



**Specific Factors of Radicalization and Violent Extremist
Narratives in the Tunisian Context: The Regions of Tunis,
Kef, Siliana, Kasserine, and Gafsa**

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Acronyms

AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AN	Alternative Narrative
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CT	Counter Terrorism
CT-CVE	Counter Terrorism-Counter Violent Extremism
CT Commission	The National Commission on Counter Terrorism and Radicalization
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FTFS	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and Levant
IRI	The International Republican Institute
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
Search	Search for Common Ground
TVE	Transforming Violent Extremism
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VE	Violent Extremism

1. Executive Summary

Search for Common Ground (Search) conducted research between September and November 2017 aiming to validate previous studies conducted by Search and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on push and pull factors in Tunisia through a desk-based review and identify community-specific drivers and narratives of violent extremism through key informant interviews, focus groups, and regional meetings.

Findings

Six recent reports on research into the drivers of radicalization to violent extremism in Tunisia were reviewed in order to identify common drivers. The **common drivers of radicalization to violence among Tunisian youth** identified from the desk research include:

- **Socio-economic grievances**, such as unemployment, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and lack of opportunities for youth's self-realization.
- The **state's failure** to address these socio-economic grievances, and their exacerbation through the violence and repression used by security forces under the justification provided by the counter-terrorism law.
- The youth's resulting sense of **frustration, resentment, deprivation, and deep mistrust** towards state institutions, leading to a lack of identity, of a sense of belonging, and to a rejection of the state and society at large.
- The widespread **acceptance of violent behavior** among marginalized youth as a means of transcending their daily difficulties, revenging the sense of stigmatization they suffer, and addressing grievances.
- Young people's **limited knowledge of religion**, absence of reliable religious leaders, and a vacuum in the management of religion, which has allowed violent extremist groups to spread violent interpretations of religious tenets.
- The **ability of violent extremist groups to fill the vacuum** left behind by the dismantling of state and religious institutions and build strong recruitment narratives addressing youth's grievances, fueling rejection of the Tunisian state and society, and providing a purpose while offering attractive financial and social rewards.

The regional meetings held in Sousse and Hammamet between October and November 2017 allowed participants to discuss push and pull factors in order to foster an open and effective dialogue between the CSOs and the institutional actors involved in tackling violent extremism. Participants at these meetings were drawn from CSOs, youth, and public authorities in the five target regions.

Key points emerged from these discussions included:

- The current context in Tunisia is characterized by an **increasing willingness among youth to adopt extreme solutions** to the complex problems they face. This makes them

increasingly vulnerable to extremist narratives, exacerbated by the insistence of state institutions on repressive measures rather than addressing the underlying issues.

- **Frustration and disillusion** with the hopes of Tunisia's post-revolutionary phase were highlighted as key underlying drivers of radicalization.
- **Violent extremist narratives** are effectively providing a structure and framework for young people's need for identity, social recognition, purpose, and economic solutions to their needs and aspirations.
- The **capacity of CSOs and authorities to provide alternative narratives is limited**. In particular, these actors cannot keep pace with the capacity of violent extremist groups to adapt their narratives and recruiting styles to changing circumstances, and they lack the capacity to fully deconstruct and address the underlying factors that allow violent extremist narratives to gain traction among youth.
- **CSOs recognize the importance of concerted action** to develop initiatives and appropriate content, but also the need for harmonization of tools, methodologies, and leadership.
- **State institutions' responses to violent extremist narratives are hampered** by a lack of communication with civil society, and a general state focus on hard responses to violent extremism, which is generally equated with terrorism. Limited attention is thus given to the development of alternative narratives to counter violent extremism.
- The **importance of linking alternative narratives to concrete measures** to address the underlying vulnerabilities that lead young people to be attracted to violent extremism was highlighted.
- The **use of social media** as a preferred channel for the potential spreading of alternative narratives was supported, also due to the youth's low degree of trust in more traditional forms of media, which are seen as highly politicized and representative of vested interests.
- In developing ideas for alternative narratives during the regional meetings, it was notable that the focus of participants tended to be on **the dramatization of key factors in the radicalization process** rather than on seeking out alternative narratives that might communicate a positive alternative to that process. This highlights the need for careful facilitation and support to CSOs and relevant state institutions in order to assist them in developing genuinely "alternative" narratives that communicate a positive message.

Recommendations

The research distilled the following recommendations for action on alternative narratives:

- In conjunction with working on alternative narratives, develop a "package" of measures to provide concrete support to youth, such as improving access to public services, sports and cultural infrastructure, and programs to provide tangible economic benefits to youth.
- Improve strategic coordination among CSOs, and between CSOs and relevant state institutions.

- Change the *modus operandi* towards violent extremism, recognizing its capacities to target and respond to its audience and to take advantage of the absence of state institutions.
- Develop a national initiative on alternative narratives that would be closely integrated into national strategies on countering terrorism and violent extremism.

2. Introduction

The radicalization, recruitment, and return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) has been a key challenge for Tunisia since its 2011 revolution. A report by The Soufan Group¹ concluded that over 6,000 Tunisians had gone to fight for Da'esh or other extremist groups in Syria by December 2015 and another 1,000-1,500 to neighboring Libya, with 700 of these being women according to the Tunisian authorities. This makes Tunisia the largest source of FTFs in the region, ahead of countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, despite the country having a population of just 10 million. Recent statistics by the Ministry of Interior show that around 900 Tunisian FTFs have returned and are now awaiting trial, posing an additional challenge for the overcrowded Tunisian prison system, which has been a fertile recruitment ground for violent extremist groups.

The drivers of violent extremism are largely responses to local dynamics and concerns. As detailed in Chapter 1 of this report, they include a number of factors, ranging from strong frustration and lack of identity and belonging among marginalized youth due to lack of political and socio-economic rights and opportunities, to the state's inability to address these grievances and provide spaces for youth's participation in decision-making as well as self-realization.

Violent extremist recruiters, through both physical and online networks, have successfully incorporated both push and pull narratives (i.e., messages intended to persuade individuals to disassociate from Tunisian society and messages that highlight the benefits gained from joining these violent groups) in their multi-pronged messaging campaigns to mobilize young Tunisians. On the push side, violent extremist messaging in Tunisia focuses primarily on fuelling antagonism and opposition towards state institutions, moderate religious actors, and Tunisian society at large. On the pull side, groups like Da'esh have sought to present themselves to Tunisians as a more desirable alternative by highlighting their piety and governance capabilities.

The field of preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is still in its infant stage in Tunisia; there are few existing geographically and/or demographically targeted initiatives, and little work has been done to counter violent extremist messaging and develop effective alternative narratives. Tunisian institutional efforts in this regard have been lagging behind, as the government has instead prioritized 'hard' security measures and while some P/CVE programs have been implemented by civil society, most of this work does so under the parameters of civic engagement. Thus, there is a clear and urgent need for innovative, robust P/CVE initiatives that are strongly rooted in local communities and are able to disengage youth from violence by amplifying the voices of credible local narrators.

To address these needs, Search for Common Ground-Tunisia (Search-Tunisia) has launched an initiative in August 2017 aiming to reduce support for violent extremist messaging within the five

¹ The Soufan Group. *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters Into Syria and Iraq*. New York: The Soufan Group, 2015. http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf

Tunisian communities of Tunis (Greater Tunis), Kasserine/Sidi Bouzid, Siliana, Gafsa, and Kef by enhancing their access to and engagement with locally credible voices that counter violent extremist narratives. This will take place through the development of a multimedia campaign which, in addition to online social media engagement and video production, will be based on a series of five graphic novels that will become a tool to empower local credible narrators to provide alternative narratives through community discussions.

This campaign includes an initial research component that aims to validate previous studies conducted by Search and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on push and pull factors in Tunisia and identify community-specific drivers and narratives of violent extremism. The research also aims to provide recommendations for the development of alternative narratives and credible storylines, both for the upcoming phases of this project as well as for other institutional stakeholders. This research spanned over September and October 2017 and utilized a methodology based on a desk-based review and key informant interviews (KIIs), complemented by regional focus groups and dialogues that convened key stakeholders, including youth, local authorities, experts, and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), to further discuss drivers of radicalization to violence, validate the findings, and identify alternative narratives.

This report details the results and findings of this research effort. After an initial presentation of the methodological approach used in this research and its limitations, a context analysis provides the background information to understand the following sections. Chapter 1 contains the results of the desk-based research; it aims to validate drivers of radicalization in the wider Tunisian context taking the form of a literature review of key research studies conducted by Search and other NGOs on push and pull factors in Tunisia. Chapter 2 first provides a general analysis of the capacities of Tunisian public authorities, CSOs, and youth to develop and disseminate alternative narratives and then looks at the specificities of the five communities targeted by this project in terms of both drivers of radicalization and alternative narratives. The report then presents a summary of findings and distills recommendations for both the upcoming phases of the project as well as more generally for local, national, and international actors. The annexes include an explanation of the key definitions and concepts used in the report and the key elements of Search's approach to transforming violent extremism (TVE).

3. Methodology

This research aims to achieve the following **objectives**:

1. Identifying drivers and narratives of violent extremism in the five Tunisian governorates of Tunis (Greater Tunis), Kasserine/Sidi Bouzid, Siliana, Gafsa, and Kef through desk research and key informant interviews (KIIs).
2. Leveraging desk research and interviews with local community stakeholders to supplement findings with community-specific factors.
3. Utilizing localized research to inform the development of graphic novel characters and storylines.
4. Validating the findings through conducting regional dialogues, with each dialogue bringing together key stakeholders from the five target governorates.
5. Providing recommendations for other actors in the field on amplifying credible alternative narratives through graphic novels and/or print media.

It uses qualitative methods and adopts an interpretative paradigm in examining factors of violent extremism and to what extent alternative narratives are incorporated into Tunisian contexts. It is based on a mix of desk review and qualitative data collection through KIIs and regional focus group dialogues. The mixture of theoretical and empirical approaches used in this report is grounded on several considerations. The desk review provides a general overview of radicalization factors and VE narratives in Tunisia, while the qualitative data collection provides an updated snapshot of findings from previous researches.

