within the group and mistreatment. In contrast, for a significant proportion of those who disengaged voluntarily (77 percent), the responses were also strikingly ideological and linked to the behaviours and actions of the VE groups, although economic expectations also featured prominently.

Although it was not possible to compare salaries before and after joining and to establish accurate payment frequency levels,[213] Figure 62 shows how expectations about stable employment were not met, as expressed by respondents who disengaged voluntarily. When asked, '*Were you being paid while being a member of the group?*', a significantly higher proportion of recruits who were arrested through capture answered that they were, compared to those who disengaged voluntarily through surrender and amnesty.

Sixty-two percent of arrested respondents stated that they had been paid while a member of a VE group, compared with only 49 percent of individuals who disengaged voluntarily. The variation between the type of respondents in terms of payment was found to be statistically significant, thus highlighting an association between lower levels of payment and voluntary disengagement.

It also underscores the significance of economic considerations for disengagement as well as for recruitment. 54 percent of voluntary recruits complained that, upon joining, the VE groups did not provide employment opportunities or did a poor job of providing them. This compares with the majority of voluntary recruits who, as Chapter 2 reports, also stated that they believed the government was also either not providing employment opportunities or doing a poor job of providing them, similar to the reference group respondents.

This suggests that the socio-economic grievances most voluntary recruits expressed upon joining were replicated, to a large degree, in their unmet expectations that the VE groups would provide a stable source of income.

A significant gender disparity was also found in terms of payment. While 32 percent of male respondents stated that they were paid while in the group, only nine percent of female respondents reported being paid. This illustrates the existence of gender norms within VE groups, including in terms of the role women often fulfil as forced wives for high-ranking men in those groups, although this might not always be the case.[214]

The research also suggests that the expectations of monetary rewards among the larger segment of those who joined quickly were disappointed, compared to those who took longer to join. Of the voluntary recruits who had joined within one month, 42 percent said that their expectations of economic opportunities were disappointed, compared to 32 percent who had joined within one year. This may reflect the particular salience of economic grievances and associated deprivation among those who joined quickly.

FIGURE 62 **WERE YOU PAID WHILE BEING A MEMBER OF THE GROUP?** ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

■ ARRESTED
■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)

Answered by 220 out of 1181

Not Paid 38%
Arrested
Paid 62%

Not Paid 51%
Voluntary disengaged
Paid 49%
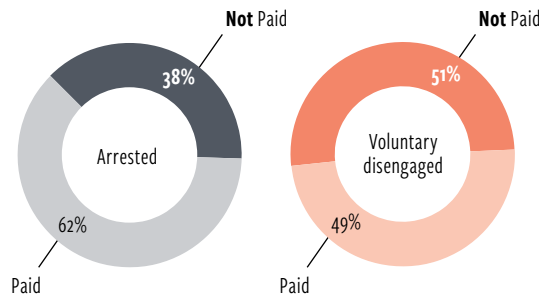
> "My expectations were to get a house for myself, enough money and a car. But none of these were fulfilled."
>
> **Aden,** *21 years old, Somalia*

Recalling Chapters 2 and 3, while 'quick recruits' were most likely to have some level of employment, the economic profiles of the voluntary respondents showed that they were primarily unskilled, working odd jobs or self-employed. Thus, their employment was characterized by low job security and unpredictability. A significant proportion of quick voluntary recruits were further revealed to be married, further suggesting the relevance of gendered roles and responsibilities influencing recruits' motivations and incentives. In terms of both recruitment and disengagement, the pull opportunity of being better able to provide for one's family is revealed as a key driver.

Indeed, similar to Chapter 2, the testimonies of individual recruits show that the desire for a stable income is often linked to the need to provide for one's family, ensure health care and be able to buy a house. They further reveal that some respondents associate joining a VE group both with earning a stable income and the promise of marrying and increasing one's social status. While these expectations may be shaped by the VE groups' recruiting narratives, the promise of economic reward is also linked to socially constructed notions of upward mobility and to the opportunity to reimagine and re-establish one's identity and positionality. As these expectations are eroded, recruits may instead become disillusioned and suffer an emotional crisis, which could offer entry points for re-establishing their identity as an ex-recruit and motivate them to exit the group.

These findings thus underscore the significance of economic factors in the decision-making of recruits - particularly the search for employment - as a key driver of both recruitment and disengagement. However, they also reveal the agency and opportunism of the individuals in question.

> "They claimed that they were better than the government and that was a lie."
>
> **Aisha,** *19 years old, Nigeria*

This is fundamentally different from the 2017 study, which found that economic factors were not as prominent a factor for disengagement as they were for recruitment. It highlights the importance of PVE narratives that counter the VE group's offer to channel socio-economic grievances, humiliations and desperation into the cause of violent extremism.

The findings further suggest that for a certain segment of recruits, offering livelihood incentives to disengage as part of a broader disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process can be effective in encouraging them to leave a VE group via amnesty or surrender. However, as the next section will show, the promise of economic benefits alone is unlikely to provide sufficient incentive to persuade long-term recruits to disengage.

4.2 The turning point

Based on political socialization theory and further building on role exit theory, this study introduces the notion of a turning point. It may take the form of a transformative shift in the values, beliefs and identity of a VE group member, suggesting deradicalization, or of a trigger for disengagement, either by exiting or changing one's role and positionality within the group. By comparing the trajectories of those who disengage through surrender or amnesty with those arrested through capture, this study seeks to provide insights into why some individuals choose to surrender voluntarily from VE groups when others do not. It thus helps to illuminate the journey map of exit pathways that may lead to disengagement or, even, deradicalization.

In the same way that not everyone who joins a violent extremist group is radicalized, not everyone who disengages from a violent extremist's group deradicalizes. Disengagement entails a change in behaviour; that is, refraining from violence and withdrawing from a VE group. However, it does not necessarily entail a change in beliefs. A person could exit a radical organization and refrain from violence but retain a radical worldview, leading to recidivism.

Deradicalization, on the other hand, is the process of changing an individual's belief system. In this context, that implies rejecting violence as a means to resolve conflict, express grievances or pursue a goal.[215] A member of a VE

FIGURE 63 **REASONS FOR LEAVING THE GROUP** BY VOLUNTARY

113

Multiple-answer question. Shows percent of individuals who selected reason. Answered by 604 out of 655.

| 18%
ARRESTED/CAPTURED
/COUNTER-INSURGENCY | 13%
NO LONGER
BELIEVED/
SUPPORTED
ACTIONS/KILLING
of INNCOENTS | 9%
BAD TREATMENT
or ABUSE BY/
WITHIN GROUP/
SEXUAL ABUSE | 8%
UNMET
EXPECTATIONS |

| 14%
NO LONGER
BELIEVED/SUPPORTED
IN IDEOLOGY | 10%
AWARENESS
of AMNESTY/
SURRENDERED | 8%
TIRED/HUNGRY | 4%
CONVINCED
or
FOLLOWED
FAMILY
MEMBER
or FRIEND | 4%
OPPORTUNITY
to ESCAPE |
| 6%
OTHER | 3%
FEAR of
BEING
KILLED | 2% GROUP
BRUTATLITY
AGAINST
FRIENDS/FAMILY

1% FORCED
RECRUITMENT |

group may decide to re-enter the group when the situation changes, posing the risk of recidivism. Conversely, when disengagement is linked to deradicalization, implying an actual cognitive shift, the outcome may be more sustainable.

It is widely held in the academic community that deradicalization may not be a realistic or attainable objective, which is why the aim of terrorist rehabilitation programmes tend to focus on disengagement.[216] The potential of sparking a change in beliefs and convictions may be particularly challenging in cases where the ideological tenets underpinning a decision to join are deeply embedded in certain values and beliefs with religious identification offering a distinctive, sacred worldview and membership, unmatched by identification with other social groups.

However, by going beyond the notion of deradicalization as a function of ideology and recognizing that people often disengage from violent extremism in the same environments in which they first engaged,[2] the data presented in this study, and the perspectives examined below, offer pathways to understanding disengagement and deradicalization.

Voluntary group members were asked to indicate the primary factors influencing their final decision to leave (Figure 63). While the figure reflects the mosaic of multiple push and pull factors that affect the decision to leave, it also shows that nearly one-third of all respondents (27 percent) stated that their primary reasons for leaving the group were that they '*no longer believed or supported the ideology of the VE group*' (14 percent), and '*no longer believed or supported actions and killings of innocents*' (13 percent). Other salient reasons for leaving include hunger and fatigue (8 percent), abuse and mistreatment (9 percent) and fear of being killed (3 percent).

Interestingly, notwithstanding the heterogeneity of religious ideologies, as well as the context-specific ways that VE groups adapt and disseminate their ideological messages in different contexts, dissatisfaction with the group's ideology emerged both as a prominent unmet expectation and a primary factor for leaving. This highlights the discrepancy between the promises that lead recruits to join and the actual religious practices of the VE groups. Many of the former recruits referred to their disillusionment and frustration with the way the VE group practiced its beliefs.

Some questioned the ideological basis of the movement and others were concerned about the level of religious understanding within the group, underlining earlier findings on the significance of religious education and literacy.

In many cases, dissatisfaction with the practices of the VE group appeared to be intimately linked to disillusionment with and unmet expectations regarding the group's actions. In other cases, atrocities committed against

civilians were described as the significant factor triggering their decision to leave. While it is difficult within the scope of this study to assume linearity, these findings may reflect the process whereby through disillusionment and unmet initial expectations, individuals become more receptive to reimagining their position within the VE group and considering the possibility of disengagement.

In an effort to prioritize the factors that shaped the final decision to leave the group — the turning point — individuals who disengaged voluntarily were asked to rate the factors influencing that decision.

Figure 64 reveals that becoming disillusioned with the VE group's actions and ideological foundation, as well as a lack of trust in its leadership, emerged as the three most salient factors shaping and influencing the decision to leave. These rated higher than other factors such as injustice, physical exhaustion, or family or friends being hurt.

A significant majority — 68 percent — indicated that '*no longer agreeing with the group's action*s' was the most influential factor affecting their decision to leave. Moreover,

60 percent identified '*no longer believing in the group's ideology*' as the second most influential factor affecting that decision.

These factors are seen in relief with other relative factors, such as the 22 percent who rated physical exhaustion as the major factor, with 30 percent rating it as a moderately significant factor. This suggests that factors linked to beliefs and behaviours take precedence over physical conditions in the decision affecting individuals' decision to leave.

The questionnaire revealed a significant gender variation, with women ascribing greater importance to ideological beliefs as a reason for leaving the group, compared to their male counterparts. As Figure 65 illustrates, up to 85 percent of female respondents stated that no longer believing in the group's ideology was the most influential factor shaping their decision to leave, compared to 62 percent of males. The decision to leave was also intimately linked to the decision of the husband and the family's decision to leave.

FIGURE 64 **HOW BIG OF AN INFLUENCE WERE THE FOLLOWING PUSH FACTORS IN YOUR DECISION TO LEAVE THE GROUP?** BY VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

■ MAJOR
■ MODERATE
■ MINOR

68% — No longer agreed with actions
60% — No longer believing in the groups ideology
53% — Lost trust in group leadership
43% — Injustice
22% — Physical exhaustion
26% — Family or friends were hurt
23% — Group turned on me
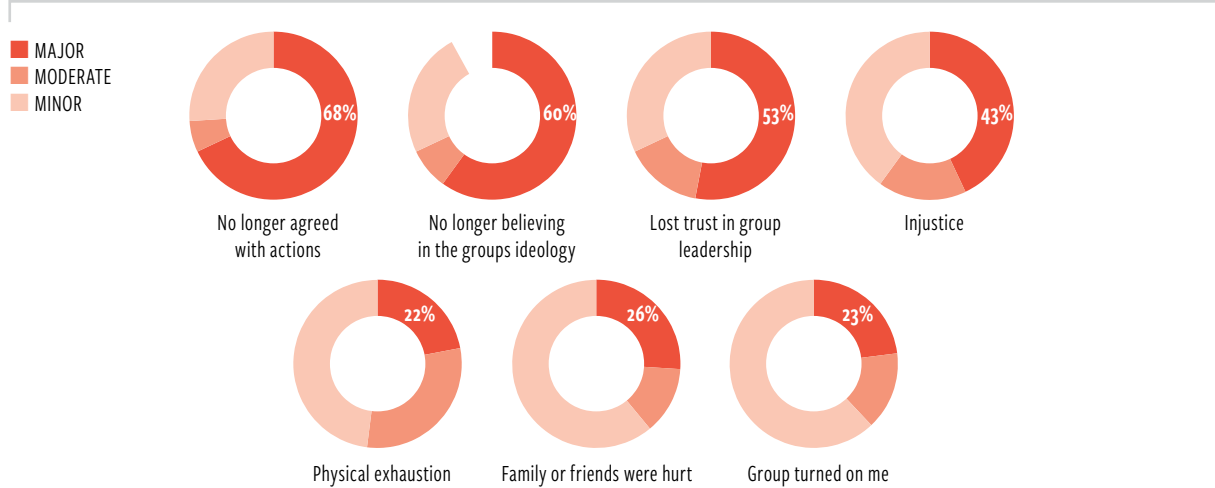
FIGURE 65 **HOW BIG OF AN INFLUENCE ON YOUR DECISION TO LEAVE THE GROUP WAS NO LONGER BELIEVING IN THE GROUP'S IDEOLOGY** BY GENDER

■ MAJOR
■ MODERATE
■ MINOR

Answered by 72 out of 247

31% / 8% / 61%

10% / 5% / 85%

"The justice and fairness and equity that was preached to us was not the reality of things in the bush."

