

SEARCH FOR
COMMON GROUND

AMONG FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

A Social Network Analysis of Influencers
and Communication Channels in Sudan



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Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DME	Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant ¹
NAP	National Action Plan
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Services
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
Search	Search for Common Ground
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SNCCT	Sudanese National Commission on Counter Terrorism
SSTL	State Sponsors of Terrorism List
SWG-PCVE	Sudan Working Group on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
TVE	Transforming Violent Extremism
UoK	University of Khartoum
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

¹ This report uses “ISIL” although there are a number of names for the same group IS, Daesh, and ISIS.

Executive Summary

Connecting the Horn of Africa to North Africa and the Middle East, Sudan is a converging ground for a variety of extremist groups and an at-risk country for violent extremism (VE).² Under President Omar al-Bashir, Sudan was known for providing a safe haven to groups promoting extremist and violent ideology, including Al Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Shabaab, and Boko Haram.³ Long-standing violent conflict, displacement, human rights abuses, and a worsening economy act as risk factors for VE in the country,⁴ but were also the driving force behind the peaceful revolution that removed Bashir from power in April 2019. This revolution has resulted in a 39-month transitional period that may usher in a new future of civilian rule. While this is an unprecedented time in Sudan with significant opportunities for hope and change, it is also a time of immense uncertainty as the Transitional Government grapples with a myriad of challenges including a spiraling economy, spoilers within and outside the government, and violent conflict in Sudan's peripheral states.⁵

While terrorism and VE have been consistent concerns in Sudan since the late 1990s, there has yet to be an in-depth evidence base on the topic to inform programmatic responses. The sensitivity of discussing VE in Sudan as well as the extremely restrictive operating environment have limited opportunities for research and locally-led response. Recently, Sudan has eased restrictions to allow such research,⁶ and the transition provides another window of opportunity to continue to build understanding of VE in the country.

The research and data collection which informs this report faced a myriad of challenges due to the shifting security situation during the 2019 revolution. The insecurity and changing context delayed the research and required the research team to frequently adapt their plans. However, this transition has also highlighted possible entry points that can inform civil society efforts to transform VE in Sudan as the country moves forward.

Methodology

The research team in consultation with Search for Common Ground (Search), the Sudanese National Commission on Counter-terrorism (SNCCT), and the US Embassy identified three target areas for this research: South Darfur, Kassala, and Khartoum. These locations were selected based on the diversity of risk factors they represent, as outlined below, and the assumption that their varying contexts would provide unique insights into the different factors that influence recruitment in Sudan.

- ♦ **Khartoum** - Khartoum was selected for this study due to the high rate of urbanization and the influx of migrants from the peripheral regions of the country. In addition, Sudan's relatively young population also has high rates of unemployment and the city itself is home to a large number of foreign migrants and students.

2 UNDP, "Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment," Regional Bureau for Africa, 2017. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

3 See: European Institute of Peace, "The Islamic State in East Africa," European Institute for Peace, September 2018. http://www.eip.org/sites/default/files/Report_IS%20in%20East%20Africa_October%202018.pdf; and UNDP, "Violent Extremism in Sudan, Study Report," Partnering Against Violent Extremism (PAVE), 2018. [http://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCT%202017%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCT%202017%20(1).pdf)

4 UNDP, 2017.

5 International Crisis Group, "Keeping Sudan's Transition on Track," International Crisis Group, October 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/keeping-sudans-transition-track>

6 See UNDP, 2017 and UNDP, 2018.

- ♦ **South Darfur** - South Darfur was targeted as it is a converging ground for migrants from Western Africa, Arab States, as well as internally displaced people from the Darfur conflict. The influx of migrants and IDPs has impacted the social and economic background in South Darfur.
- ♦ **Kassala** - In Eastern Sudan, Kassala was selected due to the influx of refugees and migrants from across the border with Eritrea and Ethiopia. The increasing importance of Kassala as a religious hub has also made it a flashpoint for religious and political tensions between Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the Arabian peninsula.
- ♦ **Rural vs Urban** - Lastly, to provide a contrast between rural and urban contexts, Kassala was also included in order to provide insight into more rural populations while Khartoum and South Darfur⁷ provide insight into the urban context, allowing for a comparison between rural and urban recruitment in Sudan.

To inform programmatic responses to VE, this research was guided by research questions centered on identifying at-risk individuals and potential influencers. It also identifies opportunities, entry points, and barriers for a civil society response; as well as the existing institutions and initiatives working on transforming VE.⁸ The research questions were informed by an initial literature review to identify the existing knowledge and gaps related to VE in Sudan, which drew upon both English and Arabic sources and was completed in January 2019.

Following the literature review, the research team travelled to Mombasa, Kenya in April 2019 for a learning exchange, which leveraged similar research conducted by Search in coastal Kenya and Tanzania.⁹ The Sudanese research team met with the researchers from Kenya and Tanzania to discuss the sensitivities, challenges, and best practices for conducting this research. As VE is a very sensitive topic in Kenya and Tanzania as well, this exchange provided useful insight to support conflict-sensitive data collection, and to mitigate challenges due to restrictive government oversight.

While the intention of the research team was to immediately begin data collection after the Mombasa workshop, intensifying protests in Khartoum prevented them from doing so. The protests, which had begun in December 2018, culminated with the peaceful overthrow of President Bashir on April 11, 2019, a few days after the research team returned to Khartoum. As the University of Khartoum campuses and the research team's offices were taken over by the peaceful sit-in, data collection was delayed until the research team could safely regain access to their offices. During this period, Search staff and the research team sheltered in their homes as protesters took over the streets and were met with a violent backlash from government-backed forces.

The security situation improved enough in late-July 2019 for the research team to train the research assistants and conduct initial focus group discussions in Khartoum. However, the situation intensified once again due to protests following the announcement that the Transitional Military Council and Forces for Freedom and Change had not come to a power-sharing agreement. This led to a shutdown of universities and roads, and prompted internet, power, and water outages. Thus, research was delayed until the safety and security of staff and participants could be ensured. When the revolution succeeded and a transitional government was agreed upon on August 17, 2019, data collection was able to slowly resume

⁷ The capital city of South Darfur, Nyala, grew rapidly due to the Darfur conflict making it the second largest city in Sudan. This location was targeted to provide an example of a "semi-urban" context.

⁸ The full list of research questions can be found in the annex of the report.

⁹ Russell, Olivia, "Meet Me at the Maskani: A Mapping of Influencers, Networks, and Information Channels in Kenya and Tanzania," Search for Common Ground, June 2017. <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SFCG-Meet-Me-at-the-Maskani-Final.pdf>

in Khartoum. However, persistent challenges due to continued university closures and disease outbreak in South Darfur and Kassala caused further delays in those locations. Despite the challenging context, data collection resumed in Khartoum in September, and began in Kassala and South Darfur in November 2019. All data collection was completed by January 2020. After analysis, the findings were shared and validated by an in-person workshop in Khartoum in July and a virtual session in August 2020.

This research utilized a mixed methods approach, with 22 semi-structured interviews with influential religious actors, civil society representatives, government representatives, and local authorities; as well as 18 focus group discussions which included a total of 153 men and women between the ages of 18 and 35. Lastly, the research team distributed (via WhatsApp, email, and hardcopy) relational surveys to 24 civil society organizations based on a mapping of key civil society stakeholders conducted in partnership with the SNCCT.

Findings

This research responds to the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics related to vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in Sudan, as well as the need for actionable recommendations for civil society and governments seeking to address the topic. The research findings, detailed below, identify those who are at-risk, their key influencers, the places where they discuss their frustrations, as well as the key avenues through which they receive information. Further, this research analyzed the opportunities, entry points, and barriers to transform VE in Sudan.

Who Is at Risk?

In general, respondents identified *youth*, broadly, as being the most susceptible to recruitment. This was further narrowed down to *young men*. This finding did not vary by location, socio-economic background ethnicity, education, or gender and is confirmed by other research both within Sudan and abroad.

The motivations for joining VEOs centered around *marginalization* (due to ethnic, religious, or ideological beliefs and backgrounds), *unemployment, and economic hardship*. These broad themes and drivers to recruitment did not vary across target location, but respondents did note interesting differences in these motivations based on class. Young people from elite, high-income households were noted to join VEOs for ideological reasons while young people from more modest socioeconomic backgrounds were driven by economic factors and unemployment. Class differences were further highlighted when respondents discussed which VEOs the recruits joined. Typically, wealthier individuals from urban areas were recruited to join ISIL, whereas individuals with lower incomes often joined Al Shabaab and Boko Haram.

When exploring the differences between rural and urban contexts, as well as the role of traditional leaders and religious actors, the research identified discrepancies among participants' responses regarding these issues. For instance, respondents varied on the importance of these actors, with some noting that traditional tribal leaders frequently recruit young people to join local tribal militias, in a bid to increase the local tribe's power and control over land. Tribal militias were perceived to be the main source of violence among rural communities. While some noted that these militias frequently aligned with VE groups for power and money, others contended that tribal militias were more likely to side with the Bashir government. Differences among respondents also surfaced when discussing the impact of Bashir's government on VE recruitment moving forward. While Bashir's government sought to distance itself from extremist groups, some respondents noted that due to the government's previous support for VEOs, many Sudanese associate VE with the cor-

ruption of Bashir's government, and are thus not interested in VE recruitment narratives. The differences in these perspectives, as well as the variety of views on what constitutes VE, indicates *the challenges with the term violent extremism, as it frequently has varied and nuanced interpretations in Sudan.*

What Are the Roles of Peer Groups and Immediate Family Members?

Across all target locations, participants indicated that they predominantly talk about their frustrations with *friends*, followed closely by immediate family members (spouse, parent, or sibling). In particular, *female family members* were most frequently mentioned as those in whom individuals confided their frustrations. This finding was true across all target locations, with minor differences in the relative importance of spouse, parent, or sibling. While various types of solutions were proposed by these influencers, few offered concrete pathways for individuals to *take action* regarding their frustrations. The types of solutions proposed were grouped into the following themes: perseverance, pragmatism, religious solutions, positive outlets, discussions, and violence. While the majority of the solutions proposed were peaceful, violence was suggested as a solution, or made to seem acceptable, a quarter of the time. It is also notable that violent solutions were proposed equally by family and peers.

What is the Role of Traditional Leaders and Religious Actors?

Interviewees indicated that religious actors can play an important role in VE due to their deep cultural ties and networks, as well as their association with historical Sudanese religious traditions of moderation and tolerance. However, focus groups respondents did not indicate that religious actors were individuals that they turned to with their frustrations. In addition, respondents were in disagreement as to the importance of influential religious voices and their credibility. Thus it will be imperative that programmatic responses that integrate religious actors ensure that they are credible among target populations. Similar to what was noted above, traditional leaders, especially tribal leaders, were perceived to be linked to either VE or the Bashir government, thus undermining their credibility with many young people. However, the exact connection between tribal militias and VE is still uncertain as interview and focus group respondents were not in agreement.

Where Are Frustrations Discussed?

Rather than discuss their frustrations and grievances in public spaces, respondents across all target locations indicated that they prefer to discuss their frustrations at *home*, further confirming the finding that frustrations are discussed with close networks. When disaggregated by location, the importance of home decreased in Khartoum and South Darfur, while the *university campus* (Khartoum) and *online platforms* (South Darfur) increased in importance. This highlights the need for programmatic responses that seek to address VE to take a multi-pronged approach that is rooted in the spaces where individuals feel most comfortable in voicing their concerns, such as homes, university campuses, and online spaces.

Interestingly, while markets were the place most frequented by respondents, further analysis highlighted that markets were not places where individuals discussed their frustrations. This could be due to a number of factors, including the highly sensitive and securitized environment in Sudan where the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) has been widely accused of arbitrary arrests and detentions. This limits the extent to which Sudanese are comfortable sharing their opinions and perspectives with strangers in public. Although frustrations and grievances were not discussed in markets, markets do play an important role in the lives of many Sudanese. As a result of transportation and fuel shortages,

many Sudanese wait for transportation for hours at a time in markets, where it was noted that they are exposed to public speeches that promote religious extremism, violence, and exclusion of various political or social groups. *Markets serve as platforms for Sudanese to interact with extremist narratives*, either passively or actively.

What Are the Information Pathways?

As was observed during the peaceful protests and revolution, the proliferation of online and digital platforms has increased in Sudan. This is confirmed by respondents, regardless of gender, who overwhelmingly indicated they received and shared information from *online platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp)*, followed by *television* and *radio*. Interestingly, the fourth most popular avenue for respondents overall was *in-person conversations and debates*. When disaggregated by gender, in-person conversations and debates decreased in importance for men (ranking 6th after books and newspaper) but stayed the same for women. These responses suggest the need for any online or media targeting to be followed up with in-person discussions.

How Do CSOs Collaborate and Share Information?

While CSOs were not directly mentioned by participants as influential, civil society can play an important role in building resilience and peace in local communities. Due to the previously restrictive operating environment in Sudan, and the sensitivity of the topic, very few CSOs addressed VE. Of those that reported having addressed VE in their work, there was an absence of strong collaboration or information sharing among them. While this could have been influenced by the fact that a number of CSOs disbanded and others just started to expand their operations in the aftermath of the 2019 revolution, thus destroying any previously established pathways, it also highlighted the need for increased collaboration and information sharing among CSOs working on VE in Sudan. While the transitional period has begun to open up the civic space, organizations will need support to develop strong networks and relationships.

In addition to limited collaboration and information sharing, civil society in Sudan faces considerable barriers to addressing VE, including a lack of capacity among CSOs, fear of engaging on sensitive issues, and a widely held belief that VE is a 'foreign' problem that does not resonate with Sudanese.

Recommendations

The key insights and recommendations for future civil society efforts to address VE in Sudan identified by this research are detailed below:

- 1 Support a Sudanese-led definition of VE and local drivers** - One of the key themes mentioned frequently by interviewees and in discussions was that extremist messaging was a foreign concept which did not resonate with Sudanese people. Our research found that this points to a broader trend in Sudan, where people have varying definitions of extremism and violence that impacts local communities. As a first step, it will be important for there to be a Sudanese-led process to develop a shared definition VE, and a common understanding of how it manifests in local communities. This process should be sure to engage diverse stakeholders and marginalized groups. Programs should then seek to increase awareness and understanding of this common definition, the push and pull factors that motivate individuals to join VEOs or engage in violent acts, as well as the underlying grievances that extremist recruitment narratives leverage. Vulnerable groups and at-risk individuals should be engaged in discussion about the drivers and definition of VE in Sudan in the places and spaces that they feel most comfortable.
- 2 Increase awareness and capacity among peer and family networks** - As individuals frequently seek advice and support from the people closest to them, i.e. friends and immediate family members, these individuals should be supported in increasing their awareness and knowledge of dynamics of VE recruitment. While family and friends offer a range of solutions, many of them do not provide actionable recommendations and a quarter of the time they propose violent solutions. Thus, projects addressing VE should consider building awareness and skills among peer and family networks related to identifying indicators of recruitment and radicalization, and developing conflict transformation skills among these influencers to provide alternative solutions and pathways for at-risk individuals to address and resolve their frustrations.
- 3 Ensure the inclusion of women as key influencers to enhance resilience to VE** - While respondents indicated that they discussed frustrations with family members, 46% of these responses indicated that their confidant was a female family member (sister, wife, mother). Thus, preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) initiatives should specifically ensure the inclusion of women in building awareness and capacity to address radicalization. All programming should also provide options to ensure women feel comfortable, i.e. women-only sessions where women can encourage one another and share information and knowledge.
- 4 Integrate digital and online media to target at-risk individuals** - Internet use and social media are growing in Sudan. This was on display during the peaceful protests that overthrew President Bashir as organizers mobilized over Facebook and WhatsApp groups and shared information on security forces and intelligence operations. The importance of these modes of communication was confirmed by this research's findings that online platforms were the most common way respondents received information, followed by television and radio. Initiatives designed to address VE should integrate these emerging platforms, as well as established media outlets to engage with at-risk individuals, prompt conversations about their key concerns, and encourage a diverse discussion on solutions to address these concerns. However, any media program which seeks to address VE should be followed up with in-person discussion and debate, as this was another avenue through which individuals indicated they receive information.