The different approaches adopted were the following:

1. **Desk research** on recent studies on radicalization and VE in Tunisia: based on recent academic researches and reports developed by international and local organizations (including Search Tunisia) working on violent extremism issues in Tunisia to compare different research methodologies, findings, and recommendations. In total, 6 reports were reviewed.
2. **Key Informant interviews**: 12 KII were conducted with national experts and high level authorities working on P/CVE issues to collect deeper information on violent extremism factors (See Annexe 2 for detailed overview of KIIs conducted).
3. **Regional FGDs and dialogues**: 4 regional FGDs and 5 regional dialogues were conducted with local stakeholders and civil society members. The aim of these meetings was to validate findings from the desk review and collect additional data on Push and Pull factors of Radicalization specific to each community. These meetings also aimed to assess CSOs, youth and local stakeholders understanding and discussion of alternative messaging towards VE narratives in their communities (See Annexe 1 for detailed overview of FGDs and regional dialogues conducted).

Possible **limitations** of this research are:

- First, research reports reviewed during the desk research adopt different methodologies to identify violent extremism factors. Consequently, it's difficult to infer from existing data generalizations across regions and communities about the profile of extremist individuals or groups. Analysis may point out different factors depending on whether they focus on ideology, socio-economic situation, politics, individual characteristics, etc.
- Second, in terms of 'alternative narrative messages', understanding accurately what the term refers to, and the different types of 'counter messaging' has been one of the most challenging tasks for this research. More specifically, there remains a large gap in knowledge and research on the type of these messages and their effectiveness because there has been a limited number of initiatives on this to date in Tunisia.
- Third, the findings presented in the dialogues sessions are derived from a small sample size. The research design mainly focused on civil society perceptions. Project participants provided observations and anecdotes of their personal experiences and opinions. Including more community members and officials perspectives will provide more deeper information.
- The project team encountered the challenge of complex and diverse interpretations of the violent extremism agenda in Tunisia. The discourse surrounding the conceptual understanding and definitions of "extremism" and the related concepts of radicalization and violence is complex, and extremely controversial.

Context Analysis of Tunisia

As of late 2017, Tunisia is perceived to have achieved a degree of **political and economic stability**, although this remains fragile. There has been a slight decrease in social tensions compared to the six first months of the year² and the "war on corruption" declared by the President has had some perceived positive impact. However, Tunisia remains a “**geography of suffering**”³ in which youth are “*feeling daily marginalization and social exclusion, [...] pushing them to adopt spontaneous strategies in order to just continue living.*”⁴

In a general atmosphere of intense **suffering, frustration, and disappointment among young people**, coupled with ongoing and widespread violence and highly polarized politics, many Tunisian youth dream of escaping what they see as “zero chance cities.”⁵

At the same time, Tunisian youth are **increasingly subject to the influence of extremism and radicalization**. The country has seen a growing violent extremist movement since the Revolution in 2011. ISIL, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and other jihadist groups have benefitted from a permissive post-revolutionary political environment, embedding themselves in local communities and capitalizing on the religious vacuum that emerged after Ben Ali’s fall. According to a report from 2015, between 6,000 and 7,000 Tunisians are believed to have travelled to Syria to join violent extremist groups, making Tunisia the single largest exporter of foreign terrorist fighters in the world, despite having a population a fraction of the size of other countries in the MENA region.⁶ Tunisia has been also subject to extremist attacks on its own territory with a series of serious incidents in 2015 and 2016, particularly targeting the vital tourism industry (the Bardo Museum and Sousse attacks), the security forces (Tunis), and border cities (Ben Guardane).

The widespread feeling of frustration and disappointment among young people is strongly linked to their **sense of having been betrayed by a revolution** which was largely driven by the activism of millions of youth, particularly the unemployed youth. While the expectation was that the Revolution would transform people’s daily lives into new conditions of well-being, currently there is a widespread perception among young people that these expectations have been betrayed and that the post-Revolution focus on political transition has failed to address the complex economic,

² During the first half of August 2017, social protest reached a peak with various interests and focuses. The main one were: (1) the so called campaign “Manich m’samah” (“I will not pardon”) that was initiated by activists and engaged youth against the economic and financial reconciliation draft law, submitted for the first time to the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) in July 2015 (the Law was finally adopted by the ARP under great pressure by President Advisors and based on a political arrangement between the two main parties composing the government: Nidaa Tounes and El Nahdha); (2) the campaign “Winou el petrole” (“Where is the oil?”) and the Al-Kamour protest movement that focused on the oil and gas management in Tunisia and the corruption within the energy industry.

³ Ghorbali F., “Sociology of Suffering: The Daily Life of Youth in Sfax’s Low-Income Districts”, *Omrane for Social Sciences and Humanities*, Issue 6, v.4, spring 2016

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Soufan Group. *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters Into Syria and Iraq*. New York: The Soufan Group, 2015. http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf

social, and cultural challenges facing the Tunisian people.⁷ Many young Tunisians report that their living conditions have deteriorated since the revolution, and youth unemployment rates have increased from 27% in 2007 to 35% in 2016⁸.

The failure to follow through on the promises and expectations of the Revolution, coupled with the persistence of cultural, social, and economic grievances, subjects Tunisian youth to a **series of daily stresses**. While they were, even before the Revolution, facing unemployment, social marginalization, and stigmatization, after the Revolution they have been subjected to new types of destabilization driven by a range of factors including:

- A highly **polarized political environment** which a wide range of conflicting sets of interests are represented;
- A **volatile regional context** characterized by widespread violent extremism and ongoing conflict (eg. Libya), which impacts the political and security situation in Tunisia;
- A **deteriorating economic and social situation and rising youth unemployment**;
- The **limited capacity of government and civil society** to address this high level of disaffection;
- **Media** that have often played a negative role in trivializing or amplifying youth's issues and social tensions or providing biased coverage reflecting their own commercial and/or political priorities and stigmatizing youth, especially those from poorer neighbourhoods;
- **Increasing levels of violence** on a day-to-day basis that have become socially tolerated and accepted among certain categories of the population, particularly in vulnerable communities;
- The **presence of violent actors** (particularly violent Salafi groups), especially in marginalized neighbourhoods, who are able to provide a framework for expressing/channeling youth frustrations and tools to translate this into violence against state institutions.

Recent incidents in Tunisia, although not apparently directly linked to violent extremism, serve to illustrate the desperate measures which young Tunisians are prepared to adopt in order to deal with their “*dynamic of suffering, frustration and a deep and bitter feeling of being disappointed and neglected by the system.*”⁹ On October 8, 2017, 45 young people, including children under the age of 15 and pregnant women, drowned while attempting the sea crossing to the Italian island of Lampedusa. Later in the week a further 8 bodies were recovered bringing the total number of victims to 53. According to one of the survivors, the disaster had been caused by a gunboat of the

⁷ Search for Common Ground, *Youth and Contentious Politics: Drivers of Marginalisation and Radicalisation in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia*. by Laila Fathi, Dallin Van Leuven, and Bouraoui Ouni with Megan Smith, Thomas Hendrick Townsley, and Maxine Sarah Rich (Tunisia, Tunis September, 2017).

⁸ Federal Reserve Bank Of St. Louis, *Youth Unemployment Rate of Tunisia, SLUEM1524ZSTUN*, ST. Louis (MO), May 1st 2017

⁹ Ghorbali F., “Sociology of Suffering: The Daily Life of Youth in Sfax’s Low-Income Districts”, *Omrane for Social Sciences and Humanities*, Issue 6, v.4, spring 2016

Tunisian Navy, while official sources¹⁰ from the security forces declared that the incident occurred when the Navy intervened to prevent 12 young people from trying to board a commercial ship leaving the port of Rades for Italy.¹¹ These **young people attempting to emigrate illegally from Tunisia** are referred to as “*harraka*” (“the burners”), a term interpreted both as referring to their willingness to “burn” borders and, according to a sociologist who has studied the phenomenon, to the practice among these youth of burning their ID cards or passports when they reach their final destination.¹²

Spokespersons for the National Guard, the unit in charge of border and coastal control, have emphasized the fact that *Al Harka* (الحرقة) represents “*a choice by families themselves who are encouraging their sons to immigrate illegally by giving them the necessary amount of money that is required by the boat owners.*”¹³ Meanwhile, young people themselves have confirmed that they will continue to attempt to “*escape the country that hates and disappoints them*”¹⁴ and “*burn borders*” in order to reach an alternative (and European) space in which they hope to find “*at least respect of human dignity,*”¹⁵ and escape economic conditions that provide Tunisian youth with no hope.¹⁶

The *Al Harka*¹⁷ phenomenon highlights not only the willingness by young people to immigrate illegally to Europe,¹⁸ but reflects the **willingness of many young people to adopt extreme measures to escape from the current conditions** and from a context where they perceive the system as being unfair towards them and the state as having failed to address their needs. This has been described as representing a “*transcendent thinking mechanism*”¹⁹ through which youth adhere

¹⁰ Ministry of the Interior web Site. October 15.

¹¹ A spokesman for the Armed Forces said on the “What was not said” TV program that the account told by survivors is not true, emphasizing the fact that the military were legally trying to convince the “*harraka*” to return to the port.

¹² Ghorbali F., “Sociology of Suffering: The Daily Life of Youth in Sfax’s Low-Income Districts”, *Omrane for Social Sciences and Humanities*, Issue 6, v.4, spring 2016

¹³ Declaration by K.CH, Spokesman of the National Guard to Radio Express FM on Monday October 16.

¹⁴ Ghorbali F., “Sociology of Suffering: The Daily Life of Youth in Sfax’s Low-Income Districts”, *Omrane for Social Sciences and Humanities*, Issue 6, v.4, spring 2016

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Invited on October 12 to a popular TV program on the “El Hiwar Ettounsi” TV (the program is called “What was not said”), K.G (an unemployed 28 old youth from Sidi Bouzid Governorate) said that he will continue trying as often as necessary to immigrate illegally, confirming that “*this is not only his attitude, but this is the attitude of all youth in this country*”.