Sadiq, *24 years old, Cameroon*
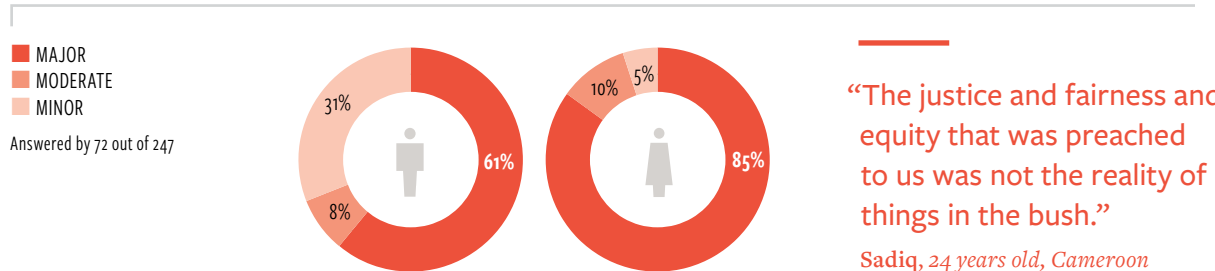
'HOW LONG WERE YOU/HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER OF THE GROUP?'
FIGURE 66 BY ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

- ■ ARRESTED
- ■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED
  (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)

Answered by 155 out of 236

A month or less: 3, 5
2-12 months: 10, 8
2-5 years: 37, 49
Over 5 years: 32, 11
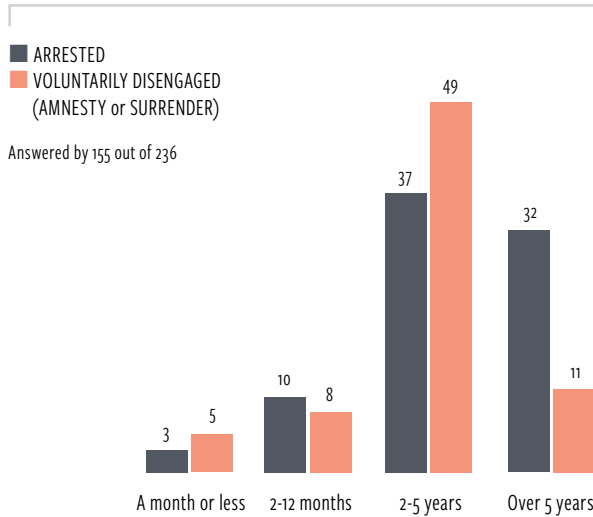
'LOOKING BACK, WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?
FIGURE 67 BY ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

Answered by 212 out of 212

Not join: 33, 49
Recruit more: 55, 3
Change tacticts: 18, 5
Not get caught: 30, 19
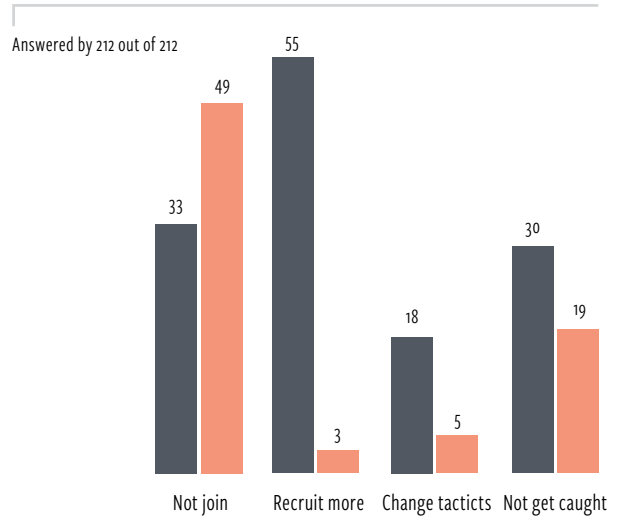
FIGURE 68 **LOOKING BACK, WHAT WOULD HAVE MOTIVATED YOU TO STAY IN THE GROUP?** BY ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

- ■ ARRESTED
- ■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED
  (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)

Stand up for something I belive in: 30%, 42%
Group beloning: 35%, 31%
Money: 21%, 47%
Justice: 32%, 31%
Defend Religion: 38%, 48%
Friends: 27%, 9%
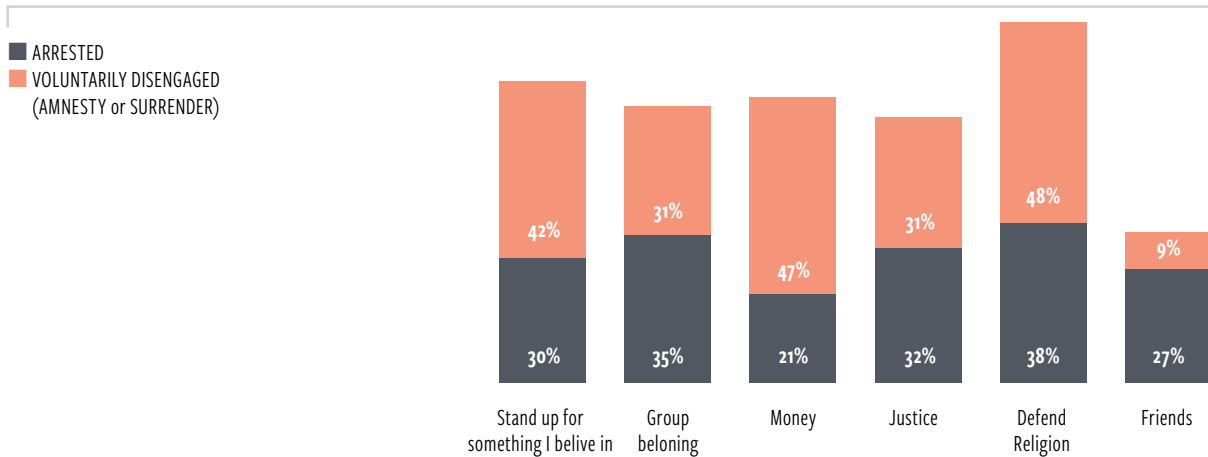
Further highlighting the socialized nature of disengagement, Figure 66 illustrates that respondents who voluntarily disengaged also reported having spent less time, on average, as members of the VE group, compared with those who were arrested. This suggests a possible association between time spent in the group and the likelihood of disengagement.

Respondents were also asked to retrospectively reflect on the question, *'Looking back, what would you have done differently?'*

Figure 67 illustrates that VE group members who disengaged voluntarily were significantly less likely to join again and recruit others, while those who were arrested admitted that they intended to re-engage in violent extremist activity and continue their engagement. This includes recruiting others to violent extremism and/or changing tactics to avoid being caught.[218]

A significant majority of those who disengaged voluntarily stated an intent to not rejoin the group (65 percent of this cateogory of respondents), which may indicate remorse. However, the most common response to that question among those who were arrested was that they intended to re-engage with the VE group with the objective of *'recruiting more people to join'* (40 percent of this category of respondents). While it is not possible to determine the motivations or sincerity underpinning the responses of those who disengaged voluntarily, the observable variation between the two groups could be a further indication of changed beliefs and ideology influencing the path towards voluntary disengagement, in addition to not having had their expectations met while a member of the group, suggestive of a turning point.

In addition, interviewees were asked to retrospectively rate the specific reasons that could have motivated them to stay in the group to identify any trends among those

who disengaged voluntarily and those who were arrested. These findings are illustrated in Figure 68.

The most significant factor for both groups was ideological: the willingness to defend one's religion and standing up for one's beliefs. However, this factor appeared to be more prominent among those who disengaged voluntarily. This may reflect the finding in Chapter 2, which revealed the widespread perception among voluntary recruits that their religion faced a physical or ideological threat, suggesting an associated with a greater likelihood of voluntary recruitment.

Economic factors also featured prominently, particularly among those who disengaged voluntarily, both reflecting that initial expectations upon joining where disappointed, and underscoring the importance of economic incentives in the decision-making process.

Beyond ideological and economic factors, for those arrested through capture, the push factor of the VE group providing a sense of group belonging emerged as the most salient factor motivating individuals to re-engage in the group activity (35 percent). This was closely followed by the desire of wanting to seek justice (32 percent). This suggests a stronger adherence to and sense of membership in the group, compared to those who disengaged voluntarily.

Recalling Chapter 3, the call for justice amid experiences of injustice and insecurity may be the corollary of lived grievances related to grievances experienced prior to joining, with VE groups presenting themselves as an effective vehicle for channelling those grievances against the state and the status quo and feelings of marginalization and exclusion into the extremist cause.

As such, this finding may reflect perceptions of VE groups as a more viable alternative to the state in terms of providing services such as justice.

Figure 69 show how respondents rate the factor of '*Standing up for something you believe in*' as a determining factor affecting their decision to potentially re-engage in the group. The dataset suggests that for those captured through arrest, the salience of this factor was higher (41 percent major and 12 percent moderate), compared to those who disengaged voluntarily, as most of those respondents rated it as minor. Those arrested through capture remain in the group for a longer period, which may also suggest that they have more positive perceptions of the VE group as an actor representing or negotiating a legitimate cause for change. This may also be related to views on the use of violence as a legitimate means to achieve social change, contrary to those who disengage voluntarily, a greater proportion of whom denounce such actions as illegitimate.

These findings underscore the strong behavioural and social dimensions that influence underlying drivers and motivations in both the disengagement and recruitment processes. They also emphasize the critical need for behaviourally informed approaches that can address underlying attitudes and belief systems to achieve sustainable outcomes.

These findings (..) emphasize the critical need for behaviourally informed approaches that can address underlying attitudes and belief systems to achieve sustainable outcomes

LOOKING BACK, WHY WOULD YOU HAVE WANTED TO STAY IN THE GROUP?
FIGURE 69 *'STANDING UP FOR SOMETHING YOU BELIEVED IN'* BY ARRESTED vs. VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

- MAJOR
- MODERATE
- MINOR

- MAJOR
- MODERATE
- MINOR

Arrested: 47% / 41% / 12%

Voluntary demobilizers: 32% / 6% / 62%
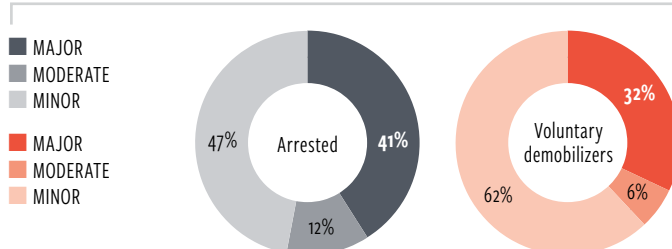
4.3. The disengagement process

Following the logic of role exit theory, the journey towards disengagement involves a period of questioning and a cognitive calculus before making the final decision to leave. Whether this internal debate ultimately leads a person to leave may depend on the strength of push and pull factors; that is, the benefits of remaining with the group and the barriers to exit.[219]

Based on evidence, the pull factors most recognized in the field include government offers of amnesty, demobilization programmes and financial incentives. Other accounts have emphasized the socialized nature of disengagement, focusing on the appeal of alternative (non-extremist) social networks, family, friends and community, as well as cognitive and behavioural processes and motivations at the individual level.[220] Some violent extremists may experience a combination of push and pull factors but never disengage, while others cite a single factor to explain their exit. However, it is important to bear in mind that leaving a violent extremist group is not just a matter of an individual's will. It can be extremely difficult and perilous for a recruit to extricate him or herself and escape from a VE group, particularly given the remoteness of camps and the likely repercussions if caught. Therefore, the manner and timing of leaving is also influenced significantly by the circumstances and opportunity to do so.

4.3.1. THE INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* data highlight the significant role of awareness and accessibility of government incentives and amnesty programs in influencing the decision to disengage voluntarily.

Figure 70 highlight the relative strength of pull factors affecting the decision to leave the VE group through surrender or amnesty. When asked to rate the influence of a set of pull factors on the decision to voluntarily leave a VE group, a significant proportion of respondents stated that the availability of government amnesty and reintegration initiatives was a significant factor in their decision to surrender or apply for amnesty, relative to other factors such as 'other employment' and friends and family. Similarly, the awareness of such amnesty and reintegration programmes supporting disengagement also emerged as crucial in the disengagement process.

They highlight the importance of sensitization and awareness efforts at the community level and of linking such efforts to national and subnational reintegration and disengagement efforts on the ground. This differs from the results of the 2017 study, where the influence of friends and family was almost as important as that of the government. While awareness and the availability of such initiatives may not necessarily outweigh other concerns and barriers perceived in the disengagement process, such as the fear of being killed, they do highlight the importance of reducing such barriers through efforts to generate greater awareness of the availability of these structures and programmes and of making them available and accessible to recruits.

HOW BIG OF AN INFLUENCE WERE THE FOLLOWING PULL FACTORS
FIGURE 70 **IN YOUR DECISION TO LEAVE THE GROUP,** BY VOLUNTARY DISENGAGED

- LARGE
- MEDIUM
- SMALL

Answered by 179 out of 179

Government convinced me

Friends /Family convinced me

Other employment

Aware of amnesty or
reintergration process
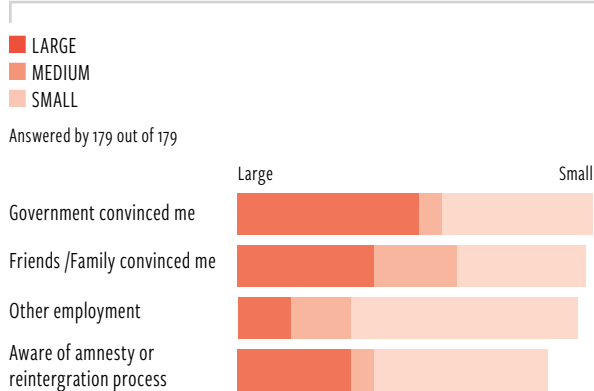
4.3.2. THE CASCADING EFFECT OF PEER NETWORKS AND FAMILY

The new dataset further suggests that disengagement has a cascading effect, as disengagement patterns appear to be closely linked to the decisions of family, friends and community members to leave the VE group.

When asked, *'Who did you leave the group with?'*, the most frequent response was 'with friends' (35 percent of respondents), again indicating the potential of peer influence as a means of encouraging disengagement, as highlighted in Figure 71. However, male and female respondents' responses regarding who they left with differed significantly, as did the findings regarding who they joined with (Figure 72).