- ♦ In addition, future research should be conducted to develop a broader understanding of media practices and engagement in Sudan, including where and how individuals engage with these information channels, which in turn would support P/CVE efforts in the country.

5 Strengthen and establish collaborative relationships among civil society - Barriers to effective engagement on P/CVE among civil society in Sudan included low capacity and collaboration, which was confirmed by the CSO relational survey. While collaboration and information sharing among CSOs existed, it was low —only 10% of possible collaborative relationships exist. As the country rebuilds post-Bashir, there is an opportunity to build on this existing foundation of collaboration to strengthen civil society. Collaborative relationships among CSOs will support complementarity among initiatives, continue to build an evidence base on P/CVE in Sudan and ultimately contribute to increased resilience to VE. In addition, since the sensitive nature of VE and previously restrictive operating environment for CSOs limited civil society’s engagement, the newly opened environment provides a window of opportunity that should be seized on to build capacity among CSOs to address community needs and P/CVE efforts.

6 Target markets for positive narratives of inclusivity, tolerance, and diversity - Markets are frequented by at-risk individuals daily, they also represent a platform and entry point for extremist messaging of all kinds (not just violent extremism but also extremist political messaging). Therefore, markets may also provide an entry point to promote positive narratives of inclusivity, tolerance, and diversity. While respondents indicated that they do not discuss their frustrations in markets, there is an opportunity to capitalize on the amount of time that Sudanese tend to spend waiting for transportation to broadcast targeted messaging.

7 Support further research to continue to monitor the impact of the transition on existing or emerging drivers of recruitment - This research spanned the overthrow of President Bashir and the beginning of the transitional period —a time that was noted for hopefulness and optimism among Sudanese. It will be important to continue to monitor how the changing context might impact levels of recruitment in Sudan, and to identify new drivers that may result from the transition and could exacerbate or mitigate VE recruitment. As the landscape continues to shift during the transition, it will also be valuable to identify the impact that various influencers and leaders have on recruitment and radicalization in Sudan.

- ♦ In particular, this research noted that the role of traditional leaders and religious actors will be an important area for additional research, since they were noted as having possible influence in rural areas. The role of these actors and traditional tribal affiliations in supporting community resilience should be better understood as they could provide possible entry points to engage with at-risk individuals. Similarly, religious actors were identified as possible influencers who have the connections and networks to promote positive Islamic messages of tolerance, diversity, and inclusion. However, due to the connection some religious actors had with the former government, it will be important to understand which leaders have credibility with at-risk individuals.
- ♦ Currently the body of evidence on VE in Sudan is limited, to further inform future programming on VE additional research regarding rural recruitment dynamics should be conducted. Overall, efforts to address VE in rural communities will need a strong understanding of the historical and present-day dynamics, as well as the relationships between tribes.

Introduction

The previous government of former President Bashir allowed various violent extremist (VE) and terrorist groups to establish bases and networks in the country.¹⁰ Under President Bashir, Sudan was identified as an at-risk country for VE due to factors such as the decades of violent conflict in peripheral states, the deteriorating economy, and the influx of refugees from places like South Sudan.¹¹ These risks in large part drove the peaceful revolution that brought new hope and expectations for change to Sudan. While the transitional period presents the opportunity to begin to resolve these issues, the uncertainty, delays, and worsening economy during this period could also drive further recruitment.¹² Thus, it is imperative to leverage the new entry points established during the transition to support increased civil society engagement on previously sensitive and securitized topics, such as VE.

Despite being considered an at risk country for VE, relatively little is known about the motivations and drivers of recruitment in Sudan —especially when compared to other countries in the region. Research and knowledge about the root drivers of VE in Sudan is only in its nascent stages.¹³ While the revolution and transition has provided increased space for civil society and communities to engage on the topic, there are still considerable barriers to a robust civil society response, including overcoming previous sensitivities and restrictive policies that limited the capacity of local civil society. This research was undertaken to contribute to an evidence base on VE and propose recommendations to inform future programming. The design and methodology of this research builds on Search’s experience conducting similarly sensitive research on VE in Tanzania and Kenya, which has contributed to strengthened collaboration between civil society and government to transform VE along the Swahili Coast.

This research also aligns with the priorities of the new transitional government as it strives to distance itself from the policies of the former government, reconnect with the international community, and be removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List (SSTL). As a result, new efforts are underway to oust terrorist groups and to better understand recruitment and radicalization dynamics within the country.¹⁴ Sudan has taken initial steps toward the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), and the Sudanese National Commission on Counter Terrorism (SNCCT) has broadened its relationships and engagement —seeking input from international bodies, civil society, and local experts.¹⁵ This research provides recommendations to enable local and international organizations to design and implement informed programming to transform VE in Sudan.

Methodology

The research team conducted research with the aim to increase the body of knowledge on understanding key dynamics related to VE in East Africa, as well as promoting increased collaboration and joint reflection among civil society organizations working on P/CVE. This research was undertaken to broadly answer the overarching research questions which

10 International Crisis Group, “Sudan’s Islamists: From Salvation to Survival,” Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°119, March, 2016. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/sudan-s-islamists-salvation-survival-0>

11 UNDP, “Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment,” Regional Bureau for Africa, 2017. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

12 UNDP, 2018.

13 Ibid.

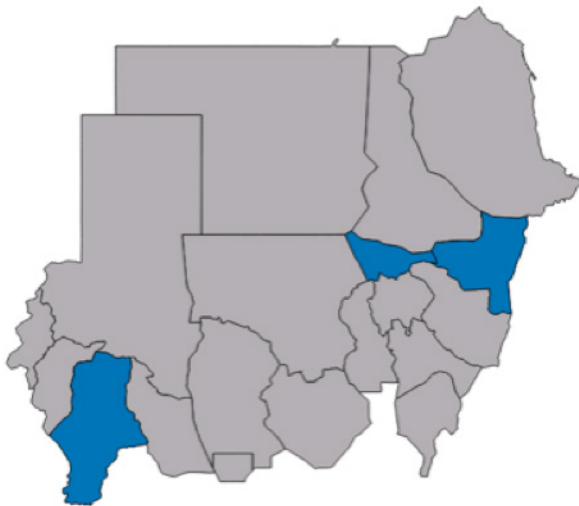
14 Mossberg, Hilary and John Prendergast, “What Happens When Sudan is Removed from the U.S. Terror List?,” USIP, February 2020. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/02/what-happens-when-sudan-removed-us-terror-list>

15 Search attended these meetings and participated as a civil society representative.

seek to understand the dynamics of participation in violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in urban and rural areas; identify opportunities for preventing VE in at risk-areas in Sudan and at state and local levels; and, explore the challenges and opportunities for CSOs/Institutions to engage in preventing and transforming VE. The specific research questions which guided this research are listed in the annexes but in general sought to elicit further understanding of who is at risk, whom they turn to to discuss their frustrations, and where they feel most comfortable discussing these frustrations. After understanding these key factors, the research explored the roles of religious and traditional leaders, differences between rural and urban dynamics, as well as the communication channels where information is shared. Lastly, this research sought to understand the opportunities and entry points for engagement and the barriers facing civil society's response.

Geographic Location

Figure 1. Target Locations in Sudan



This research was centered in Sudan and sought an understanding of differences between rural and urban areas. As such, the research targeted the three states of Khartoum (urban), Kassala (rural), and South Darfur (semi-urban).

Khartoum: Khartoum is the largest city in the country and has seen a rapid increase in population fueled by the stagnation of the rural economy, violent conflict in some states, and the impacts of climate change affecting traditional farmers and herders.¹⁶ Due to the rapid growth of the city, slums have become more prevalent across Khartoum, in the form of inner-city slums, outer slums and squatter settlements.¹⁷ While Sudan has a relatively young population (41% are younger than 15 years and 20% are 15-24 years),¹⁸ economic opportunities for youth are limited and youth unemployment is at 31.4%.¹⁹ Khartoum was selected as one focal point for this study because of its central position as the political and cultural capital, as well as a regional and international hub for the study of Arabic and Islam.²⁰

Additionally, Khartoum and its universities have seen the recruitment of young people to international VEOs abroad.²¹

16 World Bank, "Sudan: Issues in Urban Development Phase 1 – Overview of the Urban Landscape," Urban and Water Unit, Sustainable Development Department, Africa Region, November, 2011. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/231021468119365554/pdf/637850ESW0P1130Phase010FINAL-0REPORT.pdf>

17 Omer, Kalafalla. "Policy Reform, not Evictions! The Case of Slum Urbanisation in Khartoum, Sudan" Urbanet, September, 2018. <https://www.urbanet.info/sudan-slum-urbanisation/>

18 World Population Review, "Sudan Population 2020" Accessed March, 2020. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/sudan-population>

19 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019 and World Population Prospects, 2019.

20 Tarek Abd El-Galil, "Arab Students at Sudanese Universities Face an Uncertain Future," Al Fanar Media, July, 2019. <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2019/07/arab-students-at-sudanese-universities-face-an-uncertain-future/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Arab%20students,private%20education-al%20institutions%20across%20Sudan>

21 Alice Ross, Mark Townsend, and Martin Chulov, "British students killed in Iraq after joining Isis," The Guardian, March, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/01/british-students-killed-in-iraq-after-joining-isis>

Kassala: Recently, Kassala has had an increase in refugees and migrants crossing into the state from Ethiopia and Eritrea, and has also seen an increase in human trafficking networks.²² Community frustrations and grievances on both sides of the border and the impact of climate change on livelihoods and income, combined with the influx of migrants and refugees have increased insecurity in Kassala. This influx of people has also brought to light religious tensions between different sects of Islam present in the region. Home to the Sufi sect, *Khatmiyya*, Kassala is also becoming nationally recognized as the biggest centre of the *Jamaat Ansar Al Sunna*, which competes directly with the *Khatmiyya* and other Sufi sects.²³ Supported financially by Saudi Arabia, the *Jamaat Ansar Al Sunna* sect has acquired enormous economic power that has shifted power structures in Kassala. Kassala was selected as a location of interest for this study because of its role as a bridge of influence coming from the Arabian Peninsula, as a frontline of political tensions with neighboring Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as its predominantly rural population.

South Darfur: Situated in Western Sudan and along the border with the Central African Republic and South Sudan, diversity is a characteristic feature of the population in South Darfur. Here, West Africans (Chadians, Nigeriens, Nigerians), Sudanese, South Sudanese, as well as people from surrounding Arab countries live side by side. However, the population is highly divided along tribal and ethnic lines, and traditional institutions have been contested by South Darfur's large youth demographic.²⁴ The population of the capital city, Nyala, grew rapidly after the eruption of the Darfur conflict in 2003, making it the second largest urban centre after Khartoum. This massive population displacement severely impacted the social, economic, and security conditions in Nyala. Large internally displaced peoples (IDPs) camps that grew with the conflict in 2003 have expanded out of the surroundings of Nyala to become a part of the city. Continued conflict, human smuggling, and tensions around gold mines have all contributed to the continued insecurity of South Darfur. Aside from the aforementioned conflict issues, another reason South Darfur was selected for this study was to draw some demographic and situational contrasts to Kassala and Khartoum.

Process and Timeframe

To inform programmatic responses to VE, this research was guided by overall objectives and questions that centered on the dynamics of recruitment, opportunities and entry points for a civil society response, and the challenges and barriers to addressing VE.²⁵ The research questions were informed by an initial literature review²⁶ to identify the existing knowledge and gaps related to VE in Sudan, which drew upon both English and Arabic sources, and was completed in January 2019. The tools and methodology were designed in April 2019 as part of a 3-day learning exchange with Kenyan and Tanzanian researchers who had previously conducted similar research.²⁷ The learning exchange also provided a space for the researchers to discuss the sensitivities, challenges, and best practices for conducting research on VE in a sensitive and restrictive environment.

22 Hassan A Abdel Ati, "Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Eastern Sudan," Sudan report, September 2017. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/6325-human-smuggling-and-trafficking-in-eastern-sudan.pdf>

23 Catherine Miller, Land, Ethnicity and Political Legitimacy in Eastern Sudan, Le Caire, CEDEJ, pp.3-58, 2005. halshs- 00150383

24 African Arguments. "Urbanization and the Future of Sudan" African Arguments, January, 2008. <https://africanarguments.org/2008/01/29/urbanization-and-the-future/>

25 The full list of research questions can be found in the annexes of this report.

26 The full literature review can be found in the annexes of this report.

27 Russell, 2017

As the protests took over parts of Khartoum and shut down universities, the data collection was significantly delayed to ensure the safety and security of Search staff, the research team, and participants. During intense insecurity and outbreaks of violence in Khartoum, Search staff and the research team sheltered in their homes until they could safely resume work. Thus, the training of research assistants and testing of tools was delayed until late July 2019. In late July, the research team trained the research assistants, tested tools, and conducted an initial focus group discussion. However, data collection was again delayed as protests continued because the military and protesters could not come to an agreement on the transitional period and government structure.

Data collection resumed in Khartoum in late August 2019, but continued insecurity and university closures delayed it in Kassala and South Darfur until late November 2019. All data collection was completed by January 2020, followed immediately by data analysis. After analysis, the findings were shared and validated by a workshop in Khartoum in July 2020 and shared virtually in August 2020.

TIMEFRAME

- ◆ Literature Review - November 2018 - January 2019
- ◆ Learning Exchange Workshop - April 2019
- ◆ Testing and Initial Data Collection - July 2019
- ◆ Data Collection - August 2019 - January 2020
- ◆ Analysis and Writing - February 2020 - July 2020
- ◆ Validation Workshop - July 2020
- ◆ Virtual Presentation - August 2020

Data Collection and Analysis

This study utilized a mixed methods approach that included interviews, focus groups, and a CSO relational survey. Interviews were purposely sampled, selecting interviewees based on their areas of professional expertise, knowledge of VE issues, or personal involvement with VE issues and work. Interviews conducted are detailed in the table below.

Location	Role	Number
Khartoum	Government, CSOs, Religious Actors, ²⁸ Local Authorities	7
Kassala	Government, CSOs, Religious Actors, Local Authorities	7
South Darfur	Government, CSOs, Religious Actors, Local Authorities	8
Total: 22		

²⁸ Religious actors include religious leaders as well as influential religious voices

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The focus groups used a traditional methodology with an activity that collected relational data that were analyzed with SNA methods. The focus groups targeted a sample of men and women between the ages of 18 to 35 who were recruited by referral from local civil society partners with established networks in target locations. While international VE groups are not known to recruit at extremely young ages,²⁹ 18 to 35 was selected as the target age group for this research based on the ease of access for the research team. Additionally, previous research in Sudan conducted by UNDP on the root causes of VE in Sudan identified this age range as at risk of recruitment.³⁰ During these discussions, participants identified places (real and virtual) where, and people with whom, they discuss their frustrations. Additionally, they indicated whether the people they spoke to ever made violence seem like a reasonable solution to their expressed frustrations. While this research strove for equal participation of men and women, local CSOs and contacts who supported mobilization in target locations noted the difficulty in accessing women for the study as they are less frequently present in public spaces. Analysis of the relational data generated through these focus groups was conducted using OpenRefine, Microsoft Excel and UCINet.

Table 2: Focus Group Discussion Participants

Location	Number of participants	Number of FGDs	Gender		
			Male	Female	No Answer ³¹
Khartoum	39	9	72%	21%	8%
Kassala	56	7	54%	38%	9%
South Darfur	58	7	48 %	31%	21%
Total	153	18	56%	31%	13%

RELATIONAL SURVEY

The SNCCT identified the sample of organizations to use for the Relational Survey and populated a table of CSOs working on P/CVE. The Relational Survey sought to understand information sharing and collaboration between P/CVE-focused CSOs in Sudan. Decision makers within each of the identified CSOs were asked to identify the other CSOs with which they share information, partner, and collaborate, and answer several questions aimed at collecting attribute data for each CSO. Respondents completed the survey via email, WhatsApp, or hardcopy. The research team facilitated the distribution and collection of the survey. All versions were then collected and catalogued by the UoK research assistants and submitted to Search for analysis. Analysis of the relational survey was conducted with Microsoft Excel and UCINet.