¹⁷ Before the Revolution of January 2011, the *Al Harka* phenomenon was basically addressed using security measures to thwart attempts by the “*harraka*” to immigrate illegally or by dismantling networks of groups preparing logistic support to these attempts. Huffpostmaghreb.com reported, in its publication of January 30, 2017, that the Commander of the National Guard declared that the forces in charge of the Coast Guard have carried out 113 successful operations, involving a total of 1,050 people, to prevent illegal immigration. 80% of those involved originated from sub-Saharan Africa and had, for the most part, embarked from the neighboring Libyan coast.

¹⁸ The Tunisian Secretary of State in charge of Immigration said on October 18, that “*more than 4.000 Tunisians who illegally immigrated to Italy are currently in detention centers there*” adding that “*800 reached already Italy during these 10 past days. An official delegation will be paying official visit to Rome in order to regularize their situations*”, Le Maghreb, publication number 1883, October 19, 2017.

¹⁹ A.F a Professor of Theatre in Siliana (and member of the Association “Theatre innovation”), said during the first regional meeting organized on October 11 in Siliana, that “*public institutions, in particular those supposed to*

to a “*dynamic of escaping daily suffering and creating desperately a strategy for just continuing to live.*”²⁰ Thus, it is symptomatic of their rejection of what they see as a whole system of injustice and frustration. This state of mind of Tunisian youth is currently not framed by any social or state actors in order to attenuate its “extreme” forms and impacts. As a result, these desperate youth are not only left to themselves, but pushed into a condition of acute vulnerability to economic exploitation and to acceptance of violent extremist narratives, which are developed by actors who are well-integrated into, and have a direct understanding of, this context.

understand the youth and adapt their modus operandi to youth’s new ways of thinking and perceiving the world, have to pay greater attention to the fact that youth are transcending all procedural or structural approaches and frameworks. They are creating their own world and escaping their difficult daily lives.” He gave the example of the “Comic Con event” that youth from Gaafour (a delegation of Siliana) are organizing to present and show the Japanese traditions and comic.

²⁰ Ghorbali F., “Sociology of Suffering: The Daily Life of Youth in Sfax’s Low-Income Districts”, *Omrane for Social Sciences and Humanities*, Issue 6, v.4, spring 2016

Chapter 1 - Drivers of Radicalization in the Tunisian Context

There has been an abundance of research in recent years into the roots and drivers of violent extremism in Tunisia with a view to identifying concrete measures to counter this phenomenon and develop effective programs that can assist concerned agencies in helping young people to become more resilient to radicalization.

The following review focuses on 6 recent research reports that have addressed these issues:

1. A report by Search for Common Ground, *Root Causes and Drivers of Radicalization to Violent Extremism in Tunisian Communities*, published in June 2016.
2. A Technical Research Report by Search for Common Ground and the British Council, *Youth and Contentious Politics: Drivers of Marginalisation and Radicalisation in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia*, produced in August 2017.
3. A UNDP Analytical Review, *Les facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010*, written by Michaël Ayari in September 2017 (forthcoming).
4. A report by the International Republican Institute (IRI), *Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia*, published in winter 2016.
5. An analysis session organized by Saferworld and the Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center, “*Lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie*,” held in Tunis on March 29, 2017, and the report *Counter-terror in Tunisia: a road paved with good intentions?*, written by Lola Aliaga and Khloé Tricot O'Farrell and²¹ published on September 2017 .
6. A report by International Alert, *Politics on the Margins in Tunisia: Vulnerable Young People in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen*, published in March 2016.

Search for Common Ground - *Root Causes and Drivers of Radicalization to Violent Extremism in Tunisian Communities*

This research was conducted as part of a PVE project that Search for Common Ground implemented in Tunisia between 2015 and 2017. It aimed to identify key push and pull factors to violent extremism in six vulnerable Tunisian communities of Sidi Hassine (Greater Tunis), Sahline, Bizerte, Siliana, Kasserine, and Ben Gardane through 6 orientation sessions, 24 localized community dialogue and diagnosis sessions, and 11 interviews with researchers.

The research identified a **series of common drivers for radicalization** to violent extremism across the six areas covered. These included the following **domestic push factors**:

- The perceived failure of the **education system** to prepare students for the job market or enhance critical thinking skills;

²¹Aliaga L., O'Farrell K.T., *Counter-Terror in Tunisia: a road paved with good intentions ?* (London, 2017) accessed October 10th 2017, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/734-counter-terror-in-tunisia-a-road-paved-with-good-intentions>

- The **relations between citizens and police**: power abuse towards young people, the curtailment of religious freedom under Ben Ali's regime, and human rights violations justified in the name of counter-terrorism (e.g. detention or accusation without evidence);
- Young people's **limited knowledge of religion**, absence of reliable religious leaders, and a vacuum in the management of religion;
- **Socio-economic marginalization**, poor governance, and the **absence of state** institutions in rural areas;
- The **Muslim cause**, the perception of Muslim's humiliation by the West around the world.
- The **weakened role of Tunisian families**: the lack of communication, as well as parents' crisis of authority;
- **Lack of cultural, sport activities and infrastructures**: lack of spaces in which to enhance youth inclusion and personal development;
- **Alienation** from the set of values promoted by the country, community, and peers;
- **Political resistance** both to the current political system and to the authoritarian practices perpetuated by the former administrations and regime.

The report stressed that, while domestic push factors appear to be the most important triggers of violent extremism in Tunisia, there are also some *external push factors* that merit attention, including:

- **Wahhabi propaganda** in the country since the 1980s, especially in rural areas and southern regions;
- Proximity to the **Libyan conflict**;
- The **Syrian conflict** and, in particular, the massacres perpetrated by the Assad regime;
- The **presence of foreign, especially Saudi, imams** in campuses and rural areas of Tunisia.

These findings shed light also on the strength of **pull factors**, such as (1) the **active recruitment efforts of violent extremist groups** across the country and (2) **strong group dynamics and peer pressure**, for example from friends who have gone to or are about to leave for conflict zones. Recruiters are reported to tailor their recruiting to each community, and each individual's desires. For example, recruitment campaigns in Siliana would focus more on providing economic aid to citizens of rural areas to create followers, whereas recruitment efforts in Ben Gardane would play on youth's search for adventure and self-empowerment.

The report also highlighted how it is possible to draw a continuum in the narratives provided by recruiters to violent extremism. At one extreme is the Islamic State, with all that it represents to those who join it: a functioning state able to provide to its citizens; an ideology; a group of brothers/sisters to fight with and for; a set of right and just religious laws; economic stability; and the foundations for the construction of a family. At the other extreme is the Tunisian secular or infidel state, that is portrayed as denying the teachings and laws of Islam and failing to provide its citizens with either clear objectives, a set of values, or the satisfaction of their primary needs.

Search for Common Ground and the British Council - Youth and Contentious Politics: Drivers of Marginalisation and Radicalisation in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia²²

This research was conducted in Tunisia as part of a wider study by Search for Common Ground and the British Council which explored the pathways of violent extremism in a set of identified vulnerable cities in Morocco, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Theoretically grounded in contentious politics theory, this research was based on a two-phase process: the first phase focused on individual deviance and the stages of radicalization in order to understand individual drivers and pathways to violent radicalism; the second tried to understand how structural factors contribute to individual resilience to violent radicalism through case studies.

In Tunisia, the following communities identified as vulnerable to violent extremism and as highly impacted by social movements were covered during the research: Sidi Hassine, Douar Hicher, Tadhamon (Grand Tunis), Bizerte (Jarzouna and Menzel Bourguiba), Medenine and Ben Guerdane. The Tunisian section of the study was developed through 14 focus group discussions and 24 interviews with experts and key stakeholders.

The report highlighted several key considerations regarding the **manifestations of violent extremism and radicalization** in the Tunisian context. These included:

- The **high levels of violence experienced by many youth** in their everyday lives and, most importantly, the perceived **legitimization** of violence as a means of social regulation and self-expression;
- The focus of this **violence against the state** and its institutions;
- The potential for violent extremist groups to harness these existing levels of violence through the **provision of a narrative framework** that focuses and further justifies violence.

The high level of vulnerability and marginalization of the communities and, in particular, of the youth was seen to be encouraging a kind of violence-based radicalization that is fuelling the youth's feelings of frustration, disappointment, and pessimism, and at the same time, continuing to exist thanks to these feelings.

Regarding the **issue of violence**, the following points are highlighted:

- Particularly in very marginalized communities, violence was seen as a tool required in order to establish **social status and ensure protection**.
- Violence has become **socially accepted** and justified across a broad range of categories of people, including socio-professional categories like street vendors and taxi drivers.
- Violence is regarded as an acceptable **mechanism of social regulation**.
- Youth displayed a remarkable **consciousness of the threat of terrorism** and its negative impacts, especially since the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Tunisia.

²² Fathi L., Van Leuven D., and Bouraoui Ouni, *Youth and Contentious Politics: Drivers of Marginalisation and Radicalisation in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia*. (Search for Common Ground/British Council: September 2017).

A very significant proportion of the youth consulted in the research were fully aware of the steps in the process of radicalization and its risks. They said that they are conscious about what these extremist groups are trying to do with them, but they “*don’t have other options... we are very pessimistic... all the doors are closed.*”²³

This fact is crucial to understanding the specificity of the radicalization process in the Tunisian context. Radicalization is a process that frames the youth’s extreme feelings and, as an expert on Salafi Jihadism said, “*at the same time, accentuates these (feelings) in order to transform them into a structured and violent dynamic against the state and against the Tunisian societal model.*”²⁴ The most specific finding at this level was that **youth feel overwhelmed by their daily constraints** and are facing all kinds of difficulties, and generally have to face them alone. Their engagement in decision-making or with civil society is not organized in a systematic or framed way, but mainly spontaneous and accidental. At the same time, youth said they are not equipped with skills and capacities that allow them to manage differences or to find ways to transform conflicts into opportunities for dialogue. Youth were reported to have repeatedly emphasized that they feel that “*there is no one who is listening*” to them or “*trying to understand our specific needs.*” The alienation and distance they feel in relation to the state administration is a tangible reality for them.²⁵

The report stressed the fact that the current **conflictual and polarized political situation** in Tunisia was accentuating the sense of frustration and disappointment among youth through its failure to address more concrete needs among the population in general and youth in particular, thus pushing them to be more vulnerable to the narratives of violent extremist groups.