Males were far more likely to state that they left with friends (42 percent), while the most frequent response among female recruits was that they had left with their husband (31 percent), followed by other family members,

in contrast to the very few who decided to leave alone. This highlights the need for tailored gender responses that may be effective in reaching women, who may experience an additional barrier to exiting such groups given the conditions imposed by marriage and gender norms. As noted elsewhere, for some women, joining a VE groups may be seen as an opportunity for upward social mobility when faced with oppressive norms of patriarchal societies, thus adding another layer of complexity for long-term disengagement.[221]

These findings again underscore the importance of the socialized nature of recruitment and disengagement patterns, and how such dynamics converge with gender roles and norms. Yet, as in Chapters 2 and 3, which highlighted the grievances animated by state actors as key drivers in shaping the trajectory to violent extremism, these findings also highlighted how widespread sentiments of disillusionment with and unmet expectations in relation to the VE groups also constitute important drivers towards voluntary disengagement.

FIGURE 71 **WHO DID YOU LEAVE THE GROUP WITH?** VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED

■ VOLUNTARILY DISENGAGED (AMNESTY or SURRENDER)
Answered by 70 out of 199

35% LEFT THE GROUP "WITH FRIENDS", INDICATING AGAIN THE POTENTIAL OF PEER-TO-PEER INFLUENCE AS A MEANS OF ENCOURAGING DISENGAGEMENT

FIGURE 72 **WHO DID YOU LEAVE THE GROUP WITH?** BY GENDER

■ CAPTURED WITH OTHER GROUP MEMBERS   ■ COMMUNITY MEMBERS
■ FAMILY MEMBERS   ■ ALONE
■ FRIENDS   ■ OTHER
■ HUSBAND/WIFE

Answered by 199 out of 199

"I didn't see the picture that I draw in mind before I joined — I was told by the friend that would be the best decision you have ever made, please join this great cause and you will see the differences when you reached there, but I actually found nothing and I considered myself to be lucky as I am still alive."

Ali, *31 years old, Somalia*

Chapter 4: Key findings

DRIVERS OF DISENGAGEMENT

- The analysis finds that just as widespread disillusionment with the government and unmet expectations regarding its actions represented key drivers towards recruitment into violent extremism, recruits' disillusionment with and unmet expectations in relation to the VE groups also constitute important drivers towards voluntary disengagement. As the research described above suggests, economic incentives and perceived ideological drivers provided key pathways towards recruitment into VE groups in the search for greater social mobility, sense of belonging and agency. The data and testimonial evidence also illustrate how unmet expectations and inadequate response on following through on such incentives, are significant reasons why recruits to disengage voluntarily and offer some indication of deradicalization.

- In particular, disappointment and unmet expectations related to anticipation of monetary reward stand out as key exit factors among voluntary recruits who leave the groups. This offers further evidence of the importance of economic factors in recruits' incentives.

THE TURNING POINT

- The findings suggest that the disconnect between the groups' perceived actions and their actual practices and tactics plays a crucial role influencing the final decision to disengage voluntarily. Of those who disengaged voluntarily, as many as 68 percent of voluntary recruits pointed to 'no longer agreeing with or supporting actions of the VE group', including the killing of innocents, as the most significant factor influencing the final decision to leave (rated on a scale). Religious and ideological factors — notably, diverging religious interpretations — stand out as a dominant unmet expectation and primary factor that largely affect individuals' decision to leave. A significant proportion (60 percent) stated that they 'no longer believe in the ideology of the group'.

- The shift from engendering and perceiving violence as a legitimate means of social change to endorsing non-violent means may indicate a shift within the respondents' belief systems and may be a sign of deradicalization.

- In addition, those who disengage voluntarily are significantly less likely to re-join and recruit others, while those who are arrested admit that they intend to re-engage in violent extremist activity and continue their engagement as a legitimate cause for 'standing up for something they believe in' and as a way of 'wanting to seek justice'. This includes recruiting others and/or changing tactics and expressing an intention not to be caught as a member of a VE group and carrying out its activities.

- These findings underscore the strong behavioural and social dimensions of violent extremism dynamics and the critical need for behaviourally informed approaches that can address underlying attitudes and belief systems to achieve sustainable outcomes. They also speak to the added value and complementarity of peacebuilding tools and approaches in PVE efforts that seek to transform dynamics between individuals and groups toward a more stable, peaceful coexistence

THE DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS

- Recognizing the importance and significance of enabling pull and push factors for exiting from VE groups, the data highlight the significant role of government incentives and amnesty programmes in influencing the decision to disengage or demobilize voluntarily. A significant proportion stated that availability and awareness of government amnesty and reintegration initiatives was a significant factor in their final decision to surrender or apply for amnesty.

- Moreover, further highlighting the highly social nature of exit pathways, the findings also point to the cascading effects of disengagement, as these patterns are linked closely to the decision of family, friends and community members to leave.

- Males were far more likely to state that they left with friends. For female recruits, leaving with their husband was the most frequent response, followed by other family members, in contrast to those who decided to leave alone. This again underscores the importance of gender-sensitive and gender-tailored reintegration and disengagement initiatives to more effectively target women, who may be invisible or less likely to know that such initiatives exist.

JOURNEY TO EXTREMISM IN AFRICA
PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT - VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT

DRIVERS TO JOIN ·· · · THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS · · · · · · · · THE 'TIPPING POINT' · · · · · · · · · ·

PLACE OF BIRTH
VOLUNTARY RECRUITS LIKELY TO HAVE GROWN UP IN SOME OF THE MOST REMOTE AND **PERIPHERAL** AREAS

MORE LIKELY TO PERCEIVE THEIR **RELIGION** TO BE UNDER THREAT YET **64%** RELY ON OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND THE TEXTS THEY READ OR HAVE LIMITED UNDERSTANDING

31% WERE IN **'URGENT NEED'** OF **LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES** WHEN THEY JOINED

THE UPBRINGING
40% OF VOLUNTARY RECRUITS CLAIMED TO HAVE HAD **FRIENDS** FROM OTHER RELIGIONS, COMPARED TO **53%** OF THE REFERENCE GROUP

CHILDHOOD UNHAPPINESS
INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT

73% SAID **GOVERNMENT** WAS 'DOING A BAD JOB' PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT 71% OF REFERENCE GROUPS RESPONDED SIMILARLY

48% HAVE 5 YEARS OR LESS OF SECULAR **EDUCATION**

62% REPORTED HAVING **'LITTLE OR NO TRUST' IN THE POLICE** 61 % OF THE REFERENCE GROUP RESPONDED SIMILARLY

61% OF MALE RECRUITS **JOINED WITH A FRIEND**

SPEED OF RECRUITMENT AFTER FIRST ENCOUNTER

1 MONTH — 12 MONTHS

40% WITHIN A MONTH

67% WITHIN A YEAR

50% OF FEMALE RECRUITS **JOINED WITH FAMILY**

48% EXPERIENCED A SPECIFIC EVENT THAT PROMPTED THEM TO **JOIN** OF THOSE **71%** CITED **GOVERNMENT ACTION KILLING OR ARREST OF FAMILY OR FRIENDS** AS THE' TIPPING POINT' THAT IMPELLED THEM TO JOIN

DID NOT JOIN ··· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·

PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE
REFERENCE RESPONDENTS

AN ADDITIONAL YEAR OF SCHOOLING REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT BY **13%**

NOT PERCEIVING ONE'S RELIGION TO BE UNDER THREAT SHARPLY REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT BY **48-50%**

LOCAL ACTORS MOST TRUSTED BY BOTH VOLUNTARY AND REFERENCE GROUP

HIGHER **ONLINE CONNECTIVITY** REDUCES LIKELIHOOD OF RECRUITMENT

THE ABSENCE OF A 'TIPPING POINT' EVENT, REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF RECRUITMENT BY **40-50%**

PATHWAYS TO DISENGAGEMENT *- DISENGAGEMENT THROUGH SURRENDER OR AMNESTY*

DRIVERS TO LEAVE ·   **TURNING POINT** · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·   **DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS** · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·

54% SAID THE GROUP
DID NOT PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES'
OR DID A POOR JOB OF PROVIDING THEM

68% IDENTIFIED
DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE GROUPS ACTIONS
AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTOR INFLUENCING THEIR DECISION **TO LEAVE**

42% OF
MALE RECRUITS
LEFT WITH A FRIEND

77% SAID THEIR
EXPECTATIONS WERE NOT MET
IN THE GROUP

60% IDENTIFIED
NO LONGER BELIEVING IN IDEOLOGY OF THE VE GROUP'
AS THE SECOND MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTOR

SPEED OF DISENGAGEMENT
THOSE WHO **LEAVE VIA SURRENDER/AMNESTY MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SPENT LESS TIME IN THE GROUP**

31% OF
FEMALE RECRUITS
LEFT WITH FAMILY

INTEREST TO REJOIN VE GROUP ·

PATHWAYS TO DISENGAGEMENT
DISENGAGEMENT THROUGH ARREST /CAPTURE

40% OF THOSE ARRESTED THROUGH CAPTURE MORE LIKELY TO REJOIN WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF **'RECRUITING MORE PEOPLE TO JOIN'**

53% RATE
'STANDING UP FOR SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE IN'
AS A PROMINENT INFLUENTIAL FACTOR FOR REJOINING

MOTIVATIONS FOR REJOINING: **35%** IDENTIFIES THE
'VE GROUP PROVIDING A SENSE OF GROUP BELONGING' **32%** THE DESIRE OF **'SEEKING JUSTICE'**

"There was a time that i came close joining the group because my friends were with them so someday my family become aware of the whereabouts because i use to be away of home sometimes then my family started giving me advise so they had to leave our village because of me so that they can put me as far away as they can from the extremist if it wasn't my family fought for me i would have joined them, I'm grateful to my family"

Saadaq, *25 years old, Somalia*

CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING AND POLICY

This final chapter focuses on what can be done to stem the rising tide of violent extremism in Africa. More specifically, in light of the evidence presented regarding the many and various factors that drive recruitment, what measures can be taken — both through programming and in the policy spher — to prevent young men and women from joining VE groups? Addressing this challenge requires an in-depth understanding of the conditions, experiences and incidents that shape an individual's path towards, or away from, recruitment into such a group. Building on UNDP's ground-breaking 2017 study, the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report addresses that knowledge gap.

In 2017, UNDP initiated the *Journey to Extremism* research to establish a robust evidence base that focuses on what drives young men and women in Africa to join these groups, drawing on a multitude of individual stories. It identified pathways for more effective policy and pro-gramming to address violent extremism, both to inform UNDP's ongoing work and that of other stakeholders and partners. Since 2017, efforts to prevent the development of VE groups at their source have complemented the deploy-ment of counter-terrorism operations to combat them; in other words, by addressing the conditions that give rise to violent extremism. Nevertheless, stateled, security-driven, militarized operations remain the dominant response in Africa. Meanwhile VE groups are expanding their presence and deadly impact across the continent, and sub-Saharan Africa is now the global epicentre of violent extremism.

This trend must be seen in a wider context. Despite overall development gains in most African countries over recent decades, and considerable resilience, vulnerability to violent extremism is related to persistent underdevelop-men, together with socio-economic exclusion based often on religioun or ethnicity, chronic insecurity, and weak or predatory states. These challenges are all compounded by a changing climate, more frequent extreme weather events, and the consequent degradation of valuable nat-ural environments and the resources they supply. Thus,

African governments face immense obstacles to delivering stability, peace and development and to ensuring that the pace and benefits of growth keep pace with the expansion of the most youthful population in the world.

Responding to the security and development challenges that violent extremism poses is a major focus of national and international actors, with UNDP among the leading development actors. The purpose of the *Journey to Ex-tremism 2.0* report was to expand and deepen the evidence base established by the 2017 study, following a similar approach of unravelling the pathways that lead individuals to join VE groups. In addition, the new study examines key aspects in depth, providing, for instance, more gender-dis-aggregated evidence on patterns of recruitment, as well as shedding new light on the factors that may push or pull recruits to leave VE groups. The underlying aim is to inform and promote more effective policy and program-ming responses by updating the evidence base both for UNDP's own ongoing work and for other stakeholders and partners. This final section of the report first recapitu-lates key findings of the new study and then examines the implications of this evidence, identifying what can be done in programming and policy terms to reverse the tide of violent extremism.

Summary of findings

The research has reaffirmed many of the findings and insights revealed by UNDP's 2017 study of the wide range of factors that can influence an individual's journey to extremism. It also deepens the analysis of those trigger events, or 'tipping points', that in many cases impel an individual to join a VE group. While generally reinforcing the earlier findings, the new study also uncovers some significant variations and adds depth to our existing understanding of those factors that make individuals susceptible to recruitment into violent extremist groups. These include an apparent decline in the significance of religion as a driver of recruitment relative to other factors and a more fractured relationship between state and its citizens.

The conditions conducive to the escalation and acceleration of violent extremism in Africa are largely present, suggesting it could spread even further than it has in recent years, with further associated devastation and backsliding in terms of development.

The new study also adds depth to our existing understanding of those factors that make individuals susceptible to recruitment into violent extremist groups. Similarly to the 2017, the new data highlight how young people growing up in these peripheral areas tend to have much less mobility and, thus, less exposure to people from different ethnicities or religions. Such lack of exposure can lead to a hardening of attitudes towards other people, cultures and belief systems. These findings thus largely confirm previous results of the 2017 study. Family circumstances and childhood experiences compound an individual's vulnerability to such narratives. The new dataset reinforces the finding of the 2017 study that low levels of parental involvement in a child's life shape future susceptibility to recruitment. It also suggests that where the family does not provide a sense of belonging, an individual is more likely to seek it in other groupings outside the family unit. Thus, an individual's journey to violent extremism may be seen to originate, at least in part, in the child's unfulfilled need for belonging and connectedness. Limited access to education is also a significant factor for resilience, although the data underscore this is not just a matter of education per se, but about its quality and scope, especially the extent to which it instils citizenship values, respect for diversity and critical thinking.