29 Darden, Jessica Trishko. "Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth" May 2019. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>

30 UNDP. "Violent Extremism in Sudan: An Evidence-based Study" 2017. [https://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCT%202017%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCT%202017%20(1).pdf)

31 Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, a number of participants chose not to provide any demographic information. Where findings are disaggregated by gender, these non-responses have been removed.

Research Team

The research team was made up of four senior researchers (three men, one woman) from the UoK Peace Research Institute, one of whom was the Team Leader who liaised with Search and ensured that work was progressing as planned. The four Senior Researchers were supported by four Research Assistants (three men, one woman) who carried out data collection in Khartoum, Kassala, and South Darfur. Supplemental data collection was carried out in South Darfur by a male researcher from University of Nyala.

The Research Team was also supported by the head of the SNCCT, as well as local civil society organizers in each state who supported the mobilization of the focus group and interview participants. In addition, Search's Sudan Country Director (woman), Regional DM&E Coordinator (man), Sudan DM&E Officer (man), and Regional Program Associate (woman) supported the Research Team to design the research methodology, facilitate data collection, analyze findings, and produce the report.

Research Ethics

Conflict sensitivity and “Do No Harm” strategies were very important in the design, collection, and analysis of this research, especially as the context within Sudan changed extensively throughout the length of the research study and the topic of VE is sensitive within Sudan. One of the key concerns guiding the Research Team was the overly securitized presence of intelligence services and the impact this had on the willingness of community members to discuss sensitive topics. Therefore, the research team worked with local civil society organizations in Kassala and South Darfur that have long-standing relationships in the communities where they work, and which enabled them to mobilize research participants.

From the beginning, it was important to ensure that the Government of Sudan and key departments were aware of and supported the research. Search worked closely with the SNCCT to ensure their cooperation, which also helped facilitate broader government acceptance. Search was also transparent about the intent and subject of its research with the Government of Sudan.

The research team discussed the possible risks to conducting research on such a sensitive subject during the workshop in Mombasa, and solicited input from the Tanzanian and Kenyan researchers on the best methods for mitigating this challenge. This helped them develop the tools and approach in a conflict-sensitive manner.

At every data collection touch point, research participants were provided a brief description of the project and the reason for their participation, and the research team obtained informed consent from all participants. The research team complied with Search's Responsible Data Use Principles which outlined organizational standards for anonymity, data security, and storage.

Lastly, the importance of personal safety and the safety of participants was also stressed throughout the process. This was particularly salient during the insecurity of the protests and revolution in Sudan, when the project was temporarily delayed and all staff and consultants sheltered in their homes.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations that impacted this research. Although the differences and similarities between urban and rural areas are important to understand, there were limitations to the size and scope of the research, and disaggregation between the two was de-prioritized in favor of representation of diverse target locations. The research sought to mitigate this limitation by selecting more urban locations in Khartoum and South Darfur, and more rural locations in Kassala. While this provided interesting insights into the overall differences between urban and rural motivations, it cannot be applied generally to each target location, or across the entire country.

During the data collection period, this research encountered a number of delays due to the insecurity and upheaval that Sudan experienced from peaceful protests that started in December 2018. After the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir, insecurity increased to the point where the research team from the UoK could not meet in their offices and Search staff had to work from home. This delayed data collection not only outside Khartoum, as the research team was unable to travel outside the city, but within Khartoum as well. Many of the focus groups that were to be held at Universities were unable to progress as the Universities were closed down completely during the protests, and sporadically after the protests ended with the agreement between the FFC and TMC. This continued to impact the research team's ability to collect data. In addition, the change in government impacted the CSO relational survey. Prior to the overthrow of President Bashir, the SNCCT provided a list of CSOs to be contacted for the relational survey but these CSOs disbanded after Bashir was overthrown as they were all predominantly supported by the former government. The research team, in consultation with Search, used local contacts in each target location to identify CSOs which had not disbanded and redistributed the relational survey.

Lastly, this study was limited in its capacity to reach individuals at-risk of recruitment or radicalization due to existing social norms and low levels of trust. The study team found that targeted community members outside Khartoum, and in Kassala in particular, were very wary of outsiders, and especially those they considered to be Khartoum elite. Sudan's NISS is widely feared in the country and many Sudanese are hesitant to share personal details with people that are not from their communities. Similarly, in universities in Khartoum that have had high profile cases of students being recruited to join ISIL, students were hesitant to join focus groups or discuss their motivations outside their friend groups. The research mitigated this challenge by working with local interlocutors and CSOs in each target area, as well as key champions in the university who could mobilize participants and vouch for the research team. In addition, the research team targeted at-risk locations to maximize the chances of having at-risk individuals represented. This involved targeting specific universities known to have had students recruited as well as hosting focus groups with community members from areas targeted by VE recruiters.

“POVERTY AND MARGINALIZATION... CANNOT BE THE SOLE EXPLANATORY FACTORS IN SUDAN.”

- INTERVIEW, KHARTOUM

Findings

The sections that follow present the findings from this research. This research first sought to understand who is at-risk by identifying the dynamics of VEO participation in Sudan and then identifying the opportunities and entry points for CSOs and institutions that work to prevent and address VE.

While this report primarily focuses on international VE organizations, it is important to highlight at the outset that in interviews and discussions, many respondents identified various types of organized violence that they experience in their everyday lives. This included political violence, social violence, and rhetoric that promoted the exclusion of some religious or social groups. Where possible, the findings sought to differentiate between these different types of violence and highlight references to international extremist organizations. However, as noted below in the findings, it will also be important to understand the various types of violence that communities face and to develop a joint, Sudanese understanding of VE.

Dynamics of Participation

WHO IS AT RISK?

As Sudan is an at-risk country for VE, it is important to understand those who are vulnerable to recruitment and at-risk of engaging in VE. To do so, interviews were asked to identify different demographics which were most susceptible to joining VE movements. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that youth were most at risk in Sudan. This is confirmed by the literature review, as well as from news reports of Sudanese university students who travelled to Syria and Libya to join the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Libya (ISIL).³² More specifically, interviews across all target locations highlighted that **young men are the most susceptible to recruitment by VE groups**. While this response cut across socio-economic strata, the drivers to recruitment varied based on class, ethnicity, education, and tribe.

In the literature review conducted prior to this research, *push and pull factors* were identified that highlighted the complexity of reasons for individuals to join VEOs. While poverty and income were mentioned by respondents as contributing factors to individuals joining VEOs, which was confirmed by similar studies,³³ poverty alone is not sufficient to explain engagement in violent extremism. Interview respondents also confirmed the findings that **economic hardship, unemployment, and marginalization play a large role in motivating individuals to join extremist groups**. Poverty and unemployment were mentioned as contributing factors specifically in Kassala and poorer parts of Khartoum —with respondents noting that recruiters frequently promised financial security to draw in at-risk individuals. Marginalization linked to ideological

32 Geneive Abdo, “This Sudanese school’s students are rapidly joining ISIS.” Brookings Institute, August 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/this-sudanese-schools-students-are-rapidly-joining-isis/>

33 UNDP, 2017.

beliefs was also highlighted as a concern, especially when individuals felt discriminated against for subscribing to what the broader society viewed as radical beliefs. In addition to these predominant themes, interview respondents also identified several contributing factors, confirmed by other studies in Sudan,³⁴ including feelings of injustice (due to poor governance and human rights violations), religious, political, or ethnic differences, existential search for identity, lack of opportunities for both economic development and personal development, as well as protracted conflict and prison violence. Respondents in Khartoum and Kassala in particular highlighted that *inclusion* frequently plays a role in recruitment. Respondents noted that perceptions of not being “*fully Sudanese*” causes people perceived to be foreigners³⁵ to adopt extremist views and religious practices as a means by which to integrate into the culture and be perceived as more fully Sudanese. For example, respondents in Kassala noted that immigrants and extremist rebel groups from Eritrea (specifically the group Eritrea Islamic Jihad) frequently adopted Sudanese clothing and espoused extremist Salafi ideologies³⁶ and messages in an effort to integrate into Sudanese culture. Similarly, in Khartoum, a number of foreign-born students have been recruited into VEOs and, most notably, travel abroad to join ISIL. Reports on the recruitment of foreign-born students have noted that elite students with foreign passports and limited understanding of Islam were specifically targeted for recruitment.³⁷

However, while respondents noted trends in foreigners adopting extremist views to appear more Sudanese, they were also quick to mention that generally Sudanese practice a moderate form of Islam that is historically more open and accepting than extremist views promoted by VEOs. Many informants also insisted that the extremist ideologies promoted within Sudan are not home-grown, and rather, are often a result of imported values and ideologies from abroad. This was frequently mentioned in interviews and mimics the narrative of the former government. Under former President Bashir, the government often ignored the historic roots of VE in Sudan and attributed the phenomenon to a number of factors. These factors included the increasing number of immigrants in Sudan, the fact that the country is surrounded by VE hotspots in West Africa and East Africa, as well as Sudan acting as a transit country for foreign terrorist fighters headed to join VE groups in Libya and West Africa.³⁸ While the former government sought to distance itself from extremist narratives, interviews in Kassala also noted that for some, Sudanese extremist messaging is frequently associated with the corruption and Islamist agenda of the Bashir era, as well their tacit support for VE groups, and therefore does not resonate among most young people. In addition to pointing to foreign importation of VE ideology, respondents also frequently conflated violence in their communities with VE (for instance tribal violence, which will be discussed below). These differences in perceptions of the nature of VE in Sudan highlights *the challenges with the term violent extremism, as it frequently has varied and nuanced interpretations.*

FINDINGS

- ◆ Overwhelmingly respondents indicated that **young men** are the most at-risk of recruitment.
- ◆ Key drivers to recruitment included **economic hardship, marginalization, and unemployment**. However, when exploring differences between urban and rural recruitment, it became clear that the term “violent extremism” often had various interpretations among communities.

34 Ibid.

35 Foreigners here can refer to either foreign-born Sudanese or people with tribal roots outside of Sudan.

36 Many respondents attributed extremist views in Sudan to extreme interpretations of Salafist ideology. While this report recognizes that not all salafist ideology is extreme, nor does it promote the use of violence, we use this phrase to denote times when respondents referred to specific extremist Salafist groups or ideologies in Sudan.

37 Salma Mohamed Abdalmunim Abdalla, “Fighting the Enemies of God: the Rise of and the Response to Violent Extremism in Sudan” *Journal of Deradicalization*, No. 20, 2019. <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/249/171>

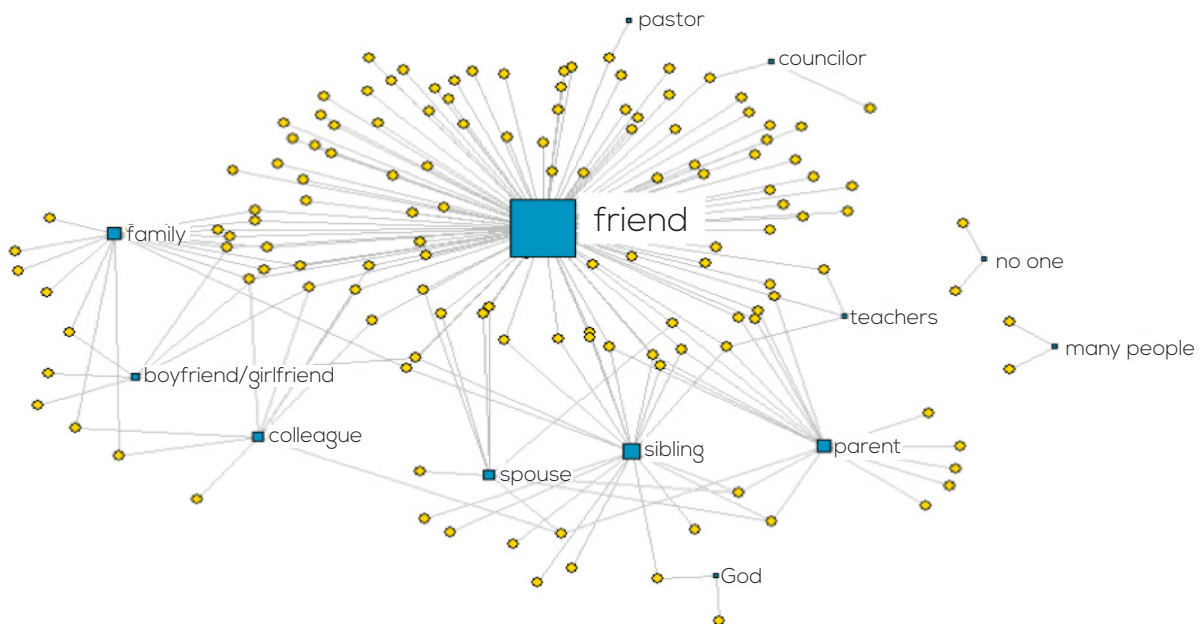
38 Abdalla, 2019.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PEER GROUPS AND IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS?

After identifying those who were at risk and some of the key frustrations that drive recruitment in Sudan, this research sought to develop a better understanding of some of the influencers (positive and negative) who have the potential to impact choices to engage in violence. Focus group participants were asked to identify the places where they discussed their frustrations, with whom frustrations were discussed, and some of the solutions being offered. The responses of focus group participants were mapped to highlight the people most frequently identified as ones with whom they discussed their frustrations.

Although responses included parents, siblings, and other family members, *respondents indicated that they predominantly talk about their frustrations with their friends*. This was consistent across all geographic target areas, as seen in *figures 4, 5, and 6* below. Moreover, data from focus groups suggests that friends or close friends were more likely than others (parents or siblings) to make violence seem like a reasonable solution to these frustrations. This finding is also confirmed through interviews in each target location which noted that on university campuses, these intimate friendship networks provided an entry point for recruiters and extremist messaging. This was particularly important while Bashir was in power, as under his government the only social groups allowed in universities were religious groups. As students joined these groups to make friends, extremist messaging could proliferate under the guise of increased piety and dedication to Islam.³⁹

Figure 2. Influencers Network all target locations



While *friends* were the most common people with whom individuals discussed their frustrations, there was also a significant focus on family members among focus group participants. From our network analysis, we identified that immediate family members (parents or siblings) were the second most common group of people with whom individuals discussed their frustrations. This was true across all target areas, with the exception of South Darfur, where the spouse

³⁹ I.e. the University of Medical Science and Technology which experienced a rash of student recruitment and a number of students who travelled to Syria to join IS.

was mentioned slightly more frequently than parent and sibling. The frequency with which respondents noted *they discussed frustrations with immediate family members and friends indicates the importance of these intimate networks*. This is also confirmed by research on VE across Africa which has indicated that friends and family are identified as often complementing online recruitment and radicalization tactics and messaging.⁴⁰ However, further analysis revealed that, *in particular, female family members (mothers and sisters) play an important role as people with whom individuals discuss their frustrations*. Of the times where respondents mentioned discussing frustrations with family members, 46% of the time they explicitly mentioned female family members.⁴¹ In addition, individuals frequently discuss their frustrations at home, where women predominate. These findings showed no significant difference between rural and urban locations, or across ages and genders.