UNDP - *Les Facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010*²⁶

This report adopts a methodology on violent extremist narratives that points out the causes and roots of this phenomenon since the start of the Arab Revolutions, underlining how violent extremism has grown in the Tunisian sub-peripheries, becoming the first concern of local communities. This analysis aims to avoid wrongful labeling and rushed designation of individuals as terrorists. Such misperceptions could reduce and simplify the array of responses to tackle the issue and create unnecessary separation between actors living in the same society. At worst,

²³ Fathi L., Van Leuven D., and Bouraoui Ouni, *Youth and Contentious Politics: Drivers of Marginalisation and Radicalisation in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia*. (Search for Common Ground/British Council: September 2017).p.100.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ As a participant from Bizerte said, “*this administration is living on another planet!*” This highlighted the youth’s feeling that the state administration does not understand their needs and is incapable of adapting its procedures to accommodate these needs. Other participants from Bizerte said “*these institutions are dealing with us very bureaucratically.*”

²⁶ Ayari, M. “*Les Facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010,*” (UNDP: Tunis, 2017), forthcoming

erasing the difference between “actors” and “sympathizers” could lead towards increased radicalization. The analysis aims to single out individual causal factors using a qualitative risk analysis approach, to estimate the long term influence of violent extremism on the resilience of the local communities.

Ayari has divided the push factors (reasons) and the pull factors (motivations) in two distinguished levels: an **individual perspective**, which follows the social and individual logical sequences which lead to violent extremism; and a **social perspective**, which helps to understand the process of violent extremism inside society as a whole and within specific social groups.

Two distinct violent extremist profiles are also identified: the **militants** and the **desperados**. The first have a background of political activism with a corresponding level of engagement. The second identifies those individuals living at the margins of the law who are likely to be receptive to any form of violence and extremist engagement.

The report describes how, in a context where youth are looking for ways to accomplish their self-realization, embracing violent extremism represents an **anti-establishment attitude fueled by deep mistrust towards state institutions**. Where these institutions are widely perceived to be contributing to economic marginalization, violent extremism becomes a **generational phenomenon**. The report also highlights some of the key characteristics among youth in urban areas that contribute to the attraction to recruitment by extremist organizations: 33% of youth between 15 and 29 years old living in suburban peripheries are illiterate and have neither a job nor the capability of seeking a job.

Regional discrepancies in Tunisia (North-South gap) are also highlighted as restricting employment opportunities, often based on people’s region of origin and family name. This social trend is affecting the great urban areas which are increasingly populated by migrants from the countryside. As underlined by the author, this regional discrimination has been underestimated by the recent studies on violent extremism.

Official approaches to engagement in and management of **religious spaces** in the country is also singled out as playing a role in creating opportunities for extremist narratives. The report underlines the way in which the state has historically attempted to monopolize religious space in the country, although without dedicated significant resources, attention or effective capacity-building efforts. In a context where the legitimacy of state institutions and leaders has been undermined and eroded, this has “..encouraged the faithful to seek alternative religious discourses.”²⁷ The subsequent repression of any re-islamization of those who feel themselves at the margins of society leads to acts of resistance and violence as people attempt to affirm their new

²⁷ Ayari, M. "Les Facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010" (UNDP: Tunis 2017), forthcoming

identity. This provides an opportunity for jihadist groups to spread anti-establishment narratives, affirming their moral support to those Muslims eager to observe their religious traditions.²⁸

The failure of security forces to contrast these waves of violent extremism is deepened by the loss of trust by Tunisians towards the police. The **relation between police and population** is based on fear and coercive power, especially in the recruitment of informants. Police are accused of taking advantage of the new 2015 counter-terrorist law to use brutal violence. As a result, an anti-police attitude is a reaction to growing feelings of humiliation and injustice at the hands of those who should be the safeguards of public security.

International Republican Institute (IRI) - *Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia*²⁹

IRI conducted research in the fall and winter of 2016 to understand local drivers leading to increased vulnerability to violent extremism in the community of Beja, in northwestern Tunisia, selected because of the high number of local youth who had left for conflict zones. The organization used a mixed methodology based on seven focus groups with vulnerable young men and women, resilient young men and women, and religious young men, and 13 in-depth interviews, including with families and friends of foreign fighters.

The findings of this research mostly align with the findings of the other research studies considered in this report. They included the following:

- Marginalized segments of the Tunisian population often do not believe that viable, nonviolent means of alleviating grievances exist, a conviction that contributes to increasing their vulnerability to radical, often violent ideology.
- Grievances such as lack of economic opportunity, corruption, and harassment by security services are connected with the disappointment of youth's high expectations by the Tunisian government in the post-revolution period.
- **Unemployment, the lack of responsiveness by local government, and the perception of widespread corruption** appear to rob vulnerable segments of Tunisia's population of their sense of agency and self-worth.
- Those focus group participants who demonstrated greater resilience tended to note their dissatisfaction with many of the same issues as more vulnerable participants, but did not experience the same degree of **hopelessness**. The feeling that things will never improve is preyed upon by violent extremist recruiters.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The International Republican Institute, *Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia*, (Washington DC, 2017). http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-6-1_vea_report_-_beja.pdf

- Focus group respondents conveyed the sense that violent extremists offer vulnerable Tunisians with both negative (an outlet for grievances) and positive (sense of self-worth, financial reward) incentives.
- **A large proportion of respondents reported negative encounters with police or security services**, including assault and harassment. In vulnerable segments of the population, this appeared to feed into feelings of anger, frustration and the sense that there are no effective nonviolent ways to seek remedies for grievances.
- Several respondents noted the **lack of moderate religious leaders** as a factor contributing to the spread of extremism in Tunisia. Violent extremist organizations are exploiting religious illiteracy to facilitate recruitment efforts and provide justification for addressing grievances with violence.

Saferworld & Al Kawakibi Center for Democracy: analysis session *Lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie*³⁰

The Saferworld report singled out different responses from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. In interviews conducted with prominent Tunisian civil society representatives, Western policy officers, and Tunisian government officials, the NGO tried to focus attention on the role played by the international community as well as by civil society in countering violence and instability in the country. Nine focus group discussions were conducted in the governorates of Sidi Bouzid, Medenine, and Sidi Hassine, with more than 114 people interviewed, with a view to framing and understanding the people's perceptions and experiences about insecurity and instability, as well as their feelings and impact of CT/CVE measures, and subsequently developing targeted recommendations for Tunisia's transition to democracy.

An important message from these discussions is the fact that, while the state bears significant responsibility for the growth of extremism, it is also responsible for violent responses to the spread of violent extremism. This paradox leads to a **high risk of people's personal security and human rights being compromised**, particularly in the context of the state of emergency in the country which has been regularly extended since the Tunis attacks of November 2015 and is still in place today. This is seen as undermining the legitimacy of the state as extreme short-term security responses take precedence over a longer-term strategy. The Parliament's members are not exempted from their responsibilities: the strong focus on the security agenda is delaying the development and implementation of alternative discourses to VE. The **counter-terrorism measures undertaken have increased people's resentment and distrust** towards state institutions, in particular the security sector. These repressive practices have been exploited by violent groups who are able to represent themselves as the real opposition to the state. Facing the lack of social and professional perspectives, as well as the rise of youth unemployment, youth feel

³⁰ Saferworld & Al Kawakibi Center for Democracy: Atelier d'analyse sur la "*Lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie*", Tunis, 29 Mars 2017.

stuck in a dead alley. Without any viable economic opportunity, they turn to involvement in petty criminality or join violent groups.

Civil society participants in the research highlighted the reluctance of the government, and the Ministry of the Interior in particular, to pursue a constructive dialogue about coordinating public security and counter-terrorism measures. In the **atmosphere of distrust of formal institutions and lack of sense of belonging**, violent groups are able to recruit their new members by promising them a role to play in society and the opportunity to build a new identity opposed to the state and to the society that they feel has denied them dignity and opportunity.

The new counter-terrorist law contains several inconsistencies in terms of human rights safeguards and this has contributed to a **disproportionate reliance on repressive measures in the government's war on terror**. This risks further fueling violent extremism from those groups able to take advantages of people's grievances against the state. As remarked by Saferworld, "*the police is still acting as in Ben Ali's era; if the democratic culture is absorbed - over 62% of interviewed pledged their full support to democracy - the human rights culture is not.*"³¹ Delays in aligning the new penal code with new counter-terrorism laws were also highlighted, particularly in relation to laws concerning pretrial custody and access to legal assistance by detainees, although some improvements in this regard were noted.

International Alert - Politics on the margins in Tunisia: vulnerable young people in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen³²

On the basis of research conducted between 2014 and 2015 in the neighborhoods of Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher in the Grand Tunis governorate, International Alert has focused on: the political involvement of civil society; how social and urban inequalities have affected participation in political and CSO activities; what aspects have shaped the identities of young people and their relationship with politics; and finally, the political vacuum that has been filled by the Salafi movement since 2011.

The study highlighted that there is a **common sense of resentment, frustration, deprivation, and dereliction in young people's daily lives**. Almost half of the young people interviewed (44%) believe that their daily lives have not changed since 14 January 2011. Worse, 46% says that their living conditions have deteriorated, and they see the public authorities as extremely deficient.