The above parallels the findings on the significance of religious factors as drivers of recruitment. Contrary to the first study, in which 40 percent of respondents pointed to 'religious ideas of the group' as the primary reason for voluntary recruitment, less than half (17 percent) identified religion as a key driver and only 6 percent pointed to the influenced of religious teachers. This contrasts with the 2017 study where 13 percent of respondents rated it as a determining factor. While lower proportions of respondents perceived their religion to be under threat in this dataset compared to the 2017 study, voluntary recruits were statistically more likely to have that perception compared to the reference group.

The pull of VE groups providing 'a sense of belonging' was further found to be a statistically significant predictor of voluntary recruitment into VE groups, with those groups providing an opportunity to channel deeper feelings of marginalization, alienation and frustration into the cause of violent extremism.

This may suggest that a commitment to a specific ideology may have less to do with driving an individual to join a violent extremist group than that person's wish to belong to a group, which leads him or her to embrace the ideology that the group espouses. It further shows that when religion operates as a powerful expression of individual and group identity and offers a way to channel existing grievances and perceived threats, the likelihood of recruitment increases. As such, this also serves as a warning that the use of religion as a touchstone for other context-based grievances may expand readily.

The study also underscores the significance of religious education and religious literacy as key protective factors against violent extremist narratives. Distinguishing clearly between individual perceptions about radical religious ideologies as a driver to extremism, on the one hand, and actual religious education and literacy levels, on the other, the findings shows that individuals who later joined a VE group voluntarily were more likely to have received fewer years of religious education than their reference group counterparts. They were also more likely to join more quickly than those who received higher levels of religious education. A significant proportion of voluntary recruits acknowledged having limited or no actual understanding of religious texts, rendering them more vulnerable to the influence of imported views and exposure to extremist ideas. In contrast, higher levels of religious education proved to be significantly associated with a lower likelihood of voluntary recruitment. As such, the findings resonate with the findings from the first *Journey to Extremism* research and offer the prospect of a bulwark against rising rhetoric that conflates violent extremism with certain ideologies and shows how religion, including religious education, may, in fact, serve as a crucial source of resilience.

The study finds a generalized sense of economic hardship and deprivation in the outlook of all respondents, further underpinned by grievances animated by the shortcomings of the state itself

The *Journey to Extremism* research again underscores the relevance of economic factors as drivers of recruitment, although they are unlikely to be the sole determining factors. One-quarter of the voluntary recruits pointed to employment as a primary driver, as well as the most cited 'urgent need' upon joining, while a majority of respondents stated that they were employed (although in vulnerable employment) at the time of joining. However, contrary to the 2017 study and widespread assumptions regarding youth unemployment as a driver of violent extremism, no significant correlation was found between unemployment and susceptibility to violent extremism: 73 percent of voluntary recruits expressed frustration with the government in terms of providing employment opportunities, compared to 71 percent of the reference group. Instead, the study finds a generalized sense of economic hardship and deprivation in the outlook of all respondents, further underpinned by grievances animated by the shortcomings of the state itself.

The *Journey to Extremism* further highlights how seemingly material incentives converge with gender norms and roles. While male respondents cited employment as the main factor, female respondents most frequently referred to the influence of family, including husbands, as the primary driver of this decision. Those who followed the violent extremism trajectory more quickly than others, were also more likely to be married and, thus, bear key responsibilities within the family. For those youths yet to assume such responsibilities, the promise of material rewards may be linked to the pull of greater societal status, respect and upward mobility as a way out of the impasse that many perceive in gerontocratic communities. In those situations, the lack of assets, such as marriage and stable employment, hinder them from advancing into adulthood – a finding firmly corroborated by the testimonial evidence in this report. These findings further illustrate how economic dependency, traditional gender roles and the pressure of community, together with grievances associated with lived realities of vulnerable and underemployment, converge and may affect recruitment patterns in critical ways. They also add more nuance to the incentives underpinning the decision to join a VE group, beyond essentialistic and deterministic understandings of youth and youth unemployment.

The 2017 study unequivocally established that limited confidence in, and widespread grievances towards, the state, including state actors, are associated with high levels of recruitment, reinforcing the importance of governance and service provision for preventing violent extremism in Africa. The new study explores such grievances in more depth, while also considering contextual evidence on the role of VE groups as alternative service providers and competitors with the state.

The previous study found a significant variation in the acute grievances expressed by those who ended up on the path to violent extremism and those who lived in at-risk environments conducive to the drivers of violent extremism. However, this follow-up study finds that those differences and contrasts appear to have been largely diminished. Rather, acute needs and grievances appear to reflect a much more fractured and divided relationship between the state and its citizens.

The new dataset reveals the increasing alienation of citizens from the state in many of the countries surveyed, reflected in most respondents' low expectations about the possibility of elections bringing positive change, limited levels of trust in state and security state actors, and doubts regarding the government's role in providing security, education and employment. This may be explained at least in part by the fact that half of the surveyed countries have experienced coups or attempted coups in recent years, which highlights the weakness and instability of states in the region. However, these findings further highlight that the conditions conducive to the escalation and acceleration of violent extremism in Africa are largely present, suggesting it could spread even further than in recent years, with further associated devastation and backsliding in terms of development.

The 2017 study introduced the notion of a 'tipping point' - an event that pushes at-risk individuals onto the path of violent extremism. It revealed how grievances towards the state are largely fuelled by human rights abuses associated with counter-terrorism operations and with state security actors more generally, compounded by their perceived impunity and lack of accountability. This study adds nuance to this understanding and explores the significance of 'tipping points'. It finds that while not everyone joins a VE group voluntarily after a specific trigger event, a significant proportion of individuals — 48 percent — pointed to specific incidents triggering their ultimate decision to join such a group. Importantly, it finds that almost three-quarters of those who felt impelled to join a VE group (71 percent) cited a specific trigger event, including government action, human rights abuses, killing or arrest

of family or friends, as the 'tipping point', consistent with the 2017 study. The study also reveals the significance of trigger events as a statistically significant accelerator of recruitment, while the absence of a 'tipping point' reduces the likelihood of recruitment sharply by between 40 and 50 percent. Anger and fear featured prominently among those who joined more quickly (within one month), while those who took longer to join were motivated primarily by hope for change, highlighting the appeal of VE groups as offering an opportunity for radical change or to rebel against the status quo. This research thus provides robust evidence of the significance of state action and, sometimes, inaction as a prominent catalyst and accelerator pushing individuals to join VE groups.

Of course, not everyone will be equally vulnerable to recruitment. The 2017 study revealed how 'micro' experiences within the family and beyond interact with structural conditions to shape individual pathways towards or away from extremism. It also identified important localized sources of resilience to recruitment.

The study finds that the effect of not perceiving one's religion to be under threat decreases the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by 48 to 50 percent, thus underscoring the value of religion in strengthening diversity, cohesiveness and the importance of trust building measures

The new dataset supports these findings while deepening our understanding of them, reinforcing sources of resilience identified in the 2017 study: higher levels of parental involvement and civic participation in childhood; increased levels of both secular (public) and religious education; and secure employment.

The study finds that the effect of not perceiving one's religion to be under threat decreases the likelihood of voluntary recruitment by 48 to 50 percent, thus underscoring the value of strengthening religious diversity and cohesiveness and the importance of trust-building measures. Moreover, respondents who ended up joining VE groups had much lower levels of awareness and participation of community-level initiatives to prevent people, although the analysis did not find a statistically significant variation when compared to the reference group. Moreover, contrary to widespread assumptions about online radicalization, higher internet usage is found to decrease the likelihood of recruitment. In contrast, any frequency of internet use that is less than daily is statistically significantly

...contrary to widespread assumptions about online radicalization, higher internet usage is found to decrease the likelihood of recruitment.

associated with a higher likelihood of voluntary recruitment. This speaks to the importance of strengthening resilience factors, such as community radio in areas where internet penetration is low.

The evidence also unequivocally confirms the importance of local actors. In particular, religious and community leaders were the most favoured to lead initiatives and foster community resilience. Respondents reported significantly higher levels of trust in those actors, in contrast to others, such as security actors. These findings underscore the important role that localized structures and community leaders and communities at large can play in fortifying against the spread of violent extremism, making an impact on the ground. This underscores the significance of local ownership and localized solutions as a key source of resilience and the importance of reinvigorating such existing infrastructures for peace.

Finally, the study examines the drivers of disengagement and examines important factors in the disengagement process by comparing the diverging paths of those who disengage voluntarily through surrender or amnesty and the paths of those captured through arrest. It shows that, just as widespread disillusionment and unmet expectations relating to government deficits constituted key drivers in the recruitment process, disillusionment and unmet expectations are key drivers of voluntary disengagement.

The study illustrates the importance of economic and ideological incentives influencing the decision to disengage. However, beyond providing economic incentives for disengagement, it highlights the importance of addressing underlying values and beliefs underpinning violent extremist behaviours, as well as the grievances that may spark a cognitive opening to extremist beliefs. It thus underscores the importance of transforming perception of violence as a legitimate means of social change an to leading individuals towards an attitudinal and behavioural shift towards non-violent and peaceful means of addressing grievances.

These findings underscore the significance of approaching violent extremism through a behaviourally informed lens. They also speak to the added value and complementarity of peacebuilding tools and approaches in PVE efforts and of bolstering social networks and peers towards achieving more stable, sustainable and peaceful coexistence.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The following section distils the key implications of the *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report. While the new dataset reaffirms many of the findings from the original 2017 study, the implications identified five years ago remain relevant today. The following section first examines the general implications arising from the evidence and then focuses on the implications for specific areas of programming and policy.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

The new edition of the *Journey to Extremism* research reaffirms the importance of enhanced development outcomes in areas at risk of violent extremism in Africa, as well as the need for targeted interventions across a range of sectors to address the identified drivers of recruitment. These interventions should be designed both to disrupt and transform the incentive structures that create such a ready supply of recruits for VE groups and to reinforce positive sources of resilience.

In practical terms, the question of resourcing to prevent violent extremism remains critical. The 2017 study highlighted this issue, yet preventive interventions still represent a relatively small fraction of the overall response to violent extremism in Africa. Moreover, the research shows that within the PVE sector, overinvestment in state-centric and stateled interventions can undermine longer-term outcomes. With their focus on building the capacity of state security forces that are often abusive and on co-opting communities and civil society to stateled agendas, state-focused PVE strategies and programmes tend to ignore how change and reform processes operate. While national governments clearly have a central role to play in responding to violent extremism, state leadership must be balanced by the critical contributions of non-state actors, including civil society and community groups in areas affected by violent extremism.

The most effective way to do this is to engage civil society and community groups in these areas in designing, implementing and following up national and international PVE strategies. Given the gendered dimensions of recruitment into VE groups, ensuring the inclusion of women's and girls' perspectives should receive particular attention. These strategies should be based on partnerships and the recognition that a collective multi-stakeholder effort is most likely to prevent recruitment. Local stakeholders can help identify the potential unintended negative consequences of PVE interventions and can monitor the downstream impacts of PVE strategies at the local level, including providing more nuanced understandings of gender dynamics.

The new study's findings underscore the highly localized nature of recruitment. This implies that solutions must also be locally informed and shaped. It calls for inclusive, community-informed PVE approaches and delivery mechanisms, especially given the low levels of citizen trust and

confidence in the state in precisely the communities where the PVE must focus. However, such an approach must take care not to instrumentalize civil society and community groups. Community engagement strategies sometimes involve including civil society groups simply as a matter of ticking that box as a way to extract information or transfer risk, underpinned by short-term investments in issues that call for a long-term approach. This is clearly harmful. Conflict sensitivity provides a useful lens for identifying how PVE programmes may be perceived and for ensuring that interventions do not put local stakeholders in harm's way.

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report shows that a balanced and inclusive approach is also important at the regional and international levels, given the risks of misaligned and uncoordinated strategies. It describes the range of multinational regional security initiatives to counter violent extremism that have emerged in the Sahel over the past decade. It highlights how the prolifer-ation of counter-terrorism forces operating within the same region has led to overlapping mandates and confused and, sometimes, competing operations. This underlines the importance of coordinating PVE planning and inputs across national governments as well as among international partners.

The 2017 study noted that PVE programming had been relatively gender-blind to that point and recognized the importance of gender-sensitive analysis of the drivers of recruitment and of the wider gender dynamics and ideologies informing VE group behaviour. It acknowledged, however, that the demographic profile of the initial dataset was limited in this respect. Learn-ing from that first iteration of the research, the new study includes a significantly higher number of female respondents. This allows for a disaggregated gender analysis of drivers of extremism and offers a stronger gender and intersectional lens to uncover specific issues relating to women's and men's patterns of recruitment and disengagement. This is intended to inform more gender-sensitive PVE policy and programming.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING
Pathways to recruitment

Upbringing and education
The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* research illustrated that peripheral and borderlands communities are associated with specific vulnerabilities, often suffering from gener-ations of socio-economic marginalization and neglect. Despite their resilience, these communities are found to have less exposure to others, with more limited prospects in development terms and lower internet penetration. The new research highlights how the nature of childhood experiences in the upbringing shapes the extent to which an individual subsequently feels a sense of identity and

belonging and how its absence increases the likelihood of seeking it through membership in a VE group. While the evidence for such psychological factors is difficult to adduce, this points to the value of psychosocially-informed interventions, among others.

Programming response areas include:

- **Bolster** efforts to support community resilience through a whole-of- society approach with targeted development-focused programs for at-risk peripheral and borderlands areas.

- **Design** age-appropriate PVE interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of youth, including children and adolescents.

- **Support** community-led and culturally-sensitive outreach on good parenting, gender awareness and domestic violence and revise school curricula and teacher training to give greater priority to citizenship and civic engagement, respect for diversity and critical thinking.

- **Invest** in young people's capacities, agency and leadership (outside of formal school structures), through, for example, mentoring opportunities and funding support to youth organizations with a particular focus on empowering young women and strengthening youth engagement in PVE projects, including identifying youth PVE champions (both former recruits and those who resisted recruitment), and enabling them to share their knowledge and experiences.