Figure 3. Khartoum Influencers Network

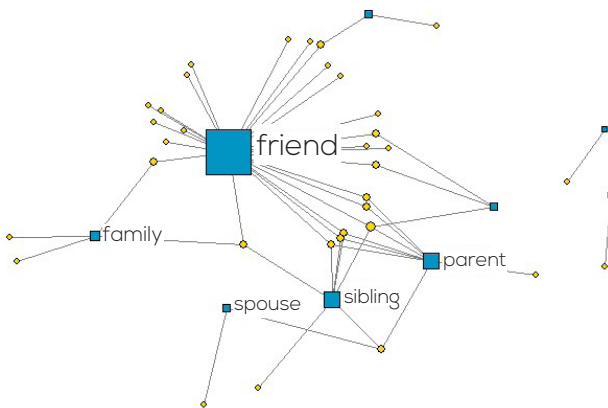


Figure 4. South Darfur Influencers

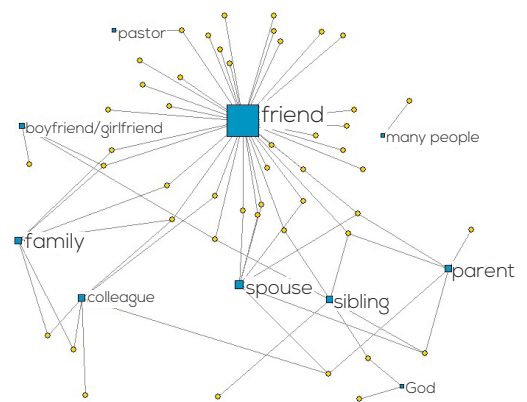
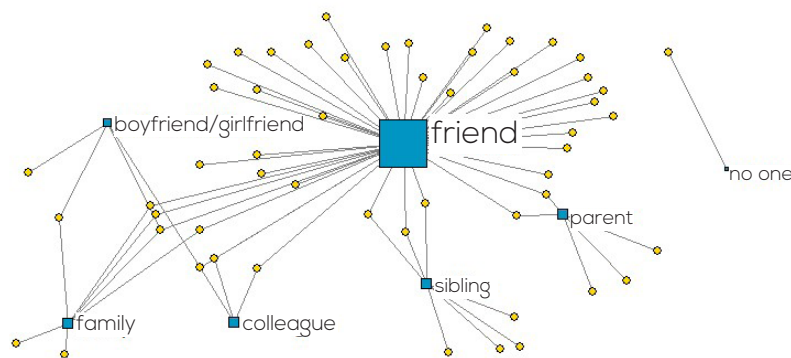


Figure 5. Kassala Influencers Network



40 Kate Cox, et al, "Social media in Africa: A double-edged sword for security and development," RAND Research Report, 2018. http://www.africa.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/UNDP-RAND-Social-Media-Africa-Research-Report_final_3%20Oct.pdf
 41 The remaining 54% was split between 19% explicitly male and 35% gender was not specified (i.e. sibling, cousin, or parent).

When discussing their frustrations, respondents indicated that people in their networks mostly offer non-violent solutions. However, 48% of respondents stated that at least one person made violence seem like a reasonable solution to their frustrations. Respondents also noted that friends they confided in generally shared their frustrations, but that family members often did not. Despite this, there were no large distinctions between groups that were likely to suggest violent solutions (friends were only slightly more likely to suggest violence than family members). This highlights the *important role that peer groups and intimate relationships play in condoning violence* and in making violence seem like an acceptable solution.

However, in South Darfur interviewees noted a different aspect of recruitment. Women, whether friends or family, play an important role outside of just suggesting violent solutions, as they frequently act as recruiters themselves, particularly targeting other women. In South Darfur, informants highlighted that women frequently recruit other women who practice more moderate Islam by ‘*da’awa*’ (evangelism/prostiliziation). Women recruiters in South Darfur were cited to use clothing as an entry point, usually arguing for more modesty and piety and gradually discussing more extremist (usually Salafist) views. Women are, in this way, a key entry point into some communities that otherwise practice moderate versions of Islam. Thus, *women can act as potential influencers, offering both violent and nonviolent solutions to frustrations, as well as potential recruiters themselves.*

SOLUTIONS TO FRUSTRATIONS

After identifying the key people with whom they discussed their frustrations, participants were asked to describe the solutions offered by these individuals. It is important to note that this information was collected before and after the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir which may influence some of the responses, as many in Sudan were optimistic immediately after the success of the revolution. Outlined below are a few of the types of solutions proposed by those with whom respondents shared their frustrations. While respondents noted a wide range of the types of solutions they received, very few were suggestions for concrete, actionable solutions, and a quarter of the time violence was suggested or made to seem like an acceptable solution.

- ♦ **Perseverance** - This theme encompasses proposals to practice patience, build resilience, and exercise optimism in the face of struggle and frustration. These types of solutions were cited 50 times by participants.
- ♦ **Violence** - While participants did not provide copious detail about the type, scope or degree of violence being proposed, there were solutions offered to participants that suggested violence as a reasonable means of resolving frustrations. Such solutions were specifically cited by participants 36 times during focus groups.
- ♦ **Pragmatism** - The next common type of solutions proposed to participants was practical advice about how to address frustrations by technical means. This included conducting research on an issue, better self care (reading, relaxation, etc.), finding a job, or adopting conflict avoidance strategies. Solutions falling within this pragmatic theme were mentioned 30 times by participants.
- ♦ **Religious Solutions** - Acts of faith and religious practice were also offered to participants as means to address frustrations. Stronger faith, prayer, devotion to Islam and other religious solutions were specifically mentioned by participants 13 times during focus groups.
- ♦ **Positive Outlets** - Respondents also noted that they received solutions to their frustration in the form of increasing their involvement in sports and social activities. This was mentioned by participants 10 times.

- ◆ **Discussion and Reflection** - Participants were told to reflect more deeply on their frustrations and to discuss their frustrations more frequently with others. Such recommendations were cited 9 times.
- ◆ **Strengthening Relationships** - The theme of strengthening relationships with family, friends and community emerged as a suggested solution to frustrations 5 times by participants.

FINDINGS

- ◆ Frustrations are expressed to those with whom individuals share a close relationship. In particular, individuals discuss their frustrations with their **friends** followed closely by immediate family members (spouse, sibling, parent).
- ◆ Most often, respondents indicated that they discuss their concerns with **female family members**, indicating the important role that women play in advocating for or against violence.
- ◆ Of these groups, individuals reported that **friends and family members were equally as likely to suggest a violent solution or make violence seem acceptable**.
- ◆ Of the solutions proposed to respondents, very few provided concrete avenues to take action.

“THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT SUDAN DOES NOT PROVIDE A GROUND FOR RECRUITMENT AND THIS MEANS THAT THERE IS LITTLE SOCIAL SYMPATHY FOR EXTREMIST GROUPS.”

- KEY INFORMANT, CIVIL SOCIETY

natural resources, land, or ethnic differences are fought by local tribal militias which perpetuate cycles of violence in rural communities. While rural young people frequently join these militias to support their clan affiliation (by increasing the land, income, and power for the local tribes), some interviews in Kassala noted that tribal militias can easily become aligned with VE movements for access to additional resources and power. However, this was contradicted by other interviews which noted that tribal militias were frequently controlled by the former government and ruling party rather than VEOs. Moreover, young people in post-revolution Sudan are frustrated by tribal leaders who are perceived as being linked to the former government, which they associate with corruption. While the role of tribal militias was not fully explored, it will be important to better understand what the term *violent extremism* means to local communities (i.e. whether it is simply using violence that is extreme, or it is the ideological motivations resulting in violence) and **confirms the finding, highlighted above, that VE has varied and nuanced meanings among Sudanese.**

WHAT ARE THE PATTERNS ACROSS RURAL AND URBAN AREAS?

While these dynamics are true across Kassala, South Darfur, and Khartoum, it is also important to identify differences in motivating factors and influencers between rural and urban contexts. Some of the most well known cases of recruitment out of Sudan come from urban, elite Universities. However, interviews highlighted the fact that while rural recruitment is likely just as prevalent, it just does not receive the same amount of attention. This limits our awareness of the true impact of VE recruitment in rural areas.

Our research found that rural populations in Kassala and South Darfur were concerned with the rate of recruitment of individuals into tribal militias, which is typically based on clan affiliation. However, the relationship between recruitment into these militias and VE recruitment diverged. In rural areas, local conflicts over

While rural recruitment into violent groups was frequently linked to tribal militias among respondents, urban recruits on the other hand were cited to join VEOs for ideological reasons, and typically joined groups perceived to promote extremist Salafist ideology. In the most well known case, this led young Sudanese students to join IS and travel to Syria in support of their cause.⁴² However, it was also noted that among urban lower class populations, recruitment was frequently tied to frustrations around limited economic opportunities. While the most well-known example of recruitment from Sudan involved students supporting ISIL, other recruits from Sudanese urban areas have gone on to join Al Shabaab or Boko Haram. Interestingly, interviews noted that class seemed to determine where urban youth went to support international extremist groups; elite individuals typically went to Syria and Iraq in support of ISIL, while lower-class recruits frequently supported Al Shabaab and Boko Haram —traveling to Libya, Niger, Nigeria, or Somalia. This may have been due to the economic situation of the recruits —typically, university students who were recruited and travelled abroad to Syria and Iraq came from elite families with foreign passports.⁴³

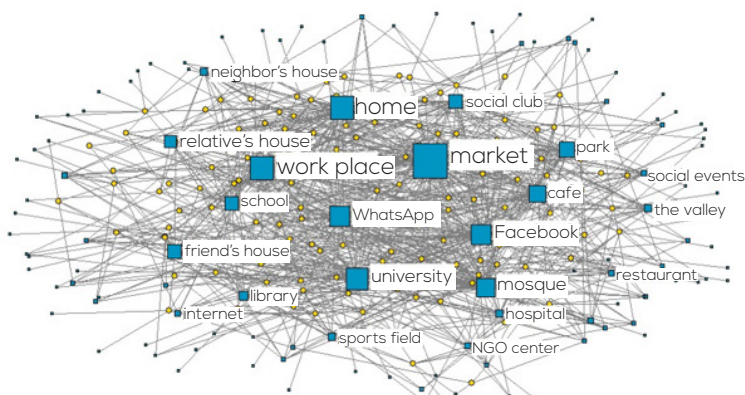
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS?

It is also important to note here that none of the respondents included in the study mentioned religious actors, traditional leaders, or civil society as those they turn to with their frustrations. This is aligned with findings from other studies conducted on VE influencers.⁴⁴ While religious and traditional leaders can play an important role as community leaders, they were not identified as people who individuals turn to for advice across all target areas. While the specific role of tribal leaders requires further research, religious actors play a somewhat contentious role in Sudan. Influential Salafi voices were mobilized under President Bashir's deradicalization program to provide re-education to and engage in moderate discussions with radicalized individuals. However, respondents noted that Salafi leaders and other religious actors are now linked to President Bashir's government which may decrease their credibility among some Sudanese. Thus, interview respondents noted that *while religious actors can play a positive role in preventing VE, there is a need to ensure that they are credible* among at-risk individuals. For many respondents, Sufi leaders are largely seen as more credible, and rooted in Sudanese traditions. Sufi leaders are also perceived to have consistently acted as voices of tolerance and inclusivity in the country. Further, interviewees noted that the historical roots of Sufi beliefs in Sudan provide Sufi leaders with *access to at-risk communities, both urban and rural, and deep historical and cultural ties to communities that can be leveraged as a moderating force*.

WHERE ARE FRUSTRATIONS DISCUSSED?

After understanding the key dynamics of participation for individuals, this research also sought to understand the ways that individuals received information they trusted in order to identify possible entry points to reach at-risk individuals. Respondents were first asked to identify the ten places they visited most often, and then they were asked to identify, of those places, where they discussed their frustrations.

Figure 6. Frequently Visited Places Network (all target locations)



42 Abdo, 2015.

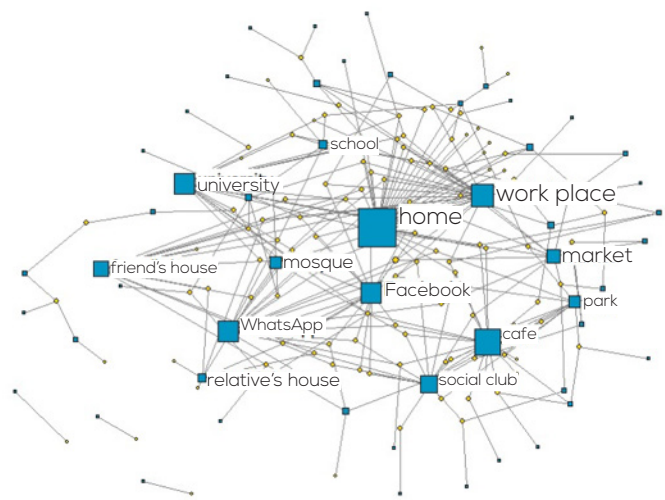
43 Ibid.

44 Russell, 2017.

As seen in the frequently visited places network, figure 6, the most common place that respondents go is the markets.⁴⁵ This is followed closely by home, workplace, university, online platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook) and friends' houses. However, as can be seen in the following network, the places that individuals frequent the most are not the same places they discuss their frustrations. Markets represent a place that is frequently visited among respondents, and a place where they spend much of their time. When questioned further, respondents noted that markets are spaces where individuals wait for transportation to and from work or school, often waiting for hours at a time due to significant delays with public transportation in Sudan. However, when asked to identify the places where they most frequently discuss their frustrations, individuals did not include markets.

In fact, markets significantly decreased in importance in this context, as seen in figure 7. The fact that individuals do not discuss their frustrations in these places might be due to a number of factors including the securitized environment in Sudan, which allowed intelligence services to arbitrarily arrest those perceived as critical of the government.⁴⁶ As a result, many Sudanese are wary of sharing their opinions with strangers or in public due to the fear of Sudan's NISS.⁴⁷ Despite this, the role of markets in spreading extremist messaging is an interesting aspect of their importance in the lives of Sudanese that may require further research. Markets are spaces, noted in interviews, where *public speeches promoting religious extremism and violence still occur* alongside other types of *extremist messaging* that promotes the exclusion of various political or social groups. Thus, markets can act as a potential entry point for extremist messaging.

Figure 7. Spaces where respondents frequently discuss



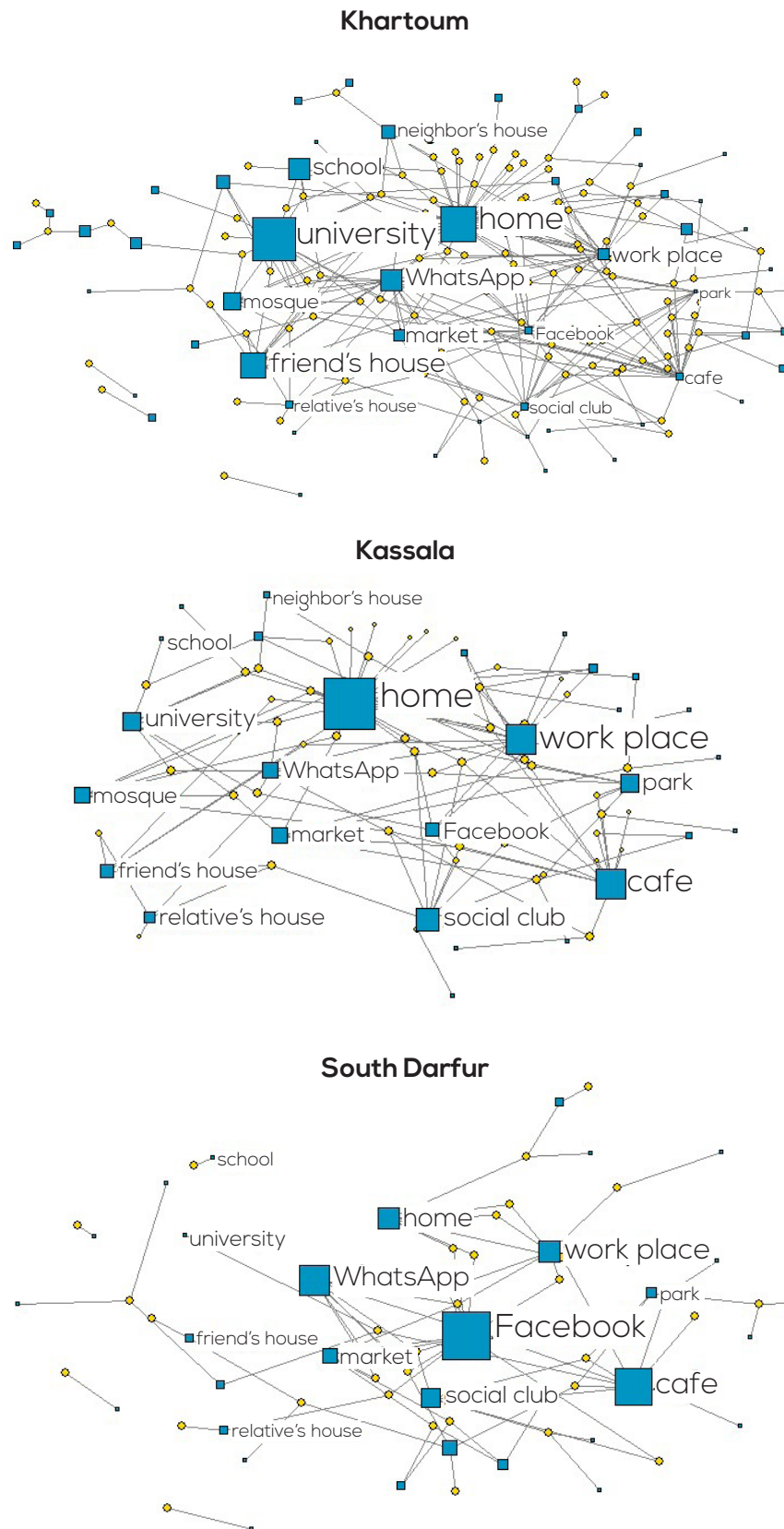
This analysis also revealed that frustrations were most frequently discussed in individuals' homes followed by workplaces, cafes, universities, and online forums (WhatsApp, Facebook). When this was paired with attribute data (age and gender), results showed that while there was no difference in age, there was a slight difference in responses between women and men. Women slightly favored discussing their frustrations in workplaces, while men tended to discuss their frustrations at home. Similarly, these findings were disaggregated by location to determine further differences and highlighted that while home remained an important space for individuals to discuss their frustrations, it decreased in importance relative to university (in Khartoum) and online forums such as Facebook and WhatsApp (in South Darfur). This suggests that *programmatic responses to address VE in local communities should take a multi-pronged approach that is rooted in the spaces where at-risk individuals feel the most comfortable in discussing their frustrations in each community.*

⁴⁵ Markets, in this instance, refers to places where people often sit and wait for transportation, frequently drinking tea and coffee and buying goods.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International, "Agents of Fear the National Security Service in Sudan," Amnesty International, 2010. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/36000/afr540102010en.pdf>

⁴⁷ This impacted our study in Kassala where local communities were uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics with outsiders, especially with people who had come from Khartoum. The reform of the NISS was a central demand of the protesters due to their widespread connection to human rights abuses and arbitrary arrests/torture.