³¹ Aliaga L., O'Farrell K.T., *Counter-Terror in Tunisia: a road paved with good intentions?* (Saferworld: London, 2017) accessed October 10 2017, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58921b4b6b8f5bd75e20af7e/t/59c15b3de5dd5b8068d8a208/1505844036342/tunisia-v2-counter-terror-in-tunisia-v2.pdf><https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/734-counter-terror-in-tunisia-a-road-paved-with-good-intentions>

³² Ayari, M. "*Les Facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010*" (UNDP: Tunis 2017), forthcoming

After an introductory section about the history of the two areas, the report tries to contextualize and explain how “*young people’s politicisation and improved access to politics since the revolution has failed to make much of a difference.*”³³ The report highlights the relationship between young people and politics in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, where the **phenomenon of Salafism** is the crucial variable in the neighborhoods’ daily political life. Salafism seems to be perceived in its local form, i.e. “*an ensemble of different groups drawn together around a young leader or local mosque. Salafists present themselves simultaneously as preachers who offer redemption and salvation of the soul, benefactors who help those in need, and ‘social workers’ who mediate conflicts between young people and help to prevent youth crime, all of which enables them to win sympathies of deprived young people.*”³⁴

Conclusions from Desk Research

From the research studies a number of drivers leading to youth’s radicalization to violence are identified as common to the whole Tunisian context. These drivers are often connected with the inability of the Tunisian state to provide opportunities, whether economic or political, to its youth for self-realization, especially in the country’s most marginalized communities. This inability, exacerbated by the longstanding corruption and inaccessibility of the institutional system, was one of the driving forces behind the protests that led to the overthrowing of Ben Ali’s regime in 2011, but no tangible improvement of youth’s prospects has occurred until today. Frustration, hopelessness, and resentment have risen to such levels that violence, a phenomenon that is part of the daily lives of most marginalized Tunisian youth, is often seen as a justifiable means to redress their grievances. These grievances have been leveraged effectively by violent extremist groups, which have based their recruitment efforts on narratives of opposition to, and rejection of, the state, while providing, on one hand, a purpose and identity to vulnerable youth and, on the other, the promise of tangible financial and social benefits.

The following **common drivers of radicalization to violence among Tunisian youth** were identified from the desk research:

- **Socio-economic grievances**, such as unemployment, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and lack of opportunities for youth’s self-realization.
- The **state’s failure** to address these socio-economic grievances, and their exacerbation through the violence and repression used by security forces under the justification provided by the counter-terrorism law.

³³Lamloum O., “*Politics on the margins in Tunisia: vulnerable young people in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen*” (International Alert: Tunis, 2017), accessed October 10th 2017

http://internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia_PoliticsOnTheMargins_EN_2016.pdf

³⁴ Ibid.

- The youth’s resulting sense of **frustration, resentment, deprivation, and deep mistrust** towards state institutions, leading to a lack of identity, of a sense of belonging, and to a rejection of the state and society at large.
- The widespread **acceptance of violent behavior** among marginalized youth as a means of transcending their daily difficulties, revenging the sense of stigmatization they suffer, and addressing grievances.
- Young people’s **limited knowledge of religion**, absence of reliable religious leaders, and a vacuum in the management of religion, which has allowed violent extremist groups to spread violent interpretations of religious tenets.
- The **ability of violent extremist groups to fill the vacuum** left behind by the dismantling of state and religious institutions and build strong recruitment narratives addressing youth’s grievances, fueling rejection of the Tunisian state and society, and providing a purpose while offering attractive financial and social rewards.

Extremist groups, generally closely integrated into local communities and intimately engaged with the day-to-day issues facing disaffected youth in Tunisia, “have found ample space for developing narratives that satisfy young people’s desire to affirm their identity and experience a sense of belonging which society and the state have failed to provide”.³⁵ This constitutes the setting within which alternative narratives, and local capacities to produce them, need to be developed.

4. The Existing Capacities of State Institutions, CSOs, and Youth to Develop and Disseminate Alternative Narratives in Tunisia

While the identification of factors of radicalization and marginalization in the Tunisian context has, in recent years, attracted considerable attention from experts, researchers, and local and international NGOs, the narratives of violent extremist groups have not received a similar attention. This has been mainly due to the following considerations:

- Narratives used by violent extremist recruiters in most Tunisian communities are complex and rapidly changing in order to adapt to, feed on, and fuel the contentious social movements and transformations that characterize Tunisian society today. This has been particularly the case in the most marginalized communities, where the state’s absence and its mainly bureaucratic approaches to address socio-economic challenges, limits greatly its capacity to fully understand the social actors and dynamics behind protest movements.
- The focus on the overtly violent actions and behaviors of violent extremists who aim to recruit vulnerable young people has often limited the space for approaches focusing on the content that they use.

³⁵ KII with Sociologist Foued Ghorbali, October 8, Tunis.

- The limited capacity of local and central authorities, as well as of the different components of civil society, to understand the dynamics underlying violent extremist narratives has negatively impacted on the ability of these actors to develop and disseminate alternative narratives.

It is also worth highlighting that while it is clear that radicalization and violent extremism are producing distinctive narratives due to their deep integration and dynamism in vulnerable and marginalized Tunisian communities, it remains unclear to what extent state institutions, CSOs, religious leaders, or youth are equipped with the tools that would allow them to understand, develop, and discuss alternative narratives.

In this chapter, we attempt to shed light on the existence of these capacities among institutional stakeholders and Tunisian civil society, to then look at the findings from the regional meetings.

Institutional Capacities to Develop Alternative Narratives

Despite an institutional will to build capacity to develop alternative narratives, the institutions whose mandates include this are still lagging behind, due mainly to structural impediments, such as lack of human resources with the right skills and lack of a clear strategy. The following two state institutions are involved in this field: the National Commission on Counter-Terrorism and Radicalization (CT Commission) and the National Platform of Alternative Narratives, which is part of the Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society and Human Rights.

The National Commission on Counter-Terrorism and Radicalization

Established on 22 March 2016, the CT Commission is the main public body responsible for facing the growing internal threat of terrorism. Established by the 2015-26 Organic Law of August 7, 2015 on counter-terrorism and money laundering, the institution aims to implement a short, medium, and long term strategy. In the short and medium terms, the focus is on the neutralization of dangers that threaten the democratic transition. In the medium term, the issue of terrorism will be tackled through a consensual strategy that aims to isolate terrorism from the factors that feed it, while building the capacity of security and military institutions. This involves continuous capacity building, periodic updating of plans, and modernization of related legislation.

In addition, according to Art. 68, the CT Commission has to “*raise social awareness of terrorist threats, through the organization of awareness-raising campaigns, cultural and educational programs, the holding of congresses, colloquia and publication of editions and guides.*”³⁶

However, according to M.K., a member of the Commission’s General Direction, there is still a long way to go. In terms of strategy, the lack of human resources is affecting the implementation of the CT’s plan shared with different ministries. Moreover, the basic program is still in its drafting phase and it is unclear how and when it will be completed and whether there is the available

³⁶ Art. 68 of Organic Law n° 2015-26 of 7 August 2015, on counter-terrorism and the elimination of money laundering.

capacity and knowledge to complete it. From a communication perspective, the CT has recently begun to interact with media and CSOs by explaining its actions, and has started to develop a program in the field of counter or alternative narratives, as a part of its new Communication Strategy.³⁷

The National Platform of Alternative Narratives

The tasks of this body, under the Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society and Human Rights, include producing alternative narratives to those of violent extremist groups, with a focus on related contents and issues surrounding violent extremism. Their actions aimed to contrast violent radical messages range from activities in the field of communication to proposals for new religious narratives. From a communication perspective, the Platform produced videos and spots focusing on the values of tolerance, peace, human rights, citizenship, the rules of coexistence, or issues such as the return of foreign fighters; these represented the first tools produced in Tunisia to raise citizens' awareness of the existence of alternative narratives. From a religious narrative perspective, the Platform will focus on the implementation of a training program for imams, which would lead to the development and spread of tolerant narratives based on more moderate interpretations of Islamic tenets. Given the Platform's scope, the spread of alternative narratives will take place online; the Ministry is launching a website which will provide alternative messages aimed at confronting the growing threat of violent radical propaganda on the Internet.³⁸

However, this initiative is still hindered by internal structural inefficiencies, including: the lack of a long-term strategy and efficient implementation tools; the lack of institutional coordination among the different ministries involved in counter-terrorism and CVE; and finally, a lack of expert human resources with the capacity to implement this strategy.³⁹

CSO and Youth's Capacities to Develop Alternative Narratives

A clear trend of the post-revolutionary period has been the steady rise on a daily basis of social activism highlighted by the numerous CSOs that have been established in Tunisia and that, in a climate of political euphoria, have been very vocal in their advocacy for fundamental, civil and political rights. By the end of 2015, Tunisia counted 18,502 CSOs, representing the most florid civil society sector in the Arab world.⁴⁰

During the last five years, CSOs have been playing a range of different roles. As watchdogs, organizations such as the Doustourna ("Our Constitution") Network and other CSOs were

³⁷ KII with M.K a Director General in the CT Commission, October 22, Tunis.

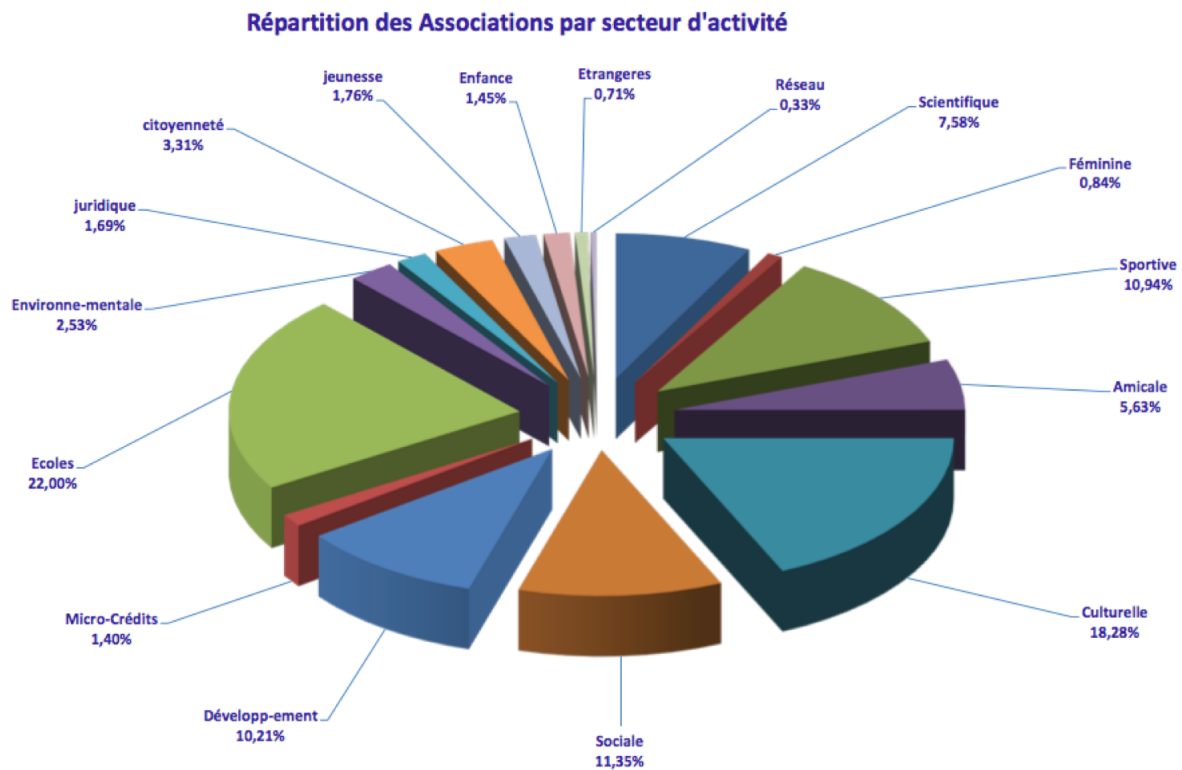
³⁸ KII with S.B, Director in the Platform of Alternative oct 23, Tunis.