Religion
The *Journey to Extremism* highlights the need to distinguish between perceptions of religious ideologies and actual religious education and literacy levels. While the former are positively associated with recruitment, the latter are not: higher than average years of religious schooling appeared to be a source of resilience, while religious literacy was low among voluntary recruits. This underscores how VE groups distort religious messages and narratives to justify violence and how a reliance on intermediaries to interpret religion allows largely imported ideologies to serve as a lightning rod for the frustration and anger that are the inevitable consequence of deep-seated socio-economic grievances and political marginalization. It also underlines the important role that religion and religious leaders can play in disabusing young people about violent religious ideologies and promoting religious tolerance and cohesiveness.

Programming response areas include:

- **Support and amplify** the voices of religious leaders who preach tolerance and interfaith cohesion, while challenging misinterpretations of Islam, countering harmful narratives and promoting alternative messaging.

- **Capitalize** on the important role that religious teaching can play as a source of resilience, supporting increased religious literacy among at-risk groups.

- **Invest** in community-led governance systems that promote transparent and accountable leadership on religious affairs, including in areas such as the development of curricula in madrassas and engagement with parents on educational content.

- **Engage and include** religious leaders and women of faith in the development, implementation and monitoring of national and subnational PVE strategies.

Economic factors

Economic factors emerge as a fundamental driver of recruitment into VE groups, with employment opportunities cited most frequently in the new dataset as the reason for joining, relative to other factors, such as religious ones. More broadly, economic factors are a critical component of the incentives and drivers leading to recruitment. However, a one-dimensional focus on vocational training and livelihood support will not alone yield sustainable outcomes, unless they can raise expectations and fulfil socioeconomic hopes of sustainable employment and thus tackle underlying grievances related to socioeconomic deprivation and deep sentiments of injustice and marginalization that lead individuals in search of alternatives.

Programming response areas include:

- **Invest** in economic regeneration of at-risk areas, including by upgrading infrastructure, prioritizing job creation and improving access to markets and financial services.

- **Provide** gender-sensitive income generation schemes for at-risk youth as well as long-term livelihood programmes and entrepreneurship training that integrates life skills, citizenship values and social cohesion.

- **Develop** strategies that provide economic incentives and alternatives for recruits, engaging wider communities to avoid the perception of rewarding those recruited.

State and citizenship

The *Journey to Extremism* research finds that widespread lack of trust in government and its institutions reveals a fractured social contract between the state and its citizens. While the first study found a significant variation in respondents' outlook, this study instead identifies a more divisive and fractured relationship between the state and government, with particularly low levels of trust in security agencies. This distrust also extends to other areas of service delivery such as employment.

Programming response areas include:

- **Improve** service delivery across security, justice and other basic services provided by the state, integrating citizen oversight and engagement as part of delivery.

- **Strengthen** oversight of state security actors by independent civilianled bodies, with clear accountability and sanctions for abuses, to fundamentally address and end impunity.

- **Reinvigorate** anti-corruption campaigns with a renewed emphasis on building state-citizen confidence and accountability and ending impunity for officials.

- **Design** national PVE action plans in a participatory fashion and integrate a wider sectoral focus on youth issues.

- **Invest** in greater resilience of democratic institutions and processes and support civic education processes.

- **Support** initiatives to reimagine the social contract and strengthen national identities, social cohesion and citizenship.

The tipping point

Forty-seven percent of male and 48 percent of female respondents joined VE groups in less than one month from their first contact with the organization. Seventy-one percent took the final decision in response pointed to 'government action' (usually a traumatic event involving state security forces) and associated human rights abuses. The fact that so many respondents had experienced or witnessed traumatic events suggests that a significant proportion will carry psychological scars and grievances, which can perpetuate the repetition of violence and fuel cycles of violent extremism. To help alleviate psychological suffering and break these cycles of violence, mental health and psychosocial support measures should be integrated into PVE programming, as they are increasingly into peacebuilding.

Programming response areas include:

- **Accelerate** the implementation of security sector reform processes tailored to the specific challenges of violent extremism that are grounded in international humanitarian law, standards and rights-based approaches and that integrate civic oversight and confidence-building mechanisms.

- **Support** effective oversight of state security actors by an independent, civilian-led body, with clear accountability and sanctions for abuses.

- **Support** confidence-building mechanisms and trust-building exchanges between local authorities (including security actors) and the communities they are meant to serve.

- **Integrate** mental health and psychosocial support into PVE programming, including support for communityled trauma counselling services.

- **Design** alternative/counter-messaging programmes contextualized to local, vernacular cultures and delivered through trusted local organizations, disseminated via SMS, radio and community centres.

The recruitment process

The data also illustrate how the pathways to and from extremism are highly socialized and characterized by significant gendered variations, with implications for gender-informed approaches to PVE. Perhaps unexpectedly, the new dataset reveals a negative association between frequency of internet use and speed of recruitment. It may also indicate that the isolation that many young people experience in these circumstances and the sense of being cut off from worldly events because of a lack of access to information may increase susceptibility to recruitment. Given the community-based nature of recruitment in Africa, where the internet plays a less prominent role, this suggests the importance of bolstering resilience through social networks, offline messaging and that PVE efforts must be equally localized.

Programming response areas include:

- **Undertake** broader research into gender-disaggregated recruitment patterns to deepen the understanding of underlying pressures, expectations and incentives.

- **Develop** gender-sensitive PVE strategies and programming that apply a gender lens both to the analysis of the issues and framing of objectives and to design, implementation and monitoring.

- **Develop** gender-sensitive programming tailored to the specific exit pathways of women and girls.

- **Support** efforts to strengthen community resilience through radio and offline messaging.

- **Support** the design of alternative/counter-messaging programmes contextualized to local, vernacular cultures and deliver them through trusted local organizations via SMS, radio and community centres.

Pathways to disengagement

Drivers of disengagement and the turning point

To fundamentally transform perceptions of VE groups as a legitimate vehicle to address grievances and achieve social change through violence, the data suggest that sustainable pathways out of violent extremism require a shift in beliefs and values. It introduced the notion of a turning point, suggesting that such a point may trigger a cognitive shift in values, fundamental beliefs and sense of identity, which implies deradicalization. Or, it may simply lead an individual to disengage or change positionality within the VE group without necessarily triggering a cognitive or behavioural shift. This underscores that behavioural change is key and offers a sustainable pathway out of violent extremism. Similarly, while economic benefits may provide a useful incentive for disengagement, they will not necessarily yield sustainable outcomes on their own. Those outcomes are likely to require a change in attitudes as well, underlining the importance of integrated approaches to PVE.

Programming response areas include:

- **Support** efforts to reinforce and rebuild social bonds, promote a sense of belonging and offer an alternative identity that rejects violence as a way to address grievances, resolve conflict, express agency or pursue a goal.

- **Support** community-based reintegration and reconciliation efforts through community and locally-based organizations, including by leveraging the role of community leaders and communities, including peer networks and relationships.

- **Reinvigorate** prevention efforts to avoid a return to violence, including by acknowledging the legitimate grievances and structural, political and economic dynamics and risk factors that may have contributed to violent extremism at the outset.

- **Work** with former recruits to develop and communicate narratives designed to disincentivize young people regarding the economic benefits of joining VE groups.

- **Develop** strategies that provide economic incentives and alternatives for recruits by engaging wider communities to avoid being seen as rewarding the recruits.

The disengagement process

The study highlighted the socialized nature of the pathways by which individuals enter and exit VE groups, similar to the pathways into violent extremism. This again underscores the significance of considering the entire social ecology of peer networks, social bonding and identity as vital aspects of these processes, also strengthening the importance of reinforcing behavioural dimensions that may bolster individuals' resilience. The widespread lack of trust in the state also illustrates the importance of local-level trust-building and awareness raising about PVE programmes so that communities are informed about and understand amnesty programs and other exit options. Timing is also critical as exit options for recruits must be provided sooner rather than later, as the data show that thr prospects of disengagement decreases the longer a person remains in a VE group. Efforts should thus focus both on the micro (individual) level and on relationships, peer networks, communities, institutions and political structures that can expand the constellation of resilience factors that can contribute to behavioural change.

Programming response areas include:

- **Scale up** amnesty and other exit opportunities for disillusioned recruits and invest in comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration services. These include behavioural and mental health and psychosocial support mechanisms that can help prevent individuals from experiencing feelings of isolation and alienation in the disengagement process that can, in turn, contribute to recidivism.

- **Support** awareness-raising efforts and accessibility of amnesty and disengagement programmes, including through trust-building measures to link national and subregional interventions to the community level.

- **Develop** gender-sensitive disengagement PVE strategies and programming that apply a gender lens both to the analysis of the issues and framing of objectives and to the design, implementation and monitoring process.

- **Leverage** the perspectives of peer networks and structures, including former VE group members as voices for alternative/counter-messaging, including by providing alternative narratives and developing peer-to-peer learning and education programmes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Realizing the promise: towards effective oversight of human rights compliance, rule of law and accountability for militarized and state-centric counter-terrorism responses

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* report highlights widespread and generalized distrust of and grievances towards the police and military. It provides robust evidence that the conduct of state security agencies can acts as a prominent accelerator, driver and 'tipping point' for recruitment in the final stages of the journey to extremism, rather than the reverse. These findings clearly show the need for more effective oversight of human rights compliance, rule of law and accountability of state security actors.

- **Exercise** effective oversight over and accountability for human rights and rule of law compliance in militarized, state-centric counter-terrorism responses - contingent upon the strengthening and implementation of systematic monitoring and compliance with human rights standards and the rule of law, extending beyond state security actors.

- **Ensure** regular reviews of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as a robust and independent international oversight mechanism to more effectively assess and mitigate harm from counter-terrorism measures, including with respect to gender equality and civic space.

Reimagining and reinvigorating the social contract from the bottom-up

The *Journey to Extremism* 2.0 report points to a much wider fractured, divided relationship between state and citizen, reflected among other in the sense of apathy in the outlook of all re-spondents regarding the impact of elections and the possibility that they could bring positive change. This is not only reflective of a shift in levels of confidence in the democratic process, but also mirrors more divided and fractured perceptions on the state in the area of service provision and trust in state and institutions, confirming the need for a reinvigorated approach which build on people's

agency, create avenues for enhanced community resilience and the social contract between citizens and the state as a foundation for sustaining peace.

- **Invest** in sustained support for bottom-up democracy-building, including by increasing the visibility and accessibility of mechanisms for political participation and civic engagement in local and national development agendas.

- **Develop and strengthen** policies that ensure effective oversight, tailored and adequate development-based responses, particularly in the area of service- provision, anti-corruption and accountability, to challenge the emergence of VE groups as proto-state competitors for authority and legitimacy.

- **Refocus** agency-focused, human security approaches in PVE programming as an effective tool and framework for addressing underlying inequalities, grievances and root causes of violent extremism, which enhances space for solidarity as people are better able to reason about, strategize and participate in actions that transform society.

- **Create space and opportunities** for trust-building measures between state and society to reimagine a social contract fit for sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st century, including through efforts to strengthen national identities, social cohesion and citizenship.

Strengthening state legitimacy through improved service delivery, quality and accountability of state service provision

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* findings reinforce the call for a revived commitment by states to upgrade the quality and accountability of institutions across service delivery areas at the national and subnational levels, particularly in at-risk areas as a critical avenue for strengthening state legitimacy and accountability.

- **Upscale** investments and ensure improved quality and accountability of state services as a fundamental and, ultimately, more effective means of addressing violent extremism compared to standalone security-focused interventions.

- **Ensure** sustained support for the democratic process at sub-national and local levels, including through bottom-up democracy-building, going beyond the tendency to focus attention and resources on national election cycles.

- **Invest and support** efforts to strengthen the technical capacity in state service provision and delivery.

Embedding a conflict-sensitive approach in efforts to address violent extremism

Violent extremism is inextricably entwined with conflict dynamics, both local and national. Thus, interventions to prevent or counter violent extremism will inevitably have an impact on conflict dynamics. The research highlights a widespread lack of trust in governments, particularly in state security forces. In this context, international support for state-centric strategies, including to strengthen state security forces, risks reinforcing exclusive and predatory power structures.

- **Embed** conflict-sensitive approaches in efforts to address violent extremism with a focus on putting people at the heart and building capacity to analyse, evaluate and mitigate the risks of potential harmful interactions between responses to violent extremism, local populations and conflict dynamics through a human security approach.

- **Strengthen** analysis and practical guidance on conflict-sensitive approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism to ensure that harmful impacts are minimized while building upon peacebuilding opportunities.

- **Support** multi-stakeholder strategies to counter and prevent violent extremism, rather than those that focus exclusively on state capacity-building.

Up-scaling support for localized, community-based support to PVE

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* research highlights the localized dynamics that shape an individual's pathway to join a violent extremist group, while also revealing how violent extremist groups tap into and exploit localized grievances. This suggests a need for a critical shift in confronting the root causes of violent extremism from standalone military means to complementary community-based, context-informed and development-based support for bottom-up conflict transformation and peace-building approaches that recognize the importance of countervailing preventive efforts at the local level. This also calls for a corresponding shift in the partnership with local actors. While there is growing recognition of the positive role that local authority figures, such as village elders, religious leaders, schoolteachers, women of faith and women's group leaders, can play in building community resilience to violent extremist ideology, most responses to violent extremism are still designed and delivered in a top-down manner. Therefore, greater efforts

are required to fortify local ownership and engagement of community actors in PVE initiatives. It also calls for more resources for community-based preventive approaches, including sustainable, long-term funding.

- **Up-scale** support for localized community-based support to PVE initiatives and ensure more long-term, sustainable funding and resources to community-based preventive approaches.

- **Strengthen** and reinvigorate partnerships with civil society and community groups which are based on fortifying local ownership and their engagement in PVE initiatives in all areas of the design, implementation and evaluation of national and international strategies.

- **Ensure** sustained support and Investments in gender-sensitive PVE response with a specific focus and resources dedicated to ensuring the inclusion of women and girls' perspectives in all areas of the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions.