Figure 8. Spaces where individuals discuss frustrations disaggregated by location



Despite the importance of home, university, and online forums for individuals to discuss their frustrations, the research found that there is no specific place where violence was suggested as a solution, rather it could happen wherever individuals seek advice during these conversations.

FINDINGS

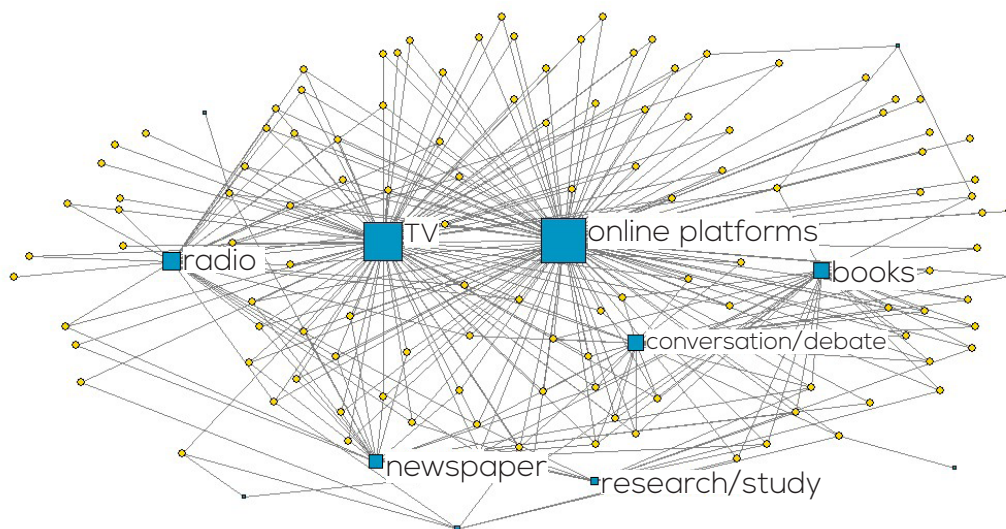
- ◆ The spaces where individuals discussed their frustrations varied based on their location, however, the top three included **home, university, and online platforms**. This indicates the need for a multi-pronged response that can integrate these various avenues where individuals feel most comfortable.
- ◆ While individuals do not discuss their frustrations in markets, they are **frequently exposed to extremist messaging in markets**.

WHAT ARE THE INFORMATION PATHWAYS?

In addition to discussing where participants talked about their frustrations, focus group respondents were also asked to identify the *communication channels* and *pathways* that they most frequently used. The network visualization below shows the most common responses as TV, Internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, and radio.

The most popular information sources among respondents were online platforms (including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and other social media) followed by TV, radio, and in-person conversation/debate with family and friends. The importance of online platforms for information sharing and communication was clearly demonstrated by the 2019 peaceful revolution. Mobilizers of the revolution overwhelmingly used Facebook and WhatsApp to share information on security forces, and document events. The relevance of in-person conversations and discussions may stem from Sudan's long history of oral traditions,⁴⁸ but also confirms the importance of family networks and peer groups for sharing frustrations, information, and solutions.

Figure 9. Communication Channels Network (all locations)



48 Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, "Sudanese Historiography and Oral Tradition," *History in Africa*. Vol. 12, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171716>

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- While respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they receive information from **online platforms** (Facebook and WhatsApp) as well as **traditional media outlets** (Television and Radio), another important avenue for information sharing is **in-person conversations and debates**.

Opportunities at the State and Local Levels

Interviews with civil society leaders and the CSO relational survey helped to identify the existing structures, barriers, and actors working on P/CVE. The relational survey explored the connections and relationships between existing CSOs in Sudan, although it should be noted that this research faced challenges due to the political shift in Sudan. The overthrow of President Bashir in April 2019 meant that CSOs loyal to the former government were disbanded, while other CSOs sidelined under Bashir's leadership were able to expand their work and relationships within communities.

WHAT ARE THE EXISTING KEY INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS?

As was discussed previously in this report, interview respondents identified both religious and traditional leaders as having a part to play in P/CVE. In particular, Sufi and Salafi leaders who can promote positive and moderate messages of Islam as well as tribal leaders who hold significant sway in rural areas. While respondents did not include civil society organizations as influential factors, they do hold a key place in identifying and addressing the drivers to VE, as well as coordinating efforts at the community and national level.⁴⁹

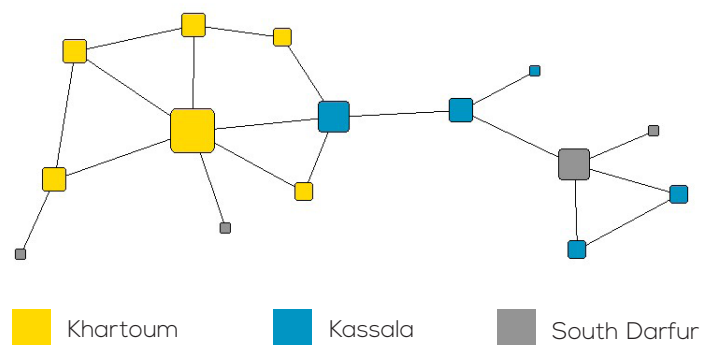
While interviewees agreed that civil society organizations can play a vital role in P/CVE in Sudan, there does not currently seem to be much coordination and collaboration among them. One exception to that is the creation, in October 2018, of the Sudan Working Group on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (SWG-PCVE). This is a group of seven CSOs, headed by the Sudan Development Initiative, to coordinate efforts to address VE share best practices. While this is a promising step, the CSO relational survey showed that collaboration among CSOs is a key challenge.

HOW DO CSOS COLLABORATE AND SHARE INFORMATION?

The CSO relational survey showed that within the collaboration network only 10% of collaborative relationships that could exist do exist.⁵⁰ In other words, *there is significant potential to build collaborative relationships between CSOs working on VE in Sudan.*

The visualization of this network demonstrates that there is less collaboration between CSOs in South Darfur and Kassala than South Darfur has among its

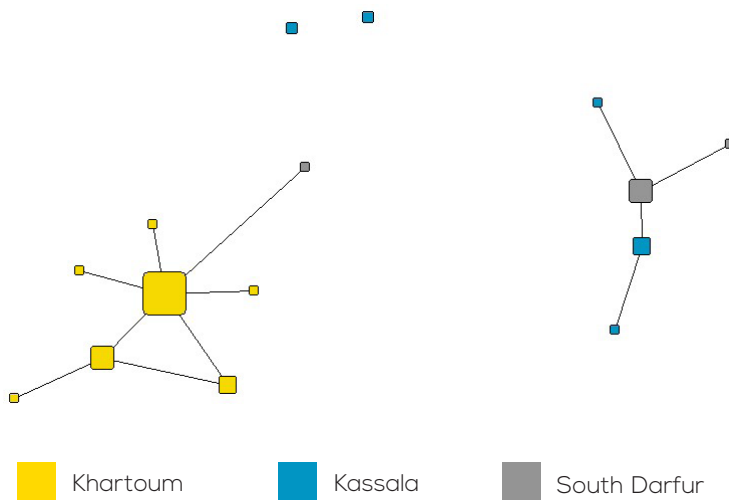
Figure 10. Collaboration Network of CSOs (all target locations)



49 Brookings Institute, "Where is Civil Society in the U.N.'s counterterrorism efforts?" Brookings Institute, May 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/15/where-is-civil-society-in-the-u-n-s-counterterrorism-efforts/>

50 The question asked in the relational survey on collaboration: "Please take a moment to consider the collaborative partnerships your organization values in its work. Think about the organizations who you have partnered with in key pieces of work. Think about the organizations with which you have shared funding or applied for funding together."

Figure 11. Information Sharing among CSOs (all target locations)



own organizations, and the same is true of Kassala. However, Khartoum CSOs seem to collaborate significantly more than CSOs in South Darfur or Kassala. *There is a strong potential for increasing collaboration and communication between CSOs in the P/CVE space in all three locations.* Similarly, information sharing among organizations was considerably low and only 7% of information-sharing relationships that could exist, do exist.⁵¹ Information-sharing relationships are highly centralized, as shown in figure 11, indicating that *there is significant potential to increase the density of these information sharing ties between actors in the P/CVE space.* These relationships can be strengthened by encouraging a culture of collaboration and dialogue, and supporting decreased operational restrictions for CSOs.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Despite this potential, there are considerable barriers to civil society efforts to address VE, including a lack of capacity among CSOs, fear of engaging on sensitive issues, and a widely held belief that VE is a ‘foreign’ problem that does not resonate with Sudanese. Under former President Bashir, operational space for civil society was severely restricted and CSOs, in some instances, acted as proxies for government interests.⁵² Following the overthrow of President Bashir, the research team had to adapt the relational survey as many organizations that were previously contacted had been disbanded since they were affiliated with the former government and ruling party.

In addition to operational challenges and the politicization of civil society, the SWG-P/CVE conducted a study that identified one of the key barriers to addressing VE in Sudan as the sensitive nature of the subject, which made CSOs hesitant to work on P/CVE efforts. Similarly, interviews with civil society leaders also identified that the structural support systems, which had allowed VE groups to proliferate Sudanese society under the former government, still exist. While President Bashir’s government has been overthrown, the systems and groups which upheld it still exist and may seek to spoil the transition or any efforts perceived to take away their influence. However, overall, interviewees agreed *that the low capacity of local CSOs is the most formidable challenge facing civil society efforts to address VE in Sudan.* Interviews with civil society leaders indicated that local “traditional” organizations are often well-placed in communities and have large constituencies, but lack the staff, funding, and organizational management to operate on more than an ad-hoc basis. This was contrasted with more “modern” CSOs that have the operational and staff capacity to conduct activities, but do not have established

⁵¹ The question asked in the relational survey on information sharing: “Please take a moment to consider the organizations with which you have valuable information-sharing relationships. From which of the following organizations does your organization regularly receive or send important information on violence prevention work in Sudan?”

⁵² Munzoul A.M Assal, “Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Sudan: A Critical Look” Chr. Michelsen Institute (Sudan Working Paper SWP 2016:2), 2016. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/5807-civil-society-and-peace-building-in-sudan>

networks and constituencies in target communities. In addition, due to the politicization of civil society under President Bashir, interview respondents expressed that CSOs are often not trusted in communities. There is a need to bridge this gap between “traditional” and “modern” civil society groups and strengthen their capacity to support communities.

While there are opportunities for CSOs to collaborate, there are also internal challenges that need to be addressed. As the political environment in Sudan has changed, there is an opportunity now to address topics that were previously seen as sensitive and support efforts to increase capacity among Sudanese CSOs that have established networks in at-risk and hard-to-access areas. However, it will be important for capacity building to identify and address extremist messaging and recruitment to target more than just civil society actors as there is currently a broadly held perspective in Sudan that VE is an imported ideology from abroad, and is not a concern for Sudanese. To support this, many respondents cited Sudanese traditions of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity, it will be important to leverage these traditions in addressing extremist messaging and radicalization efforts in local communities.

WHAT ARE THE EXISTING SUDANESE P/CVE POLICIES AND INITIATIVES?

Previous government programs to address VE focused on the deradicalization of individuals rather than preventing and addressing the push and pull factors in Sudan that drive recruitment.⁵³ Under former President Bashir, the Sudanese government utilized a method called *iwār fikry*, or intellectual dialogue, to engage radicalized individuals in discussion on the tenets of Islam and correct their misinterpretations as a method to dissuade them from engaging in VE.⁵⁴ This deradicalization program has claimed a 90% success rate among radicalized individuals.⁵⁵ However, the Sudanese deradicalization program was heavily criticized for a lack of input and oversight by civil society, as well as its approach of countering the ideology of individuals rather than addressing the driving factors for their radicalization.⁵⁶ Lastly, many remain skeptical that the Bashir government was sincere in deradicalizing individuals given its history of support for VE organizations.⁵⁷

Under the Transitional Government, there has been increased engagement of civil society in P/CVE efforts in the country. Sudan had previously signed on to international agreements like UNSCR 1373 and the Partnership for Regional East African Counter Terrorism (PRACT), and has worked with US Counter-terrorism operations. Currently, Sudan is moving towards developing a unified National Action Plan on P/CVE and has sought the inclusion of civil society early on in this process.⁵⁸

FINDINGS

- ◆ There is significant potential to build collaborative relationships as well as to increase communication and information-sharing relationships among CSOs addressing VE across all three locations.
- ◆ There are considerable barriers to civil society efforts to address VE, including a lack of capacity among CSOs, fear of engaging on sensitive issues, and a widely held belief that VE is a ‘foreign’ problem that does not resonate with Sudanese.

53 US Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2018,” October 2019. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2018-FINAL.pdf>

54 Abdalla, 2019.

55 Zalan, Kira. “For Sudan, breaking ties with its radical past is a ‘delicate balancing act,’” PRI, January 2017. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-01-18/sudan-breaking-ties-its-radical-past-delicate-balancing-act>

56 Abdalla, 2019.

57 Ibid.

58 Search for Common Ground has been requested to take part in the development of the National Action Plan on P/CVE.

Challenges and Opportunities

From the extensive literature on preventing and transforming VE around the world, it is evident that media plays an important role in highlighting and discussing the issues important to at-risk individuals, and in providing the spaces for diverse perspectives of concerns and issues to be shared. However, media capacity in Sudan is relatively low.⁵⁹ Similarly, this research explored the existing challenges and opportunities for civil society to strengthen efforts to address VE, but it will be imperative to connect these local-level actors to donors, and to address the existing barriers to their work.

WHAT IS THE ROLE AND CAPACITY OF THE MEDIA?

Under former President Bashir all forms of media including print, radio, and television operated in an extremely restrictive environment, and primarily acted as a mouthpiece for the government.⁶⁰ Social media, which has grown in usage, was similarly restricted and censored by Bashir's government. However, the use of social media to share information, connect people, and mobilize was best demonstrated during the recent peaceful revolution.