³⁹ Ibid

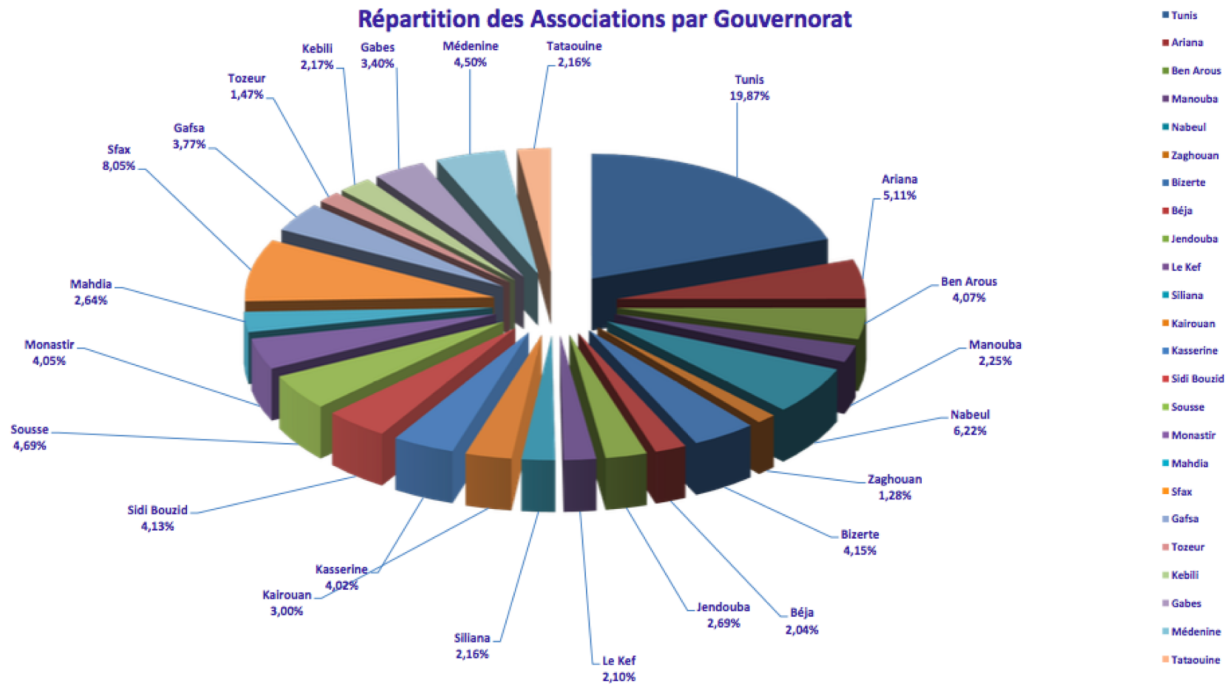
⁴⁰ Mejd I. "Tunisia: a booming civil society, a fragile democracy, and endless challenges ahead" *Nawaat*, February 1st, 2016 <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/02/01/tunisia-a-booming-civil-society-a-fragile-democracy-and-endless-challenges-ahead/>

influential during the drafting of the constitution and in the aftermath of that phase to make sure that human rights and fundamental freedoms were considered in the process and to draw attention to the main issues related to constitutional laws in the implementation of the new Tunisian constitution. During troubled times such as after the political assassinations of C. Belaid and M. Brahmi, Tunisian civil society stood up against violence, and centered its demands around the peaceful transfer of power between successive governments, and on maintaining social solidarity against terrorism and political assassinations. In short, Tunisian civil society's performance from 2011 to 2015 was highly efficient and culminated in the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the Tunisian Dialogue Quartet, a group of key Tunisian civil society actors, in 2015.⁴¹

The diagrams below provide an overall picture of the distribution of CSOs in Tunisia according to the sectors in which they operate and their geographical distribution through the country.



⁴¹ Ibid.



Distribution of NGOs according to governorates and activities. Source: Information Center, Training Studies and Documentation on Associations, 2017.

The importance of involving society as a whole in the development of alternative narratives is enshrined in the fourth pillar of the Tunisian National Strategy on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism, as explained in Art. 68. Here it is emphasized that counter narratives have to be framed through the engagement of society in its entirety, and not only by imams. The importance of mass media in disseminating alternative narratives is also mentioned as they could play a key role in launching sensitization campaigns.

Regarding the potential role of CSOs in this process, it is recognised that, currently, CSOs are not generally equipped to work effectively on issues such as the development of alternative narratives and few CSOs have the required capacities to analyze and understand the narratives of violent extremism and develop and spread alternative narratives to those associated with violent extremism.⁴²

5. Findings from the Regional Focus Groups and Regional Meetings

It is in this context that the current research organized targeted regional meetings in Sousse and Hammamet between 28-29 October and 3-4 November gathering CSO and institutional actors involved in tackling violent extremism. In these meetings, participants discussed the drivers of radicalization to violent extremism in their respective communities, and ways of fostering an open

⁴² KII with S.B, CSO activist, October 28, Sousse.

and effective discussion and dialogue between CSOs and institutional actors.

In order to create positive synergies between participants from the five regions, Search held two meetings: one in Sousse gathering participants from Gafsa, Siliana and Kasserine, a second in Hammamet gathering participants from Tunis and Kef. During the two first sessions of each meeting, participants worked separately based on their region. These two sessions were dedicated to identifying or validating factors of radicalization and marginalization in these regions. During the final session, participants from the regions were gathered together to present the results of their work at the level of identifying specific content of alternative narratives and ideas for storylines for the graphic novels.

The meetings were structured as follows:

- **First session:** Identification of the factors of radicalization and marginalization (push and pull factors). The focus was on identifying and contextualizing these factors, and validating the findings of Search’s two previous research reports and the research done by other organizations
- **Second session:** Participants engaged in an exchange and debate exercise around the identified push and pull factors in order to enrich their understanding of these factors.
- **Third session:** Search facilitators presented the “Adventures of Daly” as a pilot initiative in the field of P/CVE through comic books. The debate was around the story, the levels of radicalization, the alternative narratives, and the general dynamics of the story. This exercise permitted participants to start making the link between major concepts such as radicalization, extremism, narratives of violent extremism, and communities and youth’s capacities in the field of developing alternative narratives. Search facilitators focused on introducing participants to the concepts of violent extremist narratives and alternative narratives, the identification of elements of potential alternative narratives, and how communities can understand them and develop content in this field.
- **Fourth session:** Each regional group was split in two smaller sub-groups to have an in-depth brainstorm to develop ideas on the following aspects:
 - What could be the content of alternative narratives to violent extremism?
 - What about the main character? Who should s/he represent? (With particular attention to gender dynamics and representations⁴³.)
 - How should features of radicalization and violent extremism be expressed and reflected in the story?
 - What messages should be communicated and who are the credible voices in communities?
 - What tools and channels could be used in spreading alternative narratives?

⁴³ Interestingly, several groups chose on their own initiative to take a female lead character.

The groups were also asked also to develop a preliminary idea that could be the basis for the development of a storyline for the graphic novels. By the end of the group work, a participant from each group presented the results of the discussions and exchanges.

Siliana

The regional meeting in Siliana on October 25 gathered 13 representatives from local CSOs.

During the meeting, **push and pull factors** behind radicalization processes in the region were discussed and factors identified during previous research conducted in the area validated.⁴⁴ Key issues emphasized during this discussion included:

- The **absence of the state** and young people's difficulties in accessing public services.
- The **importance of socio-economic factors** in determining high levels of frustration among youth.
- The high level of integration of **violent extremist groups** within vulnerable urban communities and the increasingly complex dynamics surrounding these groups.

Regarding the **capacities of CSOs** in understanding and developing alternative narratives to those of violent extremist groups, CSO representatives highlighted the following considerations:

- The urgency of **improving communication** between CSOs and state actors in the region.
- The need to pay greater attention to **religious issues** and encourage a more critical approach to religious discourse.
- The **lack of tools and capacities** to understand the dynamics of violent extremism and the radicalization process.
- Activities by some CSOs are not always impartial. Some activities are not trusted by the youth, thus impacting on the **credibility** of these CSOs.
- **Public institutions** do not seem to be sending positive and encouraging appeals to civil society to involve them in the understanding, development, discussion, and spread of alternative narratives. CSOs are convinced that when it comes to state responses towards violent extremist narratives, it is more about "hard" solutions than about soft solutions, such as developing alternative narratives.

The **storyline** developed by the participants from Siliana focused on the social dynamics and the typical pressures and frustrations young people can face in a society governed by traditions and limited horizons. The suggested hero of the story (a girl seeking a job and accepting temporary employment) would be representative of many others in similar social conditions. The story would also represent the paradoxes and social pressures on youth in order to highlight that radicalization is not only based on religion, but also on social and psychological factors.