Integrating PVE within peacebuilding and sustainable development policy frameworks

Importance of development approaches in tackling the causes and consequences of violent extremism has gained increasing recognition. Despite this — and notwithstanding the limited evidence of the success of security-driven responses over the past five years — most international attention and resources for addressing violent extremism in Africa continue to be directed towards security-focused or conventional humanitarian interventions, as evidenced by this study.

- **Strengthen** the evidence-base and analytical foundation of PVE approaches based on comprehensive analysis on root and proximate causes of conflict. Design and deliver joined-up responses, rather than pursuing disconnected PVE and peacebuilding strategies that may undermine each other.

- **Integrate and embed** prevention of violent extremism in peacebuilding and sustainable development policy frameworks.

- **Bolster and promote** multi-faceted preventive approaches to violent, with long-term development goals at its core, rather than a narrow security-focused response.

Recalibrating the commitment towards investing in cost-effective prevention and long-term development

The *Journey to Extremism 2.0* study shows that ODA funding reflects reactive and security-dominated investments. This is crowding out support for preventive and long-term development as support for peacebuilding and PVE initiatives has plateaued or, even, decreased in recent years to approximately 2 percent.

- **Reprioritize** international policy and resources toward adressing the root causes and conditions of underdevelopment that dr

- **Recalibrate** commitments to reorient investments towards complementary prevention and peacebuilding efforts to harness multiplier effects and reap peace dividends.

- **Ensure and oversee** that international development budgets avoid rebranding and conflating PVE efforts with interventions to counter terror and extremism (CTE) and counter violent extremism (CVE), securitizing aid and instrumentalizing efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism in contested political contexts.

ANNEX

Methodological Annex

A NOTE ON FINDINGS and ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS

The surveys contain over 250 questions. However, the econometric analysis builds from theory and prior evidence on radicalization rather than taking a data mining approach to look for differences between the voluntary recruit group and the reference group.

The econometric analysis focused on modelling the multivariate relationship between different push, pull and personal factors and the likelihood that a respondent was a voluntary recruit (versus a reference group respondent). This was done using logistic regression techniques, after data imputation for missing data and matching along key background covariates outlined above (gender, age, nationality and education) between voluntary recruits and reference group respondents was completed.[210]

Several econometric models were run with differing combinations of push, pull and personal factors, thus ensuring that at least one variable from each category was present in the model. Multivariate logistic analysis provides insight into factors that may affect the likelihood of having joined a VE group voluntarily versus not having joined. Given the non-probabilistic nature of survey sampling, the results of these analyses are not generalizable to voluntary recruits to VE groupswrit large; they can provide insight only into this specific group of survey respondents.

DATA SUBSETTING, MATCHING and CLEANING

The relevant scope of survey data was automatically subset because the survey questions on pull factors (those that may make a group attractive to join), were asked only in a subset of countries where interviews were conducted: Somalia, Sudan, Mali and Burkina Faso.

To generate insights into the factors that may make an individual more or less vulnerable to voluntary recruitment into a violent extremist organization, the group of voluntary recruit respondents surveyed had to be matched to a similar cohort of individuals who, having been exposed to or had an opportunity to engage with such an organization, instead chose not to engage. Using the available survey data, the subset of relevant reference group cohorts includes those who either spent time living under the direct control of a VE group, who were approached by a VE groupto be recruited, or both.

TABLE 1: GENDER BREAKDOWN OF RELEVANT SET OF INTERVIEWEES[211]

	REFERENCE GROUP	VOLUNTARY RECRUITS
MALE	431	759
FEMALE	164	111

To ensure that the two groups (voluntary recruits and reference group) were relatively similar on background characteristics — that is, to disentangle potential confounding factors from explanatory variables regarding propensity to join voluntarily — a matching procedure was implemented using the 'Match It' package in R. Two versions of matching were used: coarsened exact matching method and exact matching. Analyses were run on both sets of data. This resulted in 689 and 467 observations, respectively. The balancing variables chosen were age, gender, religious education, ever having had a friend from a different religion while growing up, and ever having voted. No statistically significant differences appeared between the two groups post-balancing.

Considerable data were missing from the survey (missingness), including blank entries and 'Don't know' and 'Refused to respond' responses. For the purposes of the econometric analysis, these three categories were treated as missing or N/A.

Missing data imputation was necessary (to balance the dataset), which was done using the Mice package in R, with the MIDAS touch imputation method.

The dependent variable in the analysis was a binary 1/0, coded as 1 for respondents who were voluntary recruits and as 0 for respondents in the reference group.

Table 2 outlines the independent variables used in the various analyses — push, pull and personal — and the corresponding survey indicators that were analysed.

TABLE 2: PUSH, PULL AND PERSONAL FACTORS AND INDICATORS FOR VOLUNTARILY JOINING VE GROUP ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS

PUSH FACTORS	SURVEY QUESTION/INDICATOR	TREATMENT/CODING IN REGRESSION
Poverty context and relative deprivation	What did you do before you joined or got involved with the group?	1 | Student 2 | Employed 3 | Unemployed
Governance context: trust in state	For each of the following institutions/ leaders I read out, please rate your level of TRUST you have in them: National Government	1 | A great deal 2 | Quite a lot 3 | Not very much 4 | Not at all
	For each of the following institutions/ leaders I read out, please rate your level of TRUST you have in them: Local Government	1 | A great deal 2 | Quite a lot 3 | Not very much 4 | Not at all
	For each of the following institutions/ leaders I read out, please rate your level of TRUST you have in them: Police	1 | A great deal 2 | Quite a lot 3 | Not very much 4 | Not at all
	For each of the following institutions/ leaders I read out, please rate your level of TRUST you have in them: Military	1 | A great deal 2 | Quite a lot 3 | Not very much 4 | Not at all
	For each of the following institutions/ leaders I read out, please rate your level of TRUST you have in them: Secular justice sector	1 | A great deal 2 | Quite a lot 3 | Not very much 4 | Not at all
Governance context: perceptions of weak governance	How successful was the government in providing everyday safety?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the government in providing healthcare?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent

	How successful was the government in providing water and electricity?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the government in providing employment?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the government in providing a sense of belonging?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
Education	Years of secular schooling completed	
	Years of religious schooling completed	
	Type of religious education	0| None 1 | Christian 2 | Islamic 3 | Both
Specific trigger event	Did anything specific happen that finally motivated you to join the group?	1 | yes 2 | no
	Did anything specific happen that convinced you not to get associated with the group?	1 | yes 2 | no

PULL FACTORS	SURVEY QUESTION/INDICATOR	TREATMENT/CODING IN REGRESSION
Perceptions of the VE org	How successful was the group in providing everyday safety?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the group in providing healthcare?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the group in providing water and electricity?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
	How successful was the group in providing employment?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent

	How successful was the group in providing a sense of belonging?	1 | not being provided 2 | poor 3 | average 4 | improving 5 | excellent
PERSONAL FACTORS	**SURVEY QUESTION/INDICATOR**	**TREATMENT/CODING IN REGRESSION**
Upbringing/childhood	How happy was your childhood?	Scale 1-10
	How interested or involved were your parents in your life while growing up?	Scale 1-10
Control factors		
Age		Number
Marital Status	What is your marital status now?	1 | Single 2 | Married 3 | Divorced
Gender		1| Male 2| Female
Connectivity and Social Media usage	How regularly do you use the internet?	1 | every day 2 | once a week 3 | once a month 4 | less than once a month 5 | I did not have access to internet 6 | I did not use internet
	Which did you/do you use more social or traditional media as a source of information?	1 | social media 2 | traditional media 3 | used them equally

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Logistic regressions were performed on the balanced data set in R, with model fit determina-tion based on McFad-den's Pseudo R-squared statistic and a calculation of hits and misses (percent correctly predicted).

Table 3 presents the results of the best-fitting models. The exact matching method used to balance the data resulted in better fitting models than the CEM method. The results were consistent across both methods.

TABLE 3: KEY REGRESSION RESULTS: MULTIVARIATE LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT

	DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOLUNTARILY RECRUITED		
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Childhood happiness	-0.127** (0.062)		
Parents involved growing up		-0.206*** (0.073)	-0.219*** (0.072)
Livelihhod/Prospects: (baseline is student) Employed Unemployed Other	0.725 (0.495) 0.828 (0.518) 17.975 (1,219.438)	0.061 (0.598) 0.0004 (0.613) 17.236 (1,123.136)	
Years religious education	-0.015 (0.044)		
Years secular education		-0.248*** (0.048)	-0.241*** (0.044)
Trust in national government	0.014 (0.200)	-0.085 (0.226)	0.050 (0.189)
Trust in military	-0.175 (0.188)	-0.057 (0.209)	
Government provides employment	-0.665*** (0.189)	-0.626*** (0.202)	-0.657*** (0.194)
Government provides education	0.605*** (0.173)	0.508*** (0.185)	0.456** (0.179)
Group provides education	-0.080 (0.157)	-0.206 (0.174)	-0.172 (0.168)
Group provides employment	-0.374** (0.155)	-0.264 (0.168)	-0.242 (0.160)
Participation in any PVE programs: (baseline – always) Sometimes Never	-0.058 (0.711) 0.072 (0.675)	0.614 (0.867) 0.570 (0.810)	
Trigger event: (baseline yes) No	-0.718** (0.343)	-1.007*** (0.362)	-0.955*** (0.347)
Group provides belonging	1.055*** (0.153)	0.967*** (0.170)	1.004*** (0.170)

Friends from other religions growing up: (baseline – yes)			
No	-2.165*** (0.417)	-2.646*** (0.464)	-2.472*** (0.438)
Ever voted: (baseline – yes)			
No	-0.009 (0.401)	0.197 (0.429)	0.107 (0.420)
Threat to religion: (baseline – yes)			
No	-0.796** (0.392)	-0.870** (0.421)	
Regularity of internet use	0.843*** (0.096)	0.708*** (0.103)	0.750*** (0.100)
Nationality: (baseline – Nigeria)			
Niger	0.011 (5,131.373)	-3.364 (5,110.923)	-3.507 (3,108.137)
Somalia	-13.006 (4,603.409)	-15.142 (4,555.306)	-14.184 (2,773.382)
Sudan	-12.782 (4,603.409)	-13.520 (4,555.306)	-12.307 (2,773.382)
Mali	-16.320 (4,603.409)	-18.843 (4,555.306)	-17.917 (2,773.382)
Burkina Faso	-15.671 (4,603.409)	-18.020 (4,555.306)	-16.412 (2,773.382)
Ghana	0.375 (7,983.495)	-1.043 (7,955.855)	-1.412 (4,831.460)
Algeria	-0.212 (7,983.495)	1.309 (7,955.855)	1.072 (4,831.460)
Benin	1.933 (7,983.495)	-1.305 (7,955.855)	-1.715 (4,831.460)
Ivory Coast	-4.620 (7,983.495)	-6.641 (7,955.855)	-6.484 (4,831.460)
Constant	13.042 (4,603.409)	18.550 (4,555.306)	16.923 (2,773.382)
Observations	467	467	467
Log Likelihood	-136.131	-116.118	-121.275
Akaike Inf. Crit.	330.263	290.236	286.550
McFadden's Pseudo R squared	0.57	0.63	0.61
Percent Correctly Predicted	89%	90%	89%

Note: *p**p***p<0.01

SPEED OF JOINING

Based on the findings from the first *Journey to Extremism* report, econometric analysis was conducted on a binary dependent variable indicating whether a voluntary recruit joined a VE group quickly. As the literature and theory on this topic is very thin, with no consensus around explanatory factors, the econometric analysis is also not based on theory or literature. Thus, it should be considered with an understanding of the limitation that the specification derives purely from modelling conducted in the previous version of J2E (which was also not grounded in theory).

TABLE 4: FACTORS AND INDICATORS FOR SPEED OF RECRUITMENT ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS

FACTOR	SURVEY QUESTION/INDICATOR	TREATMENT/CODING IN REGRESSION
Emotion capturing decision to join	Looking back, what emotions capture your decision to join the best?	1 | Anger 2 | Fear 3 | Hate 4 | Vengeance 5 | Guilt 6 | Contempt 7 | Hope / excitement

Introduction to group	How were you initially introduced to the group?	1 | Friend 2 | mother / father 3 | brother / sister 4 | other family member 5 | husband / wife 6 | teacher 7 | newspaper / magazine 8 | TV 9 | radio 10 | Internet 11 | videos (DVD) 12 | twitter 13 | community centre 14 | school 15 | work 16 | football pitch (sport) 17 | specific recruitment structure 18 | social media
Prospects	What did you do before you joined or got involved with the group?	1 | Student 2 | Employed 3 | Unemployed
Trigger Event	Was there a specific event that caused you to join?	1 | Yes 2 | No
CONTROL FACTORS		
Age when joined		Number
Gender		1 | Male 2 | Female
Marital Status	What is your marital status now?	1 | Single 2 | Married 3 | Divorced
Education	Highest Degree/Level Completed	1 | Did not finish primary school 2 | Primary school 3 | Secondary school 4 | University, college 5 | Vocational training

Data was pre-processed to impute missingness as well as balance on background covariates between the group of voluntary recruits that joined slowly versus those that joined quickly. The same software tools in R were used for this set of analyses.

None of the models run showed any of the variables considered to be consistently significant predictors of the speed of recruitment. Modelling was done on both a limited data sample (with the inclusion of potential pull factors, such as perceptions of the group), as well as the full data sample (excluding these pull factor variables). Table 5 presents the results.