Under this restrictive media environment, interviewees noted that there was not much reporting or coverage of VE within the country. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, especially under former President Bashir, many media houses (including both state and local as well as radio and television) did not engage with the topic of VE. Similarly, there is limited print journalism on the subject within Sudan, and articles and accounts of recruitment have been primarily printed in international media outlets. This could be explained by the restrictive environment and sensitive nature of the subject, as well as the fact that the former government and ruling party did not see VE as a serious problem, and in some cases actively condoned it.⁶¹ After the fall of Bashir, interview respondents were concerned that the transitional government was busy taking on the many issues and challenges facing the transition and had not dedicated sufficient time to addressing VE.

Despite the low capacity in Sudan, the media has an important role to play in amplifying positive narratives and promoting credible voices to encourage peaceful dialogue.⁶² Media outlets will need to be supported so that they can publish and broadcast positive and peaceful narratives that promote inclusive and diverse dialogue.

WHO ARE THE DONORS?

Under the new Transitional Government, Sudan has opened up to more donors and international organizations eager to support the transition and the various peacebuilding and development work in the country. As donors and organizations increase their presence in Sudan, it will be imperative to cultivate an environment of collaboration and cooperation to avoid duplication of efforts. Collaboration and information sharing must increase not just between local CSOs, but also with and among international organizations and donors.

59 Freedom House, "Media Freedom a Downward Spiral," Freedom and Media Report, 2019. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>

60 Emman, Eltagani, "Sudan Overview," Media Landscapes, Accessed March 2020. <https://medialandscapes.org/country/sudan>

61 Abdalla, 2019.

62 Search for Common Ground. "Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilders Guide" Search for Common Ground, August, 2017. <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Transforming-Violent-Extremism-V2-August-2017.pdf>

Top donors who typically provide funding for P/CVE work include the EU (and individual member states), the US Government, and the United Nations.⁶³ While there is not currently a large donor base providing funding for P/CVE efforts in Sudan, there is a renewed interest in stabilizing Sudan following the peaceful revolution and increased funding for efforts to transform VE. In addition to the US the Global Engagement Center at the Department of State (DOS), which funded this report, other bureaus within the DOS that have funded P/CVE initiatives include the Bureau of Counter Terrorism, and on a smaller scale, the Bureau of African Affairs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Secretary's Office of Global Women's issues, and local US Embassies. Other donors currently funding initiatives to address VE in Sudan include National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). NED is funding work on strengthening the resilience of women to identify and address drivers to VE in their communities, supporting increased leadership, and conflict transformation skills. An initial study on the drivers of VE in Sudan was conducted by UNDP, which is also supporting Sudan's efforts at defining and developing a National Action Plan on P/CVE.

Funding from the private sector or foundations for P/CVE work, however, is limited. In Sudan, many organizations and donors are looking to re-establish a presence as civic space has opened in the post-revolution period.

WHAT ARE THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES AND RISKS FOR VE ENGAGEMENT IN SUDAN?

While civil society is eager to engage in P/CVE, there are a number of risks and challenges that they face in addition to a lack of capacity. Chief among these is the uncertain path forward for Sudan. As the Transitional Government continues to make progress and address the key demands of the revolution, actors that had power and influence under the former government are still active and could potentially act as spoilers to both the transition and peaceful conflict transformation.

As has been detailed above, the former ruling party had traditionally been tolerant of extremist messaging and groups. Having been ousted from positions of power, allies of the former government and ruling party could become more extreme in their messaging in an attempt to regain some of their standing in the country. Sudan's history of Islamist rule may pose a challenge to moderate messages of inclusion and tolerance. Thus, any P/CVE effort should have a strong understanding of the local context and key stakeholders that need to be brought on board in each community to facilitate this and mitigate the risks of any potential spoilers. Increased CSO capacity, coordination, and information sharing can help address some of these challenges by increasing awareness of best practices, key drivers, and lessons learned with respect to addressing VE.

63 Isel Van Zyl, "Preventing violent extremism: Lessons from Africa," Institute for Security Studies, Africa Report September, 2019. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ar17.pdf>

Recommendations

The key insights and recommendations for future civil society efforts to address VE in Sudan identified by this research are detailed below:

- 1 Support a Sudanese-led definition of VE and local drivers** - One of the key themes mentioned frequently by interviewees and in discussions was that extremist messaging was a foreign concept which did not resonate with Sudanese people. Our research found that this points to a broader trend in Sudan, where people have varying definitions of extremism and violence that impacts local communities. As a first step, it will be important for there to be a Sudanese-led process to develop a shared definition of VE, and a common understanding of how it manifests in local communities. This process should be sure to engage diverse stakeholders and marginalized groups. Programs should then seek to increase awareness and understanding of this common definition, the push and pull factors that motivate individuals to join VEOs or engage in violent acts, as well as the underlying grievances that extremist recruitment narratives leverage. Vulnerable groups and at-risk individuals should be engaged in discussion about the drivers and definition of VE in Sudan in the places and spaces that they feel most comfortable.
- 2 Increase awareness and capacity among peer and family networks** - As individuals frequently seek advice and support from the people closest to them, i.e. friends and immediate family members, these individuals should be supported in increasing their awareness and knowledge of dynamics of VE recruitment. While family and friends offer a range of solutions, many of them do not provide actionable recommendations and a quarter of the time they propose violent solutions. Thus, projects addressing VE should consider building awareness and skills among peer and family networks related to identifying indicators of recruitment and radicalization, and developing conflict transformation skills among these influencers to provide alternative solutions and pathways for at-risk individuals to address and resolve their frustrations.
- 3 Ensure the inclusion of women as key influencers to enhance resilience to VE** - While respondents indicated that they discussed frustrations with family members, 46% of these responses indicated that their confidant was a female family member (sister, wife, mother). Thus, preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) initiatives should specifically ensure the inclusion of women in building awareness and capacity to address radicalization. All programming should also provide options to ensure women feel comfortable, i.e. women-only sessions where women can encourage one another and share information and knowledge.
- 4 Integrate digital and online media to target at-risk individuals** - Internet use and social media are growing in Sudan. This was on display during the peaceful protests that overthrew President Bashir as organizers mobilized over Facebook and WhatsApp groups and shared information on security forces and intelligence operations. The importance of these modes of communication was confirmed by this research's findings that online platforms were the most common way respondents received information, followed by television and radio. Initiatives designed to address VE should integrate these emerging platforms, as well as established media outlets to engage with at-risk individuals, prompt conversations about their key concerns, and encourage a diverse discussion on solutions to address these concerns. However, any media program which seeks to address VE should be followed up with in-person discussion and debate, as this was another avenue through which individuals indicated they receive information.

- ♦ In addition, future research should be conducted to develop a broader understanding of media practices and engagement in Sudan, including where and how individuals engage with these information channels, which in turn would support P/CVE efforts in the country.

5 Strengthen and establish collaborative relationships among civil society - Barriers to effective engagement on P/CVE among civil society in Sudan included low capacity and collaboration, which was confirmed by the CSO relational survey. While collaboration and information sharing among CSOs existed, it was low —only 10% of possible collaborative relationships exist. As the country rebuilds post-Bashir, there is an opportunity to build on this existing foundation of collaboration to strengthen civil society. Collaborative relationships among CSOs will support complementarity among initiatives, continue to build an evidence base on P/CVE in Sudan and ultimately contribute to increased resilience to VE. In addition, since the sensitive nature of VE and previously restrictive operating environment for CSOs limited civil society’s engagement, the newly opened environment provides a window of opportunity that should be seized on to build capacity among CSOs to address community needs and P/CVE efforts.

6 Target markets for positive narratives of inclusivity, tolerance, and diversity - Markets are frequented by at-risk individuals daily, they also represent a platform and entry point for extremist messaging of all kinds (not just violent extremism but also extremist political messaging). Therefore, markets may also provide an entry point to promote positive narratives of inclusivity, tolerance, and diversity. While respondents indicated that they do not discuss their frustrations in markets, there is an opportunity to capitalize on the amount of time that Sudanese tend to spend waiting for transportation to broadcast targeted messaging.

7 Support further research to continue to monitor the impact of the transition on existing or emerging drivers of recruitment - This research spanned the overthrow of President Bashir and the beginning of the transitional period —a time that was noted for hopefulness and optimism among Sudanese. It will be important to continue to monitor how the changing context might impact levels of recruitment in Sudan, and to identify new drivers that may result from the transition and could exacerbate or mitigate VE recruitment. As the landscape continues to shift during the transition, it will also be valuable to identify the impact that various influencers and leaders have on recruitment and radicalization in Sudan.

- ♦ In particular, this research noted that the role of traditional leaders and religious actors will be an important area for additional research, since they were noted as having possible influence in rural areas. The role of these actors and traditional tribal affiliations in supporting community resilience should be better understood as they could provide possible entry points to engage with at-risk individuals. Similarly, religious actors were identified as possible influencers who have the connections and networks to promote positive Islamic messages of tolerance, diversity, and inclusion. However, due to the connection some religious actors had with the former government, it will be important to understand which leaders have credibility with at-risk individuals.
- ♦ Currently the body of evidence on VE in Sudan is limited, to further inform future programming on VE additional research regarding rural recruitment dynamics should be conducted. Overall, efforts to address VE in rural communities will need a strong understanding of the historical and present-day dynamics, as well as the relationships between tribes.

Conclusion

While research on the topic of VE in Sudan is in its nascent stage, this report seeks to provide insight into some of the fundamental dynamics of recruitment, channels of communication, challenges and opportunities to better inform programmatic responses among civil society.

This research has highlighted that the most important individuals for those at-risk are usually close peer and family networks, particularly friends and female family members. Their importance is confirmed by the key places that at-risk individuals discuss their frustrations, which overwhelmingly included their homes. However, Khartoum and South Darfur varied slightly in this regard, placing more importance on the university and online forums respectively. Beyond their key influencers, respondents had differing perspectives regarding the importance of religious and traditional tribal leaders. The exact impact and role of religious actors and traditional leaders is likely determined by their credibility among at-risk populations, which may require further research. While there is potential to involve religious and traditional leaders as credible voices on religion, moderation, and peace, there is a pressing need to increase awareness and capacity among peer and family networks, whom at-risk individuals frequently turn to for advice and support. While peaceful solutions were proposed to resolve frustrations, these were accompanied by actionable and concrete advice in a small minority of cases, and focused mainly on being patient and respecting others. In addition, both friends and female family members were just as likely to suggest violent solutions to the frustrations expressed by at-risk individuals. Lastly, since civil society has an important role to play in supporting community-led VE efforts, the capacity and collaboration of local CSOs will also need to be increased so that they can identify and address the underlying drivers and frustrations that lead to radicalization and recruitment within communities.

Annex

Annex 1: Key Questions

This study was guided by the following key questions which were informed by the objectives, gaps in knowledge, and existing research:

Understand the dynamics of participation in VEOs in urban and rural areas of Khartoum, Kassala and South Darfur

- ◆ Which demographics are most susceptible to join violent extremist groups?
- ◆ What role do peer groups play in recruitment for VEOs?;
- ◆ Are there differences between rural and urban areas when it comes to violent extremism?
- ◆ Why do some of those who join VEOs (abroad) return home?
- ◆ What role do religious and traditional leaders play in preventing/transforming VE?
- ◆ What are the communication channels used by those at risk of joining VEOs?

Identify opportunities for preventing VE in at risk-areas in Sudan and at state and local levels

- ◆ What are the informal/ traditional structures / institutions that can be engaged in P/CVE and how?
- ◆ What are the barriers / enablers to P/CVE in Sudan?
- ◆ How do the current policies of Sudan provide opportunities for CSO engagement in the VE space?
- ◆ What are the ongoing activities / past activities in the P/CVE space?
- ◆ What do the results of the focus groups (SNA tool) tell us about opportunities for programming and types of programming for P/CVE?

Explore the challenges and opportunities for CSOs/Institutions engagement in P/CVE and TVE

- ◆ Who are the key CSOs/ actors / institutions in the target geographies, and what are their capacities?
- ◆ How do these actors interact/ collaborate / share information on issues of violence prevention?
- ◆ Who are the media actors operating in these areas, and what are their capacities?
- ◆ Who are the donors currently (or potentially) funding P/CVE work in these areas?
- ◆ What are the current operational challenges and risks for CSOs and institutions working on P/CVE in these areas?

Annex 2: Literature Review

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preventing Violent Extremism in Sudan: A Social Network Assessment to Foster Efficient Civil Society Responses and Engagement

A Project Supported by the Global Engagement Center GEC

DECEMBER, 2018

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Introduction

The following literature review was written as part of a 12-month project with the US Department of State - Global Engagement Center (GEC) to conduct research on violent extremism in Sudan. The overall goal of this project is to **identify opportunities for preventing violent extremism in both urban and rural at risk-areas in Sudan**. To achieve this goal, this research project seeks to understand the context of VE in Sudan, and in particular, to provide a background to inform further research on this evolving issue. To this end, the following review provides an overview of the current research on VE in Sudan, discusses the gaps in this research, highlights potential areas of duplication, and the current state-level response in Sudan. This review only includes sources that could be accessed in English, and will be supplemented by a review conducted by the University of Khartoum in early 2019 that will draw on Arabic sources.

This review is broken up into the following chapters:

The first chapter explores occurrences of VE broadly, examining both historical and regional contexts in East Africa. This chapter will develop a common understanding of VE, provide a definition of common terms, and will discuss the regional VE trends to establish a context from which to understand VE in Sudan.

The second chapter will discuss the modern context, including the push and pull factors that enable VE in Sudan today. This chapter will provide a background of Sudan, exploring the history of political Islamism in the country, the VE organizations operating in Sudan, the drivers of VE, the state of evidence on VE in Sudan, and highlight gaps in the current research.

Lastly, the third chapter of this literature review will discuss the current interventions and response to VE by the Government of Sudan.

Chapter 1: Overview of Violent Extremism

Although the phenomenon of violent extremism is not new, its current global impact and reach is unprecedented. Prior to exploring this topic in Sudan, it is necessary to provide a brief background on what violent extremism is, the field that has grown to respond to it, and the motivations for people who join violent extremist groups.

1.1 Brief Introduction to Violent Extremism

Violent extremism impacts more than just the families and communities that experience the violence firsthand. It has caused mass displacements of populations and strained already limited resources in countries that see gains in development stalled after attacks.⁶⁴ Despite a decline in deaths from violent extremism (VE) each year for the past three years, the economic costs have still been massive, amounting to \$52 billion globally.⁶⁵ Much of this recent decline can be attributed to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) losing territory and its reduced ability to launch attacks.⁶⁶ Despite an overall trend of decreasing deaths due to VE worldwide, four of the top five countries with the largest increase in deaths from VE were located on the continent of Africa (Somalia, Egypt, Central African Republic, and Mali).⁶⁷ Across sub-Saharan Africa, VE attacks created a large and devastating humanitarian crisis. Violence of this type resulted in over 33,000 deaths between 2011 and 2016, and has gone on to displace and interrupt many more.⁶⁸ In countries like Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Somalia, and Kenya, attacks perpetrated by VE groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabaab have devastated tourism, displaced communities, and negatively impacted development.⁶⁹ Despite global awareness regarding the impact of this issue, there has been no universally agreed-upon definition for the term.⁷⁰

64 UNDP (2015). Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach. Programme document. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Local%20Governance/UNDP_RBA_Preventing_and_Responding_to_Violent_Extremism_2016-19.pdf

65 Institute for Economics & Peace (2018). Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism, Sydney, November 2018. <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 UNDP (2017). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. Regional Bureau for Africa, New York. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

69 UNDP (2017).

70 Harper, Erica. 'Reconceptualizing the drivers of violent extremism: an agenda for child & youth resilience.' Terre des hommes and WANA Institute. https://www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/tdh_wana_pve_en_light.pdf

The term itself originates from the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and President Bush's declaration of a 'War on Terror' in response. From that point, the global community paid increasing attention to the phenomenon. Beginning with a militaristic 'counter-terror' response, the field and its understanding has since shifted to recognize the need for a more holistic approach. Since the term 'violent extremism' comes from internal debates during government and military meetings on the War on Terror, it is still often conflated with terrorism.⁷¹ Responses to VE, referred to here as preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), have been plagued by this conflation, often becoming associated with western-backed militaristic counter-terrorism efforts. Although the field has evolved beyond this initial counter-terrorism approach, confusion remains around the specific drivers, best responses, and even the definition of the term. Due to the absence of a universally accepted definition, the UN has delegated its member states the responsibility to define it for themselves, which a variety of organizations and governments have done.⁷² Overall consensus from these definitions is that the term VE broadly refers to the use of violence to accomplish an agenda which is backed by an extreme ideology.⁷³ Violent extremist groups have been known to exist across a variety of different religions, ethnicities, countries and belief systems.⁷⁴ This report will use the definition from USAID that has gained the most support internationally, which defines VE as "*advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.*"⁷⁵

Another term that has required clarification is radicalization. Since individuals can hold radical beliefs and not engage in violence, it is important to note that radicalization is a process that is influenced by a myriad of factors, and may not always result in the decision to engage in violent extremism.⁷⁶ This has become increasingly accepted in the field, with broad support for the fact that people are driven to join VE groups through a complex set of push and pull factors that are locally rooted in the communities and context in which they grow up. Thus, despite the transnational nature of VE, it is an inherently individualized experience, with recruiters often adapting recruitment tactics to the individuals they are targeting.⁷⁷ This makes it imperative to develop an understanding of the nuanced root causes of VE in each unique context it manifests, such that it informs effective programmatic response.