⁴⁴ Search for Common Ground, *Root Causes and Drivers of Radicalization to Violent Extremism in Tunisian Communities*, (Tunis, Tunisia, June 2016).

Kasserine

From Kasserine, representatives of 8 associations took part in the meeting. In terms of **push and pull factors**, the following key issues were highlighted by the group:

- The **deep lack of attention from the national government** and the stigmatization of the region as poor and hopeless.
- Youth's perception of "*being left alone in the poor and miserable cities.*"
- A common feeling of frustration - shared with the other regional realities - which stirs up a grounded sense of **injustice**.
- Young people's lack of effective tools to address their sense of disappointment.
- An anachronistic **educational system** that does not allow youth to develop critical thinking.
- Lack of investment leading to lack of **employment** opportunities.
- Lack of spaces for **cultural activities**.
- The lack of means among families to understand if their children are encountering violent extremism and being influenced by them, let alone attempt to safeguard their children from this influence.

With regard to the **capacities of CSOs** to understand and develop alternative narratives to counter the narratives of violent extremism, the following points were highlighted:

- The "*need to demonstrate to youth that violent extremism is not the solution to daily frustration. Thus, there is no short term solution, but only by being patient and working together we can overcome this situation.*"⁴⁵
- The **lack of solid capacities** among CSOs to deal with the rapidly shifting advance of violent extremist propaganda.
- The need for CSOs to obtain more support from **local institutions** and cooperate more with local institutional actors.
- The fact that, while there is clear will and motivation among CSOs to work on developing alternative narratives, they will require considerable time and support in order to acquire the capacity to do so effectively.
- It was emphasized that the diffusion of alternative narratives is a task that must be carried out by all concerned actors, not just individual organizations.

About the **storyline**: during the presentation of possible ideas for the graphic novels and the main alternative narratives to be considered in them, it was clear that participants from Kasserine tended to express a **strong reaction towards what they consider "systematic" deprivation and stigmatization by state institutions**. This coloured the ideas developed by the participants for the graphic novels which, they suggested, should portray the whole process of radicalization and show

⁴⁵KII with Saif Bouazizi activist of Kasserine 29 October

the hero passing through all the potential pressures and paradoxes leading to his/her potential radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism.

Gafsa

12 CSO representatives from Gafsa took part in the meeting and took the opportunity to describe a complicated situation in their region, touching on all levels in terms of issues that need to be addressed and solutions to be identified by all actors. Participants showed general and diversified awareness of the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious issues they face, and they highlighted the main negative dynamics, paradoxes, and factors of radicalization among the vulnerable and marginalized youth of the region.

In the discussion regarding **push and pull factors** influencing radicalization processes, they emphasized the following issues:

- **Economic aspects** were seen as the most important in generating daily feelings of frustration and disappointment among youth.
- The paradox of a region rich in natural resources where the local population is poor and deprived was emphasized. Incidents of local people being left without water supply in order to provide water to nearby phosphate processing units were specifically mentioned.
- The **disruption of traditional mechanisms** of social regulation (such as families, leaders, and social groups).
- The **lack of cultural services** in an area traditionally recognized as having a strong cultural identity.
- The **exploitation of religious issues** by politicians and extremist groups who know that young people are not equipped to understand complex religious issues or to discuss underlying values and principles.
- The lack of even basic religious culture and **capacity for critical thinking** among youth, due also to the failure of the education system to develop this capacity.
- Lack of capacity within families to detect issues among family members and help young people frame these issues.

Discussions about alternative narratives and **CSO capacities** and roles in developing them raised the following points:

- The **media** is a vector which can be effective in spreading alternative messages by becoming progressively independent from the mainstream and state-owned channels of the past regime.
- The media need to win the trust of their audiences by abandoning their current ways of presenting violent incidents and giving more space to alternative discourses.
- The importance of **providing tangible solutions** for youth that will boost the economy and investments.

- The need for “*an alternative discourse to build on a public space where the youth can be oriented toward new cultural activities, as theaters, cinema and arts, which help them to escape from marginalization and any extremist solution.*”⁴⁶

The **storyline** developed by the participants of Gafsa focused on two negative processes:

- The first was around the story of the social pressure that could be put on a young girl in a conservative society, which could lead to her adoption of extreme attitudes after suffering from violation and sexual abuse. This could encourage her to adopt an attitude of hate towards the whole society and draw her closer to violent radical groups who would provide a frame for her hate and transform it into extreme behavior and the conviction that society is unjust and must be changed by all means.
- The second storyline focused on the economic pressures on unemployed youth, aggravated by family difficulties and the lack of opportunities in the vulnerable and marginalized cities in a region rich in natural resources. The lack of capacities and the absence of framing institutions would push this person to adopt extreme reactions against society and the state. This would lead to him drawing closer to violent extremist groups who listen to him and help him to overcome his problems. Through the recruitment and indoctrination process, the young man’s reactions towards the state would become increasingly radical and lead him to be prepared to undertake any violent action towards the police, which represents for him the most visible and violent part of state institutions.

Kef

In the meeting with 16 activists from Kef, the **key drivers** of radicalization and violent extremism identified for other regions were largely confirmed. These include:

- Lack of any political responsibility of local authorities.
- The lack of **professional skills** among youth.
- The incapacity of **public institutions** to innovate and their adherence to exaggeratedly bureaucratic models of operation.
- The daily occurrence of **violent incidents** involving extremist groups.

With regards to the development of alternative narratives and **CSO capacities** and roles in this process, the following key points were raised:

- Developing alternative narratives should be civil society’s main task, but this has to be done through “concerted efforts and associations.” Participants said that **CSOs in the region should act with “one voice”** when it comes to understanding, developing, and spreading alternative voices among communities.
- Alternative narratives should include tangible content. “[They] should not be based only on developing verbal content, but have to be able to give to youth in particular a practical solution and viable ways that will allow them to exit the frustration zone.” At this level, the

⁴⁶ KII with Sabrine Amaidia, Gafsa activist 29 October

idea was that state institutions have to support civil society efforts by providing “*tangible socio-economic solutions to youth; training, capacity building, financial support could be among these tangible elements.*”

- Alternative narratives should be based on “**exit tools**” (a set of tools that help youth to exit violence and frustration). Participants considered that priority should be given, within the very first stages, to getting vulnerable and marginalized youth out of “*this box of high frustration.*”
- Alternative narratives have to be spread by credible voices and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc).

The **storyline** developed by the participants from Kef focused on two social conflictual dynamics:

- The first was about a non-graduate girl who is looking for a job and the aggressive and violent reactions that society adopts towards her during this process. The cumulated violence and abuse against girls would accentuate her deep, bitter feelings that society is deeply violent and unjust and would push her to be easily approached by extremist religious groups in her marginalized city. The process of recruitment would start in closed houses where radical student girls would convince her that society and the state are infidel. The process would end with the transformation of the girl into a “time bomb.” - The second story was about an unemployed young male subject to extensive social deprivation and family pressure. The story would start with an attempt by the young man to set up a small shop in the city to sell fruit and vegetables in partnership with his cousin. However, they would encounter a ban from the municipality for non-respect of the rules. The young man would react violently against what he considers an unjust and illogical decision. A series of other problems would occur at the same time: a divorce, a problem with his parents, overdue loans. In his local coffee shop, a violent extremist group would target him and begin a process of recruitment and financial support, starting with paying off his loans and helping the man to set up his shop again taking advantage of the weak controls by the municipality and the general spread of violence. The man would become more radical and cut off all relations with his family and his former wife, the mother of his first son. During a protest against the police, he would end up assaulting and injuring a policeman and eventually find himself in prison on charges of terrorism.

Tunis

During the two days’ regional meetings in Hammamet, 14 participants discussed the major factors at the level of individual and socio-educational dimensions of radicalization and violent extremism. **Key drivers** from other areas were largely validated and the following point was emphasized:

- The lack of checks and balances to ensure the **correct and proportional use of force by the security apparatus**. There is limited supervision of the use of force by the authorities and they apparently lack the capacity to use force effectively.

Regarding **CSO capacities** in the field of developing alternative narratives, several significant remarks were made:

- Participants highlighted the **limited capacity of CSOs** to understand fully violent extremist narratives, the reasons for their attractiveness, and the links between different social dynamics and radicalization.
- The different tools and capacities behind the development of effective alternative narratives were identified, including the **need to adapt swiftly** to the rapidly changing nature of violent extremist narratives, and the need for content to be highly targeted, segmented, and disseminated by **credible narrators** and in coordination with public institutions. Regarding this latter aspect, it was emphasized how *“it will be crucial [...] that [the] state develops tangible and practical programs that will give ‘economic and social content’ to the youth who will be targeted by the alternative narratives.”*⁴⁷
- The key role of **public institutions** in this process was stressed. As one young male participant said, *“the state should be the first to take in charge this issue. The state has the capacity, but it seems that its priorities are currently others than taking care of the youth's concerns.”*⁴⁸
- Building an understanding among both state and CSO actors of what is really meant by an “alternative narrative will be important.
- There is widespread lack of capacity in deconstructing and understanding VE speeches. **Violent extremism is basically seen as a violent, hard reaction to state failure.** There is limited understanding of the "softer" elements that contribute to the development of violent extremism.

The following indications were given by participants regarding the content of potential alternative narratives and potential elements for a **storyline**:

- It should be strong but expressed in simple words.
- It must contain some “lessons.”
- It could show the “horrific ends” of the radicalization process.
- It could dismiss violent narratives as “conspiracy theories” not backed by any validated facts.
- It could be, if necessary, “à la carte,” i.e. personalized.
- It should be disseminated using social media.
- It should stimulate critical thinking.
- It should focus on psychological aspects and make youth feel “at ease.”
- It should be developed by all actors.
- It must be based on youth's expectations and needs.
- It should give tangible solutions.
- It should target families as well.