TABLE 5: LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS FOR SPEED OF JOINING VE ORGANIZATION, VOLUNTARY

	DEPENDENT VARIABLE: SPEED OF JOINING						
	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
Female – baseline male		0.332 (0.907)				0.122 (0.271)	
Ever voted – baseline yes	0.397 (0.343)	0.371 (0.346)	0.292 (0.341)	0.430 (0.345)	0.059 (0.201)	0.027 (0.200)	0.007 (0.200)
Participation in any PVE programs: (baseline – always)							
Sometimes	-0.100 (0.725)	-0.022 (0.718)	0.004 (0.713)	-0.195 (0.707)	-0.307 (0.303)	-0.331 (0.304)	-0.359 (0.303)
Never	0.333 (0.695)	0.264 (0.687)	0.259 (0.684)	0.242 (0.680)	-0.882*** (0.318)	-0.952*** (0.317)	-0.905*** (0.314)
Trigger event – baseline yes	0.225 (0.348)	0.203 (0.349)	0.389 (0.333)	0.224 (0.348)	0.350* (0.195)	0.364* (0.195)	0.342* (0.193)
Livelihood/Prospects: (baseline is student)							
Employed	0.192 (0.606)	0.190 (0.613)	0.355 (0.600)	0.381 (0.606)	0.538 (0.376)	0.470 (0.378)	0.496 (0.380)
Unemployed	0.448 (0.513)	0.320 (0.522)	0.263 (0.510)	0.651 (0.535)	0.485 (0.364)	0.446 (0.371)	0.500 (0.367)
Other	0.523 (0.809)	0.389 (0.796)	0.508 (0.796)	0.280 (0.782)	0.980** (0.429)	0.977** (0.434)	0.991** (0.437)
Years religious education	0.071* (0.042)				0.044** (0.021)		
Any religious education – baseline yes		0.484 (0.516)	0.427 (0.511)	0.223 (0.524)		-0.152 (0.242)	-0.123 (0.242)
Group provided a sense of belonging	0.107 (0.136)	0.116 (0.136)	0.068 (0.133)				
Group provided employment	0.071 (0.140)	0.098 (0.141)	0.081 (0.137)				
Group provided safety				-0.262* (0.146)			
Trust in national government	0.105 (0.181)	0.193 (0.192)	0.147 (0.188)	0.177 (0.192)	-0.028 (0.102)	-0.031 (0.102)	-0.033 (0.101)
Religion under threat – baseline yes	0.680 (0.436)	0.566 (0.423)		0.426 (0.417)	-0.277 (0.226)	-0.342 (0.225)	
Any internet usage – baseline no	0.193 (0.365)	0.217 (0.363)	0.339 (0.359)	0.231 (0.354)	0.054 (0.261)	0.108 (0.259)	0.045 (0.260)
Emotion anger – baseline no	-0.438 (0.418)	-0.308 (0.413)		-0.267 (0.393)	-0.077 (0.216)	-0.030 (0.214)	
Joined with friends	0.267 (0.321)	0.211 (0.320)		0.206 (0.318)	-0.041 (0.194)	-0.036 (0.201)	
Emotion hope – baseline no			0.537 (0.348)				0.356* (0.213)
Joined with family			0.798 (0.759)				0.302 (0.230)
Constant	-1.383 (1.080)	-1.334 (1.090)	-1.150 (1.058)	0.092 (1.104)	1.140* (0.627)	1.477** (0.610)	1.119* (0.581)
Observations	264	264	264	264	621	621	621
Log Likelihood	-134.727	-135.565	-135.065	-134.835	-351.564	-353.381	-352.449
Akaike Inf. Crit.	319.454	323.130	318.129	317.670	751.129	756.761	750.898

Note:

*p**p***p<0.01

ENDNOTES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), (2022:2). Figure 8 Chapter 1 of the report illustrates the doubling in terrorist attacks in sub-Saharan Africa since 2016, based on IEP calculations derived from the Dragon Fly Tracker.

2. IEP (2022a: 4).

3. Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (2018, 2022) and Al Jazeera (2022b).

4. United Nations (2021: 67).

5. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017).

6. UNDP (2016).

7. United Nations (2016b).

INTRODUCTION

8. UNDP (2016: 3).

9. The first Journey to Extremism report surveyed respondents in six countries: Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan, with the majority (41 percent) surveyed in Somalia, compared to the eight countries of this study. Four hundred ninety-five former or current recruits were surveyed, together with 145 reference group respondents. Of the total 718 surveyed, 81 percent were male. Nineteen percent of the 2017 data sample were women, compared to 552 female respondents of this sample, corresponding to four times as many female interviewees.

10. Please refer to the classification in UNDP (2016: 15). While noting that such demarcations are highly fluid, UNDP classified a number of countries facing different degrees of threat from violent extremism in Africa, notably 'epicentre countries', including Mali, Nigeria and Somalia; 'spill-over' countries, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger; and 'at-risk' countries, Sudan. Please refer to these categories in UNDP (2016: 8).

11. See UNDP (2017: 23). In the 2017 study, the data sample totalled 718 respondents.

12. See for instance, ICAN/UNDP (2019).

13. While this study certainty holds important implications for reintegration processes more broadly, the scope of the study does not examine the specific dynamics when an exrecruit it reintegrated back into a community, but is limited to examining the process leading up to and influencing the decision to leave. It acknowledges however that such pathways are complex, prompting further empirical inquiry and primary reserach.

14. See Glazzard et al. (2022).

15. The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws on socialization theory as conceptualized in the 2017 study, which was drawn from Botha (2014).

16. Botha (2014).

17. Dawson and Prewitt (1969: 17). See also Botha (2014).

18. 'Micro' refers to personal motives and convictions, which include negative experiences of exclusion, rejection, humiliation, injustice, or frustration. 'Meso' refers to the violent extremist's social milieu, including his/her community, and the social structures in which he or she is engaged. 'Macro' refers to structural drivers, including: chronically unresolved political conflicts; 'collateral damage' to civilian lives and infrastructure caused by military responses to terrorism; human rights violations; ethnic, national, and religious discrimination; the political exclusion of ethnic or religious groups; socio-economic marginalization; lack of good governance; and a failure to integrate diaspora communities of immigrants who move between cultures. Centre for Security Studies (2015).

19. Vergani et al. (2018).

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

20. United Nations (2016a). The UN's Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016: 1/22)

21. United Nations (2016a).

22. While reiterating that there is no universal definition, this approach is in keeping with other attempts at defining the elusive term of violent extremism. See Search for Common Ground (2017) and Zeuthen (2016).

23. UNODC (2018).

24. This definition is in keeping with Francis' attempts to synthesize existing theories and models into one that captures the complexity and variability of radicalization. He posits three broad categories of factors in the radicalization process (situational, strategic and ideological) and subdivides the situational factors into preconditions and precipitant factors, before further subdividing the preconditions into enabling and motivational factors. Francis, M. (2012). See also Zeuthen (2016).

25. Weisburd et al. (2022).

26. United Nations (1994). See also Cornell University, Legal Information Institute (2019).

27. Mahmoud (2016).

28. As indicated above, no consensus exists. Some assert that deradicalization can refer to both attitudinal and behavioural change. See for instance El-Said (2015:10) and Horgan (2009). .

29. Glazzard et al. (2022), see also Morrison et al. (2021).

30. Bosley (2020) and Richards, (2017:14). See also Morrison et al. (2021).

DEMOGRAPHIC SAMPLE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

31. Please refer to the classification in UNDP (2016:15).

32. The initial dataset included 2,234 interviews. However, after removing duplicate inputs, the sample size was 2,196.

33. The gender composition of the voluntary recruits and the relevant reference group are statistically significantly different.

34. Please refer to 'Demographic profile of research sample' in UNDP 2017 study (2017: 26).

35. The distribution of responses highlighted in the figure does not cover all responses, as a substantial number of respondents (230) did not disclose their status as either a voluntary or forced recruit.

36 The majority of females who were undergoing rehabilitation were surveyed in Cameroon, corresponding to 63 percent.

37 The responses relating to ranks were highly scattered in the data sample. This may reflect sensitivities linked to the respondent's own role in the groups. As a result, accurate, representative picture of the ranks of the respondents interviewed could not be developed.

38 Throughout the report, the term Boko Haram is used interchangeably for the extremist factions operating in the Lake Chad Bassin - JAS, ISWAP, Bakura, Ansaru - as the respondents interviewed did not 'distinguish among the factions.

39 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (2022a: 2).

40 The 'Other' groups identified included: Islamic state, 31, two of whom self-identified as forced recruits; Daoula, 10, two of whom self-identified as forced recruits; and Koogweogo, total of 2 voluntary recruits. The survey pre-defined the categories of al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Islamic State, while the remainder, including JNIM were groups identified by the respondents.

41 Abatan and Sangaré (2021). ISS (2021).

42 While acknowledging that such categorizations are highly fluid and most likely subject to change over time, they are derived from the UNDP regional project (UNDP (2016:16-17).

43 The initial dataset included a total of 2,234 interviews. However, after removing duplicated inputs, the sample size was 2196.

44 The balancing was done using both coarsened exact matching and exact matching methodologies using the MICE program in R. After balancing, no statistically significant differences existed in gender, age, education or nationality across the two groups.

45 The primary respondents were asked to rate their perceptions and motivations prior to joining or after having joined, while reference group respondents were asked to rate their perceptions at the time of the interview.

46 The Afrobarometer is a database that explores perceptions across indicators such as governance at country-level and aggregated level in a range of countries in Africa. However, it does not include two of the countries (Somalia and Chad) out of the eight under review. Please visit https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/.

47 For instance a Mercy Corps case study on recruitment into Boko Haram in Nigeria presents a spectrum, ranging from having been forced to joining Boko Haram and having joined freely. See Mercy Corps (2016).

48 Due to the sensitivities relating to accessing VE groups, primary research on disengagement remains scarce. Most studies examine individuals who have already left a radical organization, rather than those who remain in the group. Exceptions include Bjørgo and Horgan (2008).

49 For purposes of transparency, each graph depicts the total number of respondents to each question relative to the total number of respondents. The latter refers to the number of respondents who did not respond to the question, either because they did not know how to respond or did not want to respond or due to missing data (blank).

50 See Bøås and Rupesinghe (2019), Abatan and Sangaré (2021), and International Alert (2020). ISS (2021).

51 International Crisis Group (2019). See also Khadija and Harley (2019).

52 IEP (2022a: 29).

53 IEP (2022a: 29). The *Global Terrorism Index* measures the impact of terrorism in 163 countries using data compiled by the Dragonfly TerrorismTracker database. The Index is scaled between 0 and 10, where a higher value indicates a greater impact of terrorism. IEP's defines terrorism as follows, "The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious or social goal." IEP places terrorist organizations and ideologies into three broad categories: political, nationalist/separatist, and religiously motivated terrorism.

54 IEP (2022a: 12), See figure 1.2

55 IEP(2022a: 29).

56 IEP (2022a: 14). According to the *Global Terrorism Index* (GTI), deaths in Nigeria fell by 51 per cent in 2021, following three years of successive increases. This decline was due to a decline in deaths attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP, particularly in the Borno region, where deaths fell by 71 percent. This is the lowest number of deaths attributed to the group in a decade. Boko Haram's decline has resulted in a substantial decline in terrorism in Borno State, which experienced 71 percent fewer terrorism-related deaths compared to the prior year. However, despite this decline the number of terrorist attacks increased by 49 per cent between 2020 and 2021, as ISWAP overtook Boko Haram as the deadliest terror group in Nigeria, with an increased presence in neighbouring countries in the Sahel region.

57 IEP (2022a: 44). While Somalia is still ranked high on the GTI score in the region, as having the third highest impacts in the world in 2021, it has recorded an significant decrease over time from 308 attacks in 2021 to 1,461 deaths in 2017. Despite a gradual decline, Al-Shabaab remains the deadliest terrorist group in Somalia, which represents 89 per cent of all which terror-related deaths in the country in 2021.

58 IEP (2022a: 26-28).

59 Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (2018, 2022) and Al Jazeera (2022b).

60 The graph draws on data from the Dragon Fly Terrorism Tracker based on IEP calculations. However, it does not cover all countries under review, such as Burkina Faso. It also does not reflect data from all of 2021.

61 IEP (2022a: 47)

62 IEP (2022a: 77).

63 IEP (2022a: 12).

64 UNDP (2023: 17).

65 These groups include: Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP), Islamic State - Sinai Province (ISSP), and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).

66 IEP (2022a: 3).

67 UNDP (2023: 17).

68 IEP (2022a: 2), Eizenga and Williams (2020).

69 The distinction between VE groups is ever evolving, becoming less black and white. For example, Ansar Dine and Katiba Macina have merged into the JNIM coalition as local cells, although they pursue a more local agenda.

70 IEP (2022a: 17). For example please refer to UN (2022: 5).

71 Keating, M, Matt Waldman (ed.) (2019).

72 IEP (2022a:17).

73 Bukarti, B.A. (2021). Babatunde. (2018).

74 Bøås and Rupesinghe (2019).

75 IDEM (2019).

76 IEP (2022: 58).

77 Dewaal (2019).

78 Anzalone and Warner (2021).

79 UNDP (2023: 24). See Anzalone and Warner (2021).

80 UNDP (2023: 10). See Brown, (2018).

81 IEP (2022a: 2). See also Figure 4.2 ´Correlations with terrorism in OECD countries and the Rest of the World' (page 64).

82 United States Institute of Peace (USIP) (2022).

83 Al Jazeera (2022a).

84 IEP (2022a: 54).

85 United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2022).

86 UN (2016b).

87 African Union (2022).

88 Cherbib (2018).

89 Van der Lijn (2019).

90 International Crisis Group (2020).

91 The New Humanitarian (2019), Al Jazeera (2018)

92 Human Rights Watch (2022). Africa News (2022), The New Humanitarian (2021). See also Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) (2020).

93 International Federation for Human Rights (2021).

94 Sommers. (2022).

95 Shurkin. (2021). Ayat (2020).

96 Other groups outside the purview of the CJTF include the Yan Gora.

97 International Crisis Group (ICG) (2017).

98 The New Humanitarian (2020).

99 ICG (2017).

100 Voice of America (VOA) (2021).

101 UN (2021).

102 Saferworld (2020).

103 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2021). UNDP (2022: 80).

104 SIPRI (2022: 6).

105 IEP/UNDP (2020: 1). The evidence builds on 18 focus countries in Africa.

106 IEP/UNDP (2020: 1- 5).

107 IEP/UNDP (2020: 1).

108 IEP/UNDP (2020: 1). Securitization here refers to national expenditures for the military, private security and national security.