The international response to this issue has faced a few challenges as governments and international organizations sometimes duplicate efforts, struggle to match global priorities to local concerns, and are still missing supporting evidence to inform programming.⁷⁸ Although evidence on root causes and effective programmatic responses is growing, this evidence is still particularly lacking in sub-Saharan Africa.⁷⁹ An additional limitation is the continued use of hard-security tactics in some countries. On average, the field of P/CVE has taken strides to stress the importance of a 'whole society' approach

71 Nasser-Eddine Minerva et al., 'Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review', Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defense Science and Technology Organisation, Australian Department of Defense, 2011, 8-9. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a543686.pdf>

72 United Nations General Assembly, UN Doc. A/70/674, 'Plan of action to prevent violent extremism, Report of the Secretary General', 24 December 2015. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

73 The EU provides a broad and general definition, see their guiding documents on the here: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596838_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf)

74 A 2018 report by Harper with Terres de Hommes offers a good discussion of the troubles with terms like radicalization and extremism including that they are sometimes not related to the use of violence.

75 USAID (2011). "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency Policy". September 2011. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/VEI_Policy_Final.pdf

76 Glazzard, A. and Zeuthen, M. (2016). Violent extremism. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 34. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham. https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Violent-extremism_RP.pdf

77 UNDP, 2017

78 Rosand, Winterbotham, Jones, and Praxl-Tabuchi. (2018). "A Roadmap to Progress: The State of Global P/CVE Agenda," The Prevention Project and Royal United Services Institute, September 2018. http://www.organizingagainsteve.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCCS_ROADMAP_FNL.pdf

79 UNDP, 2017.

rather than one rooted in a ‘hard security’ military response. These hard approaches, although a necessary component of P/CVE, lead to increased recruitment to VE since they are often associated with perceived and actual government/security sector abuses that feed local grievances.⁸⁰ There is broad agreement in the international community of the importance of a combined, holistic approach that emphasizes local drivers and addresses the issue through inclusive programming that involves government, civil society, and religious institutions.⁸¹ To this end, a number of studies have looked at regional trends on drivers in West, East, and North Africa and the UN Development Program (UNDP) recently conducted an extensive multi-year study titled *Journey to Extremism in Africa*. This UNDP study interviewed individuals who had joined VE groups to determine the root causes, push and pull factors, and the path to VE across sub-Saharan Africa. This study was the most comprehensive look at motivations to join violent extremist organizations in Africa to date.

1.2 Regional Trends of Violent Extremism

Since the 1990s, East Africa has battled the growth of VE. The most prevalent VE organization threatening peace and security in East Africa⁸² is the Somali-based violent extremist group, Al Shabaab. Although based in Somalia, Al Shabaab has been recruiting and radicalizing individuals across the region, while launching deadly attacks in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Al Shabaab also successfully held territory in Somalia, imposing strict policies on the communities there. It has leveraged feelings of economic inequality, political marginalization, and historic grievances to recruit followers beyond Somalia’s borders, such as in Kenya and Tanzania. However, Al Shabaab is not the only VE organization with a presence in the region. Other extremist organizations such as Boko Haram and ISIL also have a presence, albeit smaller, in East Africa.⁸³

Various studies have looked at the drivers of VE in East Africa and a few broad trends can be identified from this collective research. As the field of P/CVE developed a better evidence base, original broad explanations for the radicalization and recruitment of individuals gave way to a nuanced understanding of the root causes of VE.⁸⁴ As the international community has moved to develop a ‘whole society’ approach to addressing VE, various organizations have argued for different terms and theories that will incorporate and better explain the nuanced and diverse range of incentives, enablers, and motivations that influence individuals.⁸⁵ However, this report will continue to use the terms ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors,⁸⁶ and will discuss the networks or opportunities that provide individuals access to VE groups.

In the Horn of Africa, these factors have been explored through various studies, including, UNDP’s study *Journey to Violent Extremism in Africa*, a 2016 Afrobarometer Survey on perceptions of VE, and reports from the Global Center on

80 RUSI (2017). Strive Lessons Learned Horn of Africa - Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism. European Commission. <http://ct-morse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Strive-Lessons-Learned-Report-Final-Version.pdf>

81 RUSI (2017).

82 Within this report, East Africa includes the Horn of Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti) and the Sudans (South Sudan, and Sudan).

83 Cox, et al (2018). Social media in Africa: A double-edged sword for security and development. RAND Research Report. http://www.africa.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/UNDP-RAND-Social-Media-Africa-Research-Report_final_3%20Oct.pdf and also see UNDP 2017.

84 Harper, 2018.

85 Zeuthen and Khalil (2016). Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation. RUSI. https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20160608_cve_and_rr.combined.online4.pdf and Harper, 2018.

86 This report will use the definition of push and pull factors from the USAID report “The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency Policy”. Push Factors are “important in creating the conditions that favor the rise or spread in appeal of violent extremism” and Pull Factors refer to factors that “are associated with the personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer”.

Cooperative Security.⁸⁷ These trends include the following push factors: hard-security government response, economic and political marginalization, high levels of poverty and chronic underdevelopment. The pull factors identified include: socialization agents, identity, and reputation. Recognizing that VE is a phenomenon that is locally rooted, despite having ties to transnational organizations, it is important to note these general trends but to ensure that programs respond to the root causes on the ground.

Since extremism is rooted in local contexts, VE in Sudan manifests differently than it does in other countries and efforts to address VE will benefit from localized knowledge of the issue. Sudan has also historically acted as a ‘net supplier’ country, supplying foreign terrorist fighters to other countries while experiencing minimal effects of VE at home. However, this is changing as extremism takes hold in the country, and is prompting a closer look at the motivations of radicalized individuals in Sudan.⁸⁸

Chapter 2: Violent Extremism in Sudan

Since its formation in the 1940s, Sudan’s Islamic Movement sought to create an Arab-Islamic state aligned with the Middle East. Once in power, they utilized security, intelligence, and violence to maintain control, consolidate their hold on power, and impose an Arab-Islamic identity on all Sudanese regardless of the diversity present in the country.⁸⁹ Building on ethnic divisions, the government of the National Islamic Front (NIF), and later the National Congress Party (NCP), used the concept of Jihad to bring ‘infidels’ and ‘non-believers’ under control and spread this centralized Islamic identity into all parts of Sudan.⁹⁰ In addition, Sudan’s sanctions and presence on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list (SSTL) is currently under review as the government of President Bashir has been committed to assisting in the international effort to counter-terrorism by providing intelligence and support to combat the issue world wide.⁹¹ This has also opened the door for a discussion on the presence of VE in the country, with the government having demonstrated more willingness to engage on this issue in recent years.

2.1 Background in Sudan

The Islamic Movement in Sudan has its roots in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike its Egyptian counterparts, the movement in Sudan took a pragmatic approach to establishing its hold on power.⁹² Their first major achievement came with the imposition of shari’a law across Sudan in 1983. After these laws, known as the September Laws, were established, a series of coups eventually led to the Islamic Movement’s political party (NIF) coming to power in 1989. However, there was no agreement within the NIF about how the Arab-Islamic identity should look. Some in the party argued for an inclusive vision that would put an end to the war in the South and take into consideration Sudan’s diversity, while others pushed for a narrower vision of the Islamic state. As the turmoil within the party continued, Sudan became known as a

87 UNDP, Afrobarometer, and Global Center on Cooperative Security.

88 UNDP. (2018). Violent Extremism in Sudan. Study Report. Partnering Against Violent Extremism (PAVE). [http://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCCT%202017%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.sd.undp.org/content/dam/sudan/docs/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Sudan%20-%20UNDP%20SNCCCT%202017%20(1).pdf)

89 International Crisis Group. (2011). Divisions in Sudan’s Ruling Party and the Threat to the Country’s Future Stability. Crisis Group Africa Report N°174, May 2011. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/divisions-sudan-s-ruling-party-and-threat-country-s-future-stability>

90 Ibid.

91 Bureau of Counter Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (2018). Country Reports on Terrorism 2017. US Department of State. September 2018. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/283100.pdf>

92 Amed, Azza Mustafa. (2014). Islam and Political Parties in Sudan: The National Islamic Front. Les Afriques dan le Monde. May 2014. http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/sites/lam/files/note3_observatoire.pdf

refuge for Islamic leaders and groups beginning with the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress in 1991 during which leaders were encouraged to stay or move their operations to Sudan. This proposal was accepted by a number of key radicals at that time such as Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and Osama Bin Laden.⁹³ Support for terrorist leaders like these, as well as other groups designated as terrorists like Hamas and Hezbollah, resulted in Sudan being included on the United State's (US) SSTL in 1993 and later being sanctioned by the US and the UN.⁹⁴

In the late 1990s, Sudan's continued alienation from the international community and the harsh economic sanctions prompted President Bashir to consider re-engagement with the West. An internal struggle in the NIF led to the architect of Islamism in Sudan, Hassan al-Tourabi, leaving the NIF to start an opposition group, the Popular Congress Party (PCP), in 1999.⁹⁵ As the NIF faced increasing opposition, President Bashir worked to consolidate power for himself and a few trusted leaders who agreed with his pragmatic vision to re-engage the West under the NCP. Those who disagreed with this plan to re-engage formed opposition groups. However, these opposition forces have not been able to mount a strong threat to President Bashir's government, in part due to his control of the security, intelligence, and armed forces.⁹⁶ President Bashir's control has been sustained through pursuing conflicts in Darfur, eastern, and southern Sudan. These conflicts have divided Sudanese along ethnic and religious lines and promoted a Sunni-Arab-Islamic identity for all Sudanese, sidelining and marginalizing minority groups.⁹⁷

Some of these opposition forces have developed into more extremist factions and vocally supported the extremist ideologies of international VE groups.⁹⁸ However, as the International Crisis Group notes in their 2016 report, most of the extremists in Sudan are not a major threat domestically, opting instead to vocally advocate for external violent extremist groups.⁹⁹ Despite this, there have been notable cases of local violence from these smaller groups - mainly targeted at Westerners, minority Muslim sects, or Christians.¹⁰⁰ There have also been cases of extremist clerics in Sudan celebrating international acts of violence by groups such as ISIL, Al Qaeda, and Al Shabaab.¹⁰¹ Some of these clerics have held positions with the government or have been allowed to preach in universities, raising questions about the government's commitment to fighting terrorism. Universities in Sudan have been a hotbed for extremist ideology and recruiters. The International University of Africa has allegedly promoted extremist ideology, and the University of Medical Sciences and Technology, among others in Khartoum, has had groups of students leave with the intention to join ISIL in Syria.¹⁰² Typically, the recruits from these universities are wealthy students with foreign passports, but these are not the only Sudanese that have been recruited to join extremist groups abroad. Sudan is recognized as a supplier of foreign terrorist fighters in

93 International Crisis Group, 2011. According to the International Crisis Group, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman was the mastermind behind the first World Trade Center attack.

94 Bhattacharji, Preeti. State Sponsors: Sudan. Council on Foreign Relations, Backgrounder. April 2008. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-sponsors-sudan>

95 International Crisis Group. (2016). Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°119, March 2016. <https://www.crisis-group.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/sudan-s-islamists-salvation-survival-0>

96 Ibid

97 Ibid and Baldo, Suliman. (2017). "Radical Intolerance: Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups" Enough Project. December 2017 https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/SudanReligiousFreedom_Enough_Dec2017_final.pdf

98 International Crisis Group 2016.

99 Ibid.

100 A 2008 assassination of two USAID employees was claimed by a Sudanese fringe extremist group, Ansar al-Tawhid according to International Crisis Group, 2016. For more information on attacks on local Muslim sects and Christians see Suliman Baldo's 2017 report Radical Intolerance on religious persecution by the state and by local groups in Sudan.

101 Baldo, 2017.

102 Abdo, Genevieve. This Sudanese School's Students are Rapidly Joining ISIS. Brookings Institution. August 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/this-sudanese-schools-students-are-rapidly-joining-isis/>

Libya and Syria, although the exact numbers are not known.¹⁰³ Also raising questions on the government's ability and commitment to fight extremism within its borders is the general consensus of Sudanese recruits that as long as no attacks target Sudan, the government will not prosecute individuals who join VE groups.¹⁰⁴

2.2 Violent Extremist Groups

Sudan's unique context and location makes it a converging ground for a variety of extremist groups. Connecting the Horn of Africa to North Africa and the Middle East, Sudan routinely acts as a transport route for human traffickers and foreign terrorist fighters on their way to the Middle East, Libya, and the Lake Chad region to join VE groups in those areas. The extremist groups that are recruiting or have a presence in Sudan are detailed below.

ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

Overwhelmingly, Sudanese recruits to VE organizations joined ISIL.¹⁰⁵ Sudan's recruitment and extremist network differs from the rest of East Africa. In Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania, the biggest threat to peace and stability and the largest recruiter of radicalized individuals is Al Shabaab. However, Sudan's promotion of an Arab-Islamic national identity and connection to the Middle East has changed the dynamic of recruitment in the country. Although the government has reported deflated numbers of Sudanese who join ISIL, it is estimated that at least 100 individuals joined ISIL in Libya from 2011-2017 and the numbers in Syria are even greater.¹⁰⁶ Although the government does not recognize any ISIL operatives active in the country, they do admit that Sudan is used as a transit point for violent extremist groups and fighters heading to Libya to join the group there.¹⁰⁷

AL SHABAAB

Despite its prominence in East Africa, Al Shabaab does not recruit many Sudanese when compared to ISIL. Al Shabaab is the second largest recruiter in Sudan, but accounts for a much smaller proportion of recruits than ISIL. Overall, according to a recent study on VE in Sudan by the UNDP, only 4% of Sudanese VE recruits that the research team surveyed were recruited by Al Shabaab.¹⁰⁸ Compared to countries like Kenya and Somalia, which see an overwhelming number of recruits to Al Shabaab, Sudan is an outlier.¹⁰⁹ There have been no major attacks in Sudan by Al Shabaab, although this may change as Sudan is increasingly engaging with U.S. counter-terrorism efforts. Al Shabaab has been known to target countries who have supported and committed troops to AMISOM in Somalia. Although it is reported that Al Shabaab has a physical presence in Sudan, their ability to remain there is likely due to the fact that no attacks have targeted Sudan.¹¹⁰ However, this situation should be consistently monitored as Sudan's government steps up support to the global effort to counter VE.

103 Zelin, Aaron. Report: Foreign Fighters in Libya. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/report-foreign-fighters-libya> .