109 IEP/UNDP (2020: 5).

110 IEP calculations provided from this research based on data from the DragonFly TerrorismTracker.

111 IEP/UNDP (2020). It is difficult to accurately estimate how much of the security spending is a direct response to the terrorist threat in the focus countries, given that several have been involved in ongoing armed conflict for lengthy periods of time, and that almost all countries worldwide have some minimum level of military spending. Moreover, it is important to note that the different figures estimations presented are subject to different methodologies and calculations, leading to different outcomes.

112 According to the OECD DAC CRS system, the social infrastructure category includes education, health, government and civil society and water, supply and sanitation – all of which overlap with development related PVE programming areas. Productive infrastructure category includes agriculture, forestry and fishing, industry, construction and mining. Economic infrastructure category includes transport, communication, energy, banking and financial services.

113 Chen (2022), Lefas, M, Nozawa, J, and Kessels E. (2020), UNWOMAN (2020).

114 United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) (2006). According to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact's Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation (RMME) Working Group Projects Matrix, the following financial contributions were pledged across 2020 and 2021: a total of $57,288,694 to Pillar I; $7,512,170 to Pillar II; $170,028,817 to Pillar III; and $6,372,056 to Pillar IV.

115 UN General Assembly (2017).

116 This includes the emergence of the *Global Peace Index* (GPI) and the *Positive Peace Index* (PPI). The PPI measures the level of societal resilience of a nation or region. GPI is a composite index measuring the peacefulness of countries made up of 23 quantitative and qualitative indicators each weighted on a scale of 1-5 . See IEP (2016) and IPI Global Observatory (2017a).

117 Positive Peace is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. The same factors also lead to many other desirable socio-economic outcomes. Higher levels of Positive Peace are statistically linked to greater income growth, better environmental outcomes, higher levels of wellbeing, superior developmental outcomes and stronger resilience. See IEP (2022b).

118 The categorization of the Global Peace Index is measured according to three indicators: Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict domain, Societal Safety and Security and Militarisation.

119 IEP/UNDP (2020: 9) and IEP (2016: 3).

120 IEP (2016: 3).

121 IEP/UNDP (2020).

122 IEP/UNDP (2020: 9).

123 IEP (2016 : 3)

124 IEP (2016: 3) ad IPI Global Observatory (2017a).

125 United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2021).

CHAPTER 2.
DRIVERS OF RECRUITMENT

126 Dawson and Prewitt (1969:18) and Botha (2014).

127 Dawson and Prewitt (1969: 18) and Botha (2014).

128 Dawson. Prewitt (1969: 18) and Botha (2014).

129 O'Driscoll, D. (2017: 9). See also Ellis et al. (2015). Simi et al. (2016).

130 Blum and Hayes (2016).

131 UNDP (2017: 35-36).

132 UNDP (2022b). In their study on children's upbringing in conflict contexts, Akaito and Musa (2020) also find that if a child is in conflict with his or her family members, he or she is more likely to experience conflict outside the family unit . The reverse also holds – a family at peace will contribute to realizing peace in their wider society.

133 Ellis et al. (2015) and Simi et al. (2016).

134 O'Driscoll, D. (2017).

135 UNDP (2017: 36).

136 Ghosh et al. (2016).

137 UNDP (2017: 39).

138 Bloom and Matfess (2015).

139 ISS (2014).

140 Bukarti, B. A. (2021: 6-7).

141 Grease (2019)

142 Harriet et al. 2015.

143 Bukarti (2021).

144 UNDP (2017: 45).

145 Reference group respondents were asked, *'Have you ever considered your religion to be under threat?'*, while primary respondents were asked *'At the time of joining, did you consider your religion to be under threat?'*.

146 The results vary depending on exact coefficient estimations from Model One or Model Two.

147 The survey responses were coded as either an ideological threat, a physical threat or both. Sixteen percent of voluntary recruits responded 'ideological threat' and 10 percent responded 'physical'.

148 Ysseldyk et al. (2010).

149 Bukarti (2021). It is important to reiterate that the Boko Haram did not emerge as an ethnic-focused uprising, and Kanuri language is not synonymous with Boko Haram. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of Kanuris have opposed the VE group and fought it both ideologically and militarily. Rather, this is intended to highlight the highly localized dynamics that groups such as Boko Haram exploit and tap into as part of their recruitment strategy.

150 See Bøås and Rupesinghe (2019) and Lebovic (2020). It is important to recognize the nuances in the ethnic mobilization narrative, given that most Fulani have not joined the group. Those from the religious or aristocratic lineage have been targeted by jihadist groups at the intersection of socio-economic status with ethnic groups also appear to have played a role in the mobilisation by VE groups in central Mali.

151 Davids (2014).

152 International Alert (2020).

153 UNDP (2017: 49).

154 Bukarti (2021: 6).

155 Vijaya et al. (2018).

156 United Nations Population Fund (2015) and Mercy Corps (2015).

157 Vijaya et al., (2018).

158 Allan et. al (2015) and Mercy Corps (2015).

159 The questionnaire distinguishes among : odd jobs (working when needed or the opportunity arises), unskilled, self-employed, semi-skilled, skilled, professional, services and the agricultural sector.

160 It is also important to note that this graph shows aggregated average wages. However, when comparing reported incomes with international poverty thresholds, the average incomes indicated do not meet the poverty threshold of the World Bank either for lower-income countries ($1.90/day) or for middle-income countries ($3.20/day).

161 Female voluntary recruits were the smallest subsample among our survey respondents. However, the difference in incomes reported is statistically significant.

162 Saferworld (2014)

163 Sommers (2013).

164 Botha (2014).

165 Allan et al (2015).

166 Terrorism Impact as measured by the *Global Terrorism Index* combines measures of attacks, fatalities, injuries and hostages for a more holistic assessment of impact than the number of attacks alone. See the Global Terrorism Index 2022 report for a more comprehensive methodological explanation.

167 Newman, 2007 and USAID, 2011

168 For instance, when comparing levels of trust across various governance sectors, voluntary recruits report higher levels in executive and legislative institutions in this survey sample than in the 2017 study, where 70 percent of voluntary recruits did not trust top political leadership, 75 percent did not trust national government, and 72 percent did not trust local government. See UNDP (2017: 65)..

169 The perceptions of recruits towards state institutions may, to some extent, have been influenced by the fact that the majority of them were awaiting trial at the time of the interview. This may have introduced a bias towards more positive responses than would otherwise have been the case. Nevertheless, they are fairly consistent with additional data from Afrobarometer, which at the aggregate level show that, on average, countries are divided on the question of trust towards the president, yet less positive regarding the parliament..

170 These findings are consistent with the data from the Afrobarometer (2019/2021), where trust levels across the six countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan) reflect similar trends, with the exception of Niger, which shows relatively higher levels of trust.

171 The findings are fairly consistent from data from a 2019/2021 Afrobarometer perception survey insofar that they confirm positive perceptions towards local actors. On average, 68 percent of respondents from the six countries under review (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan) express some or a lot of trust in religious leaders. Data from Niger show the highest levels of trust (90 percent showing somewhat or a lot of trust), compared to Sudan, with the lowest levels (47 percent stating somewhat or a lot of trust).

172 Allan et al. (2015), Finkel et al. (2021) and Grynkewich (2008).

173 Grynkewich (2008)

174 Bøås and Rupesinghe (2019) and International Alert (2020).

175 European Union Institute for Security Studies (2021). However, this finding comes with caveat: the sustainability of these processes is debatable, as is the conclusion that VE groups actually filled the role of the state as these peace processes were often "imposed" (with harsh conditions) rather than truly negotiated. In some instances, militant groups in central Mali brokered local peace agreements between communities, regulating disputes and access to key natural resources. However, they did so by dictating their conditions to the local populations, including the introduction of sharia-based family laws and taxes, a ban on weapons, prohibition of any contact with the Malian state and army, with obvious power imbalances. See Bacon (2022).

176 Bacon, (2022).

177 IPI Global Observatory (2017b).

178 Allan et al. (015), Ogharanduku (2017).

179 Pantucci and Jesperson's (2015).

180 IEP (2022c).

181 Evidence from the Afrobarometer shows that, on average, 48,8 percent have little or no trust in police actors. Surprisingly, such perceptions are more pronounced in Sudan, Cameroon and Nigeria, rather than the Sahel countries. Interestingly, perceptions of military actors are more positive than the findings in this study, with an average of 33.0 percent expressing little or no trust and 23.5 expressing 'somewhat trust'. Again, such perceptions are more pronounced in Sudan, Cameroon and Nigeria. See also International Alert (2016).

182 Holtug and Uslaner (2021).

183 UNDP (2017: 66).

CHAPTER 3:
THE 'TIPPING POINT' AND THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

184 UNDP (2017)

185 Grease (2019).

186 While the 2017 study asked, 'What specific thing happened that finally motivated you to join the organization?,' the new questionnaire adopted a more exploratory approach to ascertain whether such an event did indeed take place and then explored the nature of that event in more detail. The question posed to the primary group was, 'Did anything specific happen that finally motivated you to join the group?' The question for the reference group was, 'Did anything specific happen that convinced you not to get associated with the group?' This was followed by an open-ended question, where responses were grouped subsequently in relation to the salience of each factor that respondents described.

187 Khalil (2021).

188 USIP (2016) and Raafat, L (2021).

189 Vergani et al (2018)., Davies (2014).

190 International Alert (2020), ICAN/UNDP (2019), Abatan and Sangaré (2021).

191 Ferguson and McAuley (2021). Davydov (2015).

192 Kharroub (2015). Borum (2014). Sparke (2019).

193 Vergani et al (2018), Post (2007) and Sageman (2004).

194 Mowat (2015).

195 Behr et al. (2013), Khalil (2021).

196 UNDP (2017: 76)

197 It is important to note that survey data were collected in peripheral areas in countries with a clear urban-rural digital divide. While there is some evidence of the rise of 'Islamogram', the urban-rural digital divide continues. It affects the extent of and audience for online radicalization. Recognizing the limits of online influence, VE groups have adapted their strategies to combine both offline and online recruitment tactics in an effort to reach individuals who had not been reached previously. See Mattheis (2020), Ayad (2021) and King and Mullins (2021).

198 Recalling the demographic profile of respondents, it should here be noted however that there is a significantly higher proportion of men in the sample size of voluntary recruits, when compared to the proportion of women, why this finding should be interpreted with some degree of caution.

199 There are some cases for example in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, where radio has been a powerful PVE tool. See Marrone et al. (2020) and New York University (2022).

200 Recalling the methodological chapter on key considerations, the subsetted sampling method of reference groups respondents was based on the two criteria: whether they lived under whether they had ever lived under direct control of a violent extremist group.

201 In terms of country variation, at the aggregate level, Chadian respondents had a greater level of awareness of PVE initiatives. However, for reference group respondents, a higher proportion of Somalian respondents (80 percent) were aware of them. Sudan had the lowest levels of awareness in the reference group (4 percent). Across all recruits, the lowest levels of awareness were seen in respondents from Niger and Mali (only 12 percent of recruits), while Chad reported the highest levels of awareness.

202 The analysis did not systematically review and compare the specific initiatives in question to assess their relevance and impact. Thus, these finding should be understood as a reflection of perceptions about the provision of PVE activities, rather than as a measure of their impact.

203 UNDP (2017: 6, 75).

CHAPTER 4.
PATHWAYS OUT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

204 Glazzard et al. (2022) and Bolsey (2020).

205 Although the 2017 study used the term 'demobilization', this study cautiously focus on disengagement and deradicalization as two different outcomes that do not necessarily co-occur. Disengagement refers to behavioural change, such as withdrawing from or leaving a violent extremist organization or changing one's role within it. This does not necessarily require a change in cognitive values or fundamental beliefs. The motivations for ceasing involvement may vary by context, group and individual. Deradicalization thus indicates a substantive shift away from an ideological commitment to a VE movement or cause or withdrawing or being conditioned to withdraw from violent extremist belief. See Horgan (2008), Horgan and Braddock (2010), Schmid (2013), Glazzard et al. (2022), Bolsey (2020) and Altier et al. (2014, 2017).

206 Williams (1989) and Rabasa et al. (2011).

207 Bolsey (2020). See also: Rabasa et al (2011), Grasso et al (2019), Altier et al. (2014), Altier et al (2017), Altier et al (2019), Doosje et al (2016). Horgan (2008, 2009).

208 Rabasa et al. (2011).

209 Rabasa et al (2011).

210 Rabasa et al. (2011).

211 Glazzard et al. (2022). Horgan (2008), Horgan and Braddock (2010), Schmid (2013).

212 The categorization does not include individuals who were rehabilitated as those who disengage by force and voluntarily may both end up on the path of rehabilitation. This makes it difficult to clearly distinguish between the two.

213 The responses to this question were scattered, making it difficult to establish accurate payment levels and frequency. Nevertheless, although not conclusive, the open-ended responses revealed that 'payment' referred to monetary and material rewards. While noting the cross-variation among VE groups, the testimonies also suggest that payment frequency varied. In some cases, payments were tied to the performances of the recruits in question. This may in turn help to provide further nuance to the variations uncovered between the two respondents in terms of their disappointment regarding payment and their expectations of material rewards.

214 See for instance ISS (2021).

215 Bosley (2020), Horgan (2008, 2009) and Horgan and Braddock (2010).

216 Glazzard et al. (2022), Horgan (2008, 2009), Horgan et al. (2010). Altiers et al. (2014, 2019).

217 Bosley (2020).

218 The survey were formulated as such, *'Thinking back, what would you have done differently?'* The four choices of response were not join, recruit more, change tactics and not get caught. Multiple answers to this question were allowed.

219 Rabasa et al. (2011).

220 See, for example, Khalil et al. (2019) and Bjørgo (2008). Bjørgo has suggested that "even if a person has completely lost faith in the group's ideology and politics, ties of friendship and loyalty may for some individuals constitute more than sufficient reasons for staying with the group."

221 Altier (2021).

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

222 The balancing was done using both coarsened exact matching and exact matching methodologies using the MICE program in R. After balancing, no statistically significant differences existed in gender, age, education or nationality across the two groups.

223 The gender composition in the voluntary recruits and the relevant reference group are statistically significantly different.

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