104 European Institute of Peace. (2018). The Islamic State in East Africa. September 2018. http://www.eip.org/sites/default/files/Report_IS%20in%20East%20Africa_October%202018.pdf

105 UNDP, 2018.

106 Zelin,

107 European Institute of Peace, 2018.

108 UNDP, 2018

109 UNDP, 2017.

110 European Institute of Peace, 2018.

BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram's recruitment of Sudanese fighters is only at 1% of overall recruitment, based on the UNDP study.¹¹¹ This is in part due to the group's limited reach compared to Al Shabaab and ISIL. Boko Haram has only recently refined its online recruitment strategies. Pledging allegiance to ISIL made ISIL's training and financial support available to them to do so.¹¹² Typically, Boko Haram recruitment centers around its base of operations, the Lake Chad Basin, and uses in-person tactics like abductions and financial incentives.¹¹³ The recruits that have been drawn to join Boko Haram from Sudan were noted by the UNDP study as being drawn to the group due to clan affiliations as opposed to ideology or financial incentives.

OTHER GROUPS¹¹⁴

Although there are extremist groups operating within Sudan beyond the international groups mentioned above, little could be found about their ideology, operations, targets, or recruitment. Groups like *Ansar al-Sunna*, have alternately been called extremist and reformist by different sources. Similarly, *Ansar al-Tawhid*, a local radical extremist group, is said to be behind the 2008 death of two USAID employees in Khartoum that was, however, contested by other reports.¹¹⁵ *Ansar Dine* (operating in Mali) was reported to have recruited 1% of individuals surveyed by the UNDP study, putting its influence at the same level as Boko Haram in Sudan. However, no other mentions of this group operating in Sudan were found.

2.3 Drivers to Extremism in Sudan

Sudan is categorized as an at-risk country by the UNDP in their 2016 report on Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa. Risk factors like the ongoing ethnic-based conflict in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, the growing internal displacement and South Sudanese refugee burden, rapidly increasing inflation, deteriorating economy and recent widespread protests all contribute to concerns that Sudan is vulnerable to VE. Preventative responses to this issue require a deeper understanding of the root causes and networks that enable Sudanese to join these groups. However, not much research has been done on VE drivers in Sudan, and only a few studies conducted recently have explored the current context in Sudan.

PUSH FACTORS

As mentioned previously, regional push factors experienced in East African countries impact Sudan differently. Push factors, which are key to facilitating conducive conditions for VE to grow and spread in Sudan, consist of economic disparities, social and political inequalities, marginalization of youth, weak rule of law, and social isolation.¹¹⁶ Regional studies have identified that the repressive and hard security approaches to VE by governments increase recruitment in their country. However, according to research in Sudan, it is not Sudan's hard-security policies that have motivated individuals to join VE groups. Rather the anger and frustration of individuals is directed at Western incursions into the Middle East

111 UNDP, 2018

112 Cox et al. 2018.

113 Ibid

114 This information was pulled from a number of different sources, however, confirmation of the existence of these groups in Sudan could not be found. Sources listed names differently and included references to some of these groups as only opposition groups and not violent extremist groups.

115 International Crisis Group, 2016.

116 UNDP, 2018.

or threats to religion and ethnicity. Also identified as a reason for this frustration and anger was the inability of other (home) countries to apply Shari'a law.¹¹⁷

Economic inequalities are often cited as a push factor when discussing violent extremism, often due to Muslims feeling marginalized from economic opportunities. However, in Sudan this is wrapped into the frustration with the worsening economy overall.¹¹⁸ Sanctions and Sudan's presence on the SSTL have limited Sudan's economic development. In 2010, Sudan was the 17th fastest growing economy in the world. However, after South Sudan seceded in 2011 - taking with it a vast majority of the oil reserves, and thus revenue - Sudan's economy suffered.¹¹⁹ Now, Sudan's inflation has increased past 60%, subsidies for bread and other commodities have ended, and prices have skyrocketed resulting in a shortage of necessary goods.¹²⁰ Current protests in the country show the simmering frustration, desperation, and anger that the population harbors towards a government that is widely seen as corrupt.¹²¹

Political marginalization and social inequality have been an issue in Sudan for a long time.¹²² Despite regular national elections, the results from 2010 and 2015 have been widely believed to be rigged in President Bashir's favor.¹²³ Bashir has consistently consolidated power within a core group of supporters, while encouraging divisions along ethnic and religious lines and marginalizing the periphery.¹²⁴ Lastly, social isolation was mainly experienced by respondents in Khartoum, and was linked to the recruitment of individuals to extremist groups in other countries through universities. Typically these students grew up in a different country, held passports for these countries, and were highly educated. However, they often did not speak Arabic, were not well versed in Islam, and did not assimilate well into the culture, which isolated them on university campuses. Recruitment of these individuals shocked Sudanese people within and outside the country.¹²⁵

PULL FACTORS

Despite many Sudanese experiencing the same economic issues or marginalization, not all of them decide to join VE groups. The motivations that pull individuals to extremist groups in Sudan include financial benefits, social incentives (such as a sense of belonging), humanitarian necessity, and religious reward.¹²⁶ In Sudan, the religious ideology of extremist groups caused a large portion of the recruits to join. In this case, the goal of creating a caliphate and a belief in the religious ideals of the group were the second and third most popular pull factors that recruits surfaced in the recent UNDP study.¹²⁷ Financial benefits are often cited as a draw for individuals targeted by extremist groups, and this holds true in Sudan as well.¹²⁸ Another often-cited pull factor is the draw of 'being a part of something bigger' or of 'being a part of the in-group'—this feeling of inclusion plays a role in recruitment in Sudan as well.

117 UNDP, 2018.

118 Ibid.

119 UNDP. About Sudan: Sudan Country Info. <http://www.sd.undp.org/content/sudan/en/home/countryinfo.html>

120 Ibid.

121 Elmileik, Aya. (2018). "What prompted the protests in Sudan?" Aljazeera, December 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/prompted-protests-sudan-181224114651302.html>

122 Baldo, 2017.

123 Smith, David. (2015). "Sudan's Omar al-Bashir extends 26-Presidency with 94.5% of the vote" The Guardian, April 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/27/sudan-bashir-elected-majority-vote>

124 Baldo, 2017.

125 Abdo, 2015.

126 UNDP, 2018.

127 Ibid.

128 UNDP, 2017.

Interestingly, the push and pull factors discussed above align somewhat with the perception among community members in Sudan of why people join VE groups —namely due to unemployment/economic hardship and religious belief.¹²⁹

NETWORKS

One more key aspect of the radicalization process is the ability of individuals to be in touch, through networks or circumstances, with VE groups. Research from Sudan suggests that individuals are put in touch with VE ideas primarily through two methods: a friend or the internet. Although other channels like school, mosque, or TV/Radio were also mentioned, they were substantially less important.¹³⁰

That a friend was an important avenue by which individuals engage with extremist ideas is supported by other research on radicalization in East Africa which highlights the importance of social networks.¹³¹ Often peer groups and networks like friends and family act as complements to online tactics to supplement what individuals are learning and reading online.¹³² This can also be seen in the accounts of groups of students leaving universities together to join ISIL in Syria, as well as student groups on campus that often allegedly act as hubs for extremist ideology.¹³³

2.4 Gaps: Areas for Further Research

In general the phenomenon of VE needs to be better understood in Sudan. Only recently has the space for the discussion of VE opened up in the country. Continued research into the push and pull factors, recruitment tactics, and proliferation of the issue is needed. Of the information that exists on the drivers of VE in Sudan, much more is understood about the motivations of University students from Khartoum who have joined, than the motivations of individuals from rural areas. Differences in rural and urban drivers should be explored through further research. Although initial studies (UNDP and Afrobarometer) have touched on the urban/rural divide, their reach was limited. Expanding VE research in Sudan to target other states that may be experiencing growing frustration, like Kassala and Al-Qadarif, will help develop an inclusive understanding of extremism in Sudan.

In addition, specific gender differences are important to further understand and identify. Although touched on in the UNDP study, the data and findings were only disaggregated in a number of the categories analyzed, leaving gaps in understanding of the impact on and role of women. On the whole, VE requires more research on women's motivations and their role in inhibiting or assisting efforts to address VE and this holds true in Sudan.

Lastly, although there have only been a few studies on VE in Sudan so far, none of them have touched on best practices for programming to address the issue. The RAND study on *Social Media Use in Africa* does provide recommendations on addressing online radicalization but they are broad and not specific to different groups or countries. RAND's recommendations suggest that responses should be backed by a detailed national plan for online engagement, should be created in

129 Lekalake and Buchanan-Clarke. Threat of Violent Extremism from a 'Grassroots' Perspective: Evidence from North Africa. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 100. (June 2016). <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab-r6-dispatchno100-violent-extremism-nth-africa-en.pdf>

130 UNDP 2018.

131 Russell, Olivia. (2017). Meet Me at the Maskani - A Social Network Assessment in Kenya and Tanzania. Search for Common Ground, June 2017. <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SFCG-Meet-Me-at-the-Maskani-Final.pdf> and UNDP, 2017.

132 Cox et al, 2018.

133 International Crisis Group, 2016.

partnership with community concerns, should not react to VE narratives, and that best practices should be shared among other organizations and governments. However, online programming is just one aspect of a multi-faceted approach to develop programs that respond to root causes, and thus more information is required. In addition, broad recommendations like these should be tailored to local-level contexts in order to establish community and government ownership and support. Current government attempts to address VE are limited, with the government's main focus and effort dedicated to its deradicalization program. Future research into VE in Sudan should also seek to provide insight into possible practical approaches and initiatives that could address VE in an innovative way - to expand current understanding of P/CVE.

An additional aspect to consider in future research on VE in Sudan is how a post-Bashir Sudan could remain resilient to the growing threat of VE. Whether or not Bashir remains in power, the recent protests have prompted important questions surrounding the resiliency of Sudan. Therefore, research into opportunities for supporting and cultivating resiliency that identifies key champions for peace in the country will help build a base from which to pursue positive avenues for peace and engagement.

Chapter 3: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

As the impact of VE has spread, the knowledge of best practices in addressing the issue has grown. Responses have moved away from the early reactionary counter-terrorism approaches, and towards 'whole society' tactics that recognize the complexity of the motivations for joining extremist groups. As the understanding of the drivers of VE increases, evidence shows that a holistic approach to preventing VE is essential. Thus, P/CVE programs have adapted to involve development and civil society organizations that are better placed in communities to address local level factors.

Beginning in the early 2000s, Sudan entered into conversations with the U.S. Government to support international counter-terrorism efforts. At that time, Sudan cut ties with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda group and began ousting extremist networks in the country. The Sudanese government also signed a number of counter-terror treaties and agreements, taking significant steps to signal their commitment to combating the spread of extremism. In 2003, Sudan signed agreements with Algeria, Yemen, and Ethiopia to strengthen counterterrorism efforts, and began initiatives to counter terrorist financing, strengthen the country's porous borders, and increase cooperation and information-sharing with other governments on VE-related issues.¹³⁴ This section provides an overview of P/CVE efforts in Sudan. However, since VE has typically been a sensitive topic in Sudan, not much information could be identified that highlighted local civil society initiatives, and therefore this section primarily discusses the state-level response.

SUDAN'S NATIONAL COMMISSION ON COUNTER TERRORISM (NCCT)

Established in 2003 by the Government of Sudan, it wasn't until 2014 that the NCCT was legally given the ability to work with international bodies. The NCCT partnered with UNDP in Sudan to conduct an extensive survey of former extremists, providing the first evidence-based study on violent extremism drivers in the country.¹³⁵

134 Bhattacharji, 2008.

135 UNDP, 2018.

INTERNATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

Sudan has signed on to international agreements like UNSCR 1373 and the Partnership for Regional East African Counter Terrorism (PREACT).¹³⁶ In addition, Sudan has signed bilateral agreements with neighboring countries like Chad, Niger, and Libya to strengthen borders that have acted as a thoroughfare for human traffickers and made the movement of VE groups much easier.¹³⁷ As was stated previously, Sudan has also been a partner in international counter-terrorism efforts.

DE-RADICALISATION PROGRAM

This program has been promoted by the Sudanese government as an example of its efforts to address VE radicalization at home.¹³⁸ The process consists of engaging detained individuals who have attempted to join or have joined a VE organization. They are engaged in discussions and debates with prominent Islamic clerics to re-orient them away from extremist views. Individuals, after completion of the program, are released with job opportunities, financial support, or a return to university waiting for them. Khartoum claims a 90% success rate for this program.¹³⁹

ARAB MEDIA FORUM ON COMBATING TERRORISM

Khartoum held an international forum in 2016 to address the role of media in counter-terrorism efforts. The conference resulted in a number of resolutions that representative Arab States agreed to implement in order to address to promote a peaceful Islam which respects human life.¹⁴⁰

COMBATING TERRORISM AND MONEY LAUNDERING

In a positive step forward, Sudan was removed from the Financial Action Task Force in 2015 for implementing the legal and regulatory steps necessary to strengthen its framework to implement the 2009 Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Act (AML/CFT) in compliance with IMF regulations.¹⁴¹ Sudan is still working on further steps in this process.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

This literature review looked at the issue of extremism in East Africa with a focus on the unique context of Sudan. Unlike other countries impacted by VE in the Horn of Africa, the ruling party in Sudan has previously encouraged the spread of extremist ideologies and provided a safe haven within the country for extremists to operate. Extremist organizations based outside the country have taken advantage of this environment to radicalize and recruit from the Sudanese population. The main extremist group recruiting in Sudan is ISIL, although Al Shabaab and Boko Haram have also drawn recruits from the country. As the U.S. government works with Sudan to lift the sanction and remove them from the SSTL, thus

136 Bureau of Counter Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, 2017.

137 Sudan Tribune. (2018). Sudan, Libya, Chad and Niger sign border protection agreement. June, 2018. <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article65552>

138 Baldo, Suliman. (2018). "With Friends Like These...Strong Benchmarks for Next Phase of U.S.-Sudan Relations" Enough Project. February 2018. https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FriendsLikeThese_EnoughProject_final-2.pdf

139 Zalan, Kira. (2017). "For Sudan, breaking ties with its radical past is a 'delicate balancing act'". PRL, January 2017. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-01-18/sudan-breaking-ties-its-radical-past-delicate-balancing-act>

140 UNDP Pave and Sudan Tribune (2016). Sudan to host Arab forum on combating terrorism on Thursday. http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?i-frame&page=imprimable&id_article=59925

141 Improving Global AML/CFT Compliance: on-going process – 23 October 2015. <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/countries/a-c/afghanistan/documents/fatf-compliance-october-2015.html#Sudan>

freeing up resources for support and development, it is important to consider the role of historical support for VE and ensure that its influence does not spread.

It is widely accepted that although VE networks cross borders, the drivers for individuals to take the step to join an extremist group are primarily based on localized contexts. Therefore, broad trends that can be identified in the Horn of Africa manifest differently in Sudan.

Sudan's current VE environment is muddled by the country's drive to develop an Islamic state and push a unified Arab Islamic identity. As the ruling party shifted away from the original ideology of the National Islamic Front, the government of President Bashir began to normalize relations with western countries in order to lift sanctions and receive much needed aid. Instead of risking this relationship through direct support to terrorist and extremist groups, the government of President Bashir took an ambivalent stance towards extremist clerics and groups operating in Sudan, only cracking down to show cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism efforts. This allowed a base for extremism to grow in the country.

Based on the limited research into VE in Sudan that has been done, the top pull factors in Sudan include economic disparities, social and political inequalities, and social isolation. Frustration and anger at western governments, mainly the US, for continuing the *war on terror* has also motivated a large number of individuals. Pull factors in Sudan included financial incentives, a sense of belonging, and religious rewards. Many recruits discussed their support for the religious ideology of VE organizations as being a key motivator as well. Although Sudanese recruits have come from all over Sudan, much international attention has been paid to the recruits from elite universities immediately surrounding Khartoum. Less is known about the motivations and volume of recruits from other states in Sudan, and requires deeper research.

The Sudanese government has taken steps domestically and internationally to stop the growing threat of VE. Further research into the topic of VE in Sudan will help inform future efforts to prevent the spread of extremist groups and ideologies.

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