⁴⁷ KII with S.B.G, president of the OTCS (Organisation Tunisienne de la Cohesion Sociale) 4 November

⁴⁸ KII with S.O., Unemployed young man participant

6. Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

On Context

It is obvious that political, economic, social, and religious actors are dealing with the post-Revolution period based on their own mechanism and objectives. The political focus is still preponderant and managing social and economic issues within a holistic strategy is not currently a priority. Social tensions are producing a lot of “extreme” and rigid attitudes that are influencing marginalized communities and pushing them towards a conviction that the state is weak and absent, encouraging people to turn to new mechanisms of social regulation outside of official state control.

Local social dynamics in Tunisia are increasingly complex and resulting in the development of new ways of transcending state mechanisms and measures by the local institutions. The recent increase in *Al Harka* flows (illegal immigration to Europe) is showing that thousands of youth are trying to find solutions to their feelings of frustration and disappointment outside of the communities in which they live.

The democratic transition is still facing complicated challenges, such as, on the one hand, strengthening state institutions, promoting economic growth, regulating market, and developing a new social contract, and, on the other hand, respecting basic liberties and principles of good governance and inclusion. The debate and protests by CSOs against the adoption of the Law on the Economic and Administrative Reconciliation have showed how difficult it is for public institutions (the Presidency of the Republic in this case) to pass legislations and regulations that are perceived as being against principles of transparency and good governance.

The democratic transition is also under pressure by the activism of religious and extremist groups that are trying to gain space to replace state mechanisms and are benefiting from difficult social conditions and the disappearance and degradation of the middle class. Terrorist activities⁴⁹ are still dividing political and civil society actors, accentuating the debate around several problematic issues. These include questions about the real capacity of state security institutions to counter extremism and terrorist threats, and the capacity of the judicial system in the field of investigating

⁴⁹ The most recent incident (1 Nov, 2017) included an armed attack against two traffic police officers in front of the Parliament building by a young extremist who attacked them with a knife. One of the police officers died as a consequence of his injuries. See: <https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFKBN1D21RD-OZATP>

and judging terrorist offenders. Another debate has arisen between state institutions and CSOs around the sacrifice of human rights in favor of the fight against terrorism.

On the factors of radicalization and marginalization in the five targeted regions

The desk research and project activities (meetings, dialogues, FGDs and KIIs) confirmed to a great extent not only the main factors of radicalization for each region, but also that there is a general sense of frustration and disappointment that is still the main reason behind the increasing levels of radicalization in these regions and in the country in general. Regional focus group dialogues confirmed that the evolution is less in the external manifestations of radicalization than in youth's new ways of thinking and reacting. Frustrated, unemployed, and desperate youth in vulnerable and marginalized areas are creating new forms of extreme expression and of violent behavior against their daily situation.

Pervasive violence underpins the adoption of extreme attitudes by youth. This is a growing trend that reduces the distance between violence and extremism in vulnerable and marginalized communities and transforms its rules and mechanism in a kind of supra state mechanism of social regulation and identity.

On violent extremist dynamics and narratives

The main finding at this level is the fact that VE is framing to a great extent youth's search for identity, social recognition, and hope, and it is also offering a financial solution to their needs and aspirations. In the short term, it is not realistic to suppose that state institutions and CSOs in Tunisia will be in a condition to unite their efforts to deconstruct VE narratives, and, meanwhile, these narratives are gaining space on the ground thanks to their ability to provide tangible and rapid practical solutions to the needs of youth that have been ignored by the state and civil society. VE is developing its own narratives for the purposes of recruitment and mobilization. VE groups and youth are occupying the same spaces, including social media and urban areas where VE groups are almost the only actor currently in a position to understand and respond to the needs and frustrations of young people. The effectiveness of VE narratives in framing youth's needs is mainly based on this close relationship between those needs and the capacity for rapid response among these VE groups.

On the capacities of CSOs and state institutions to understand, develop, and disseminate alternative narratives

CSOs are in general working on very diverse issues, including youth's needs and specific problems. The main finding of this study regarding the existing capacities of CSOs and local authorities observed that the problem is twofold: (i) CSOs and local authorities limited capacities in the field of approaching VE dynamics, not only through concrete activities but also as narratives that are accompanying these activities; and (ii) CSOs and local authorities' internal and intrinsic limits in understanding these VE dynamics in order to practically develop alternative narratives. Many

CSOs (like several state and local institutions) tend to confuse terrorism and violent extremism and they do not keep pace with the rapid dynamism of VE activities. They are generally unable to think beyond the visible manifestations of VE or to deconstruct and analyze what is really underlying and backing these apparently violent phenomena.

The ideas put forward by some CSOs to unite efforts and work together to develop initiatives and contents in this field will face problems in the harmonization of tools and methodologies, as well as in deciding who will take leadership and credit. Despite current shortcomings, CSOs are in reality the best positioned to address these issues, on condition that they are equipped with the appropriate tools and knowledge to enhance their capacities in this field.

At the level of state institutions' responses to VE narratives, the main findings are that specialized institutions (mainly the CT Commission and the Platform of Alternative Narratives) see their current activities/programs as part of efforts to counter terrorism and radicalization. The main priorities of the CT Commission are gathering action plans from ministries with the aim of giving substance to the newly adopted National Strategy of Countering Terrorism and Radicalization. The absence of any tangible link and communication strategy between these state institutions and CSOs is proof that developing alternative narratives is currently a low priority, or is not considered feasible in the short term. Responses to terrorism in Tunisia are mainly directed at developing hard responses to terrorism and VE activities and the CT Commission perceives that media, political parties, and CSOs should be taking the lead in the production of counter/alternative narratives. The Platform of Alternative Narratives is guided by its broad vision and is not focusing specifically on developing alternative narratives to those used by VE groups. The general policy of the ministry to which the platform is institutionally connected (the Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society, and Human Rights) is in reality limiting the capacities that could allow this structure to be more attentive to the development of alternative narratives. The involvement and the implication of civil society organizations is still limited and this limits the chances of creating synergies between the two groups.

On potentially appropriate and “attractive” alternative narratives

Youth who participated in our regional consultations were highly attentive to the idea of developing alternative narratives to VE narratives. Based on their initial understanding, these should be based on content that focuses on showing the state's readiness to effectively counter the threats from terrorism and VE.⁵⁰ Some participants confuse alternative narratives with all activities of “communication” to the general public by the state. Others said that content should not be only

⁵⁰ The recent attack on the two policeman occurred in November 1, (resulting in the death of one them) certainly influenced the point of view of the participants regarding what should be the content of alternative narratives by the State institutions. It also demonstrated a way of thinking based on direct reactions and a certain state of mind reflecting an intrinsic violence at the level of the youth themselves.

“slogans and just superficial heroism,” but should be supported by a tangible improvement in youth's conditions in marginalized areas.

It was notable that the focus of participants in regional meetings tended to be on the dramatization of key factors in the radicalization process rather than on seeking out alternative narratives that might communicate a positive alternative to that process. This highlights the need for careful facilitation and support to CSOs and relevant state institutions in order to assist them in developing genuinely “alternative” narratives that communicate a positive message.

Regarding channels and tools to be used to spread any alternative narratives, the majority of participants were unanimous that this should be spread through social media networks. They said they do not trust public channels or traditional media. They believed that Government should be innovating and acting like a private company in this field. It was also indicated that, youth are very familiar currently with comic books and all other graphic formats. Alternative narratives could make use of visual content but should also have a written content adapted to youth's capacities.

Recommendations

Starting from a general perspective, **public institutions** should be starting to work urgently on different levels:

1. Attenuation of the general atmosphere of frustration and disappointment among youth through a "**package**" of different measures that should start from making access to public services easier and aim to formulate programs that involve youth and provide them with tangible economic support that could meet their needs.
2. Rethinking the nature and the content of current relations with CSOs in order to reach a **higher level of coordination and synergy**. Public institutions, in particular those specialized in P-CVE, need to consider strategic partnerships with CSOs, and recognize that CSOs can be reliable and necessary partners.
3. Bringing about a **profound change in the general *modus operandi* towards VE**. Specialized institutions (the CT Commission and the Platform) should no longer consider VE as predominantly the openly violent and radical behavior that captures the attention of all actors, but more and more as a very solid and innovative process that produces, adapts and spreads attractive and impactful narratives targeting youth and benefiting from continuous absence of State institutions in marginalized and vulnerable urban and rural areas.
4. A "**National Project on Alternative Narratives**" should be launched as key part of the national strategy in the field of countering Terrorism and Radicalization. This project should be well communicated to the Tunisian public and should get the maximum support and appropriation from all stakeholders, including the political parties. The project should rely on innovative tools and involve youth and CSOs at the very local level. At a very specific level, a kind of "localized strategy" in the field of PVE, should be developed in

parallel with the current "centralized" strategy that the government is building mainly around the adopted National Strategy to Counter Terrorism and Radicalization, and implemented through the different action plans of Ministries.

5. **CSOs need to show a readiness to cooperate** and to create synergies between themselves in order to understand and develop alternative narratives at the local level. They have to be supported by INGOs, Donors and specialized State institutions in order to improve their capacities to approach VE dynamics in general and alternative narratives in particular. Their involvement at the very local level should be enhanced by local public institutions and their awareness about the fact that preventing VE is not only work to be done by specialized CSOs but by all components of the local community. Access to media and to public communication channels should be facilitated.
6. Finally, **alternative narratives** should be targeting not only youth but should develop a solid link with their families and with society at large.

With regards to the very specific Tunisian context, the alternative narratives to be produced by Search Tunisia under this project, should keep in mind the following elements for the development of content :

- A **reconstruction of the image of the state and security forces** based on their full readiness to counter terrorism and VE albeit in full respect of human rights and regulated control of force and in close cooperation and partnership with all other actors;
- A revaluing of **society's rules and values**;
- An attenuation of the youth's frustrations and disappointment through messages of **hope and appeals to act**;
- A **redesigning of the image of the hero** around modernized cultural and religious dimensions;
- **Tangible proof** that, in parallel, the government is really addressing the youth's needs at the very local level;
- Full engagement by the **private sector and media** in a "national project" that aims to rebuild social mechanisms of regulation and channelization.

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Annexes

Annexe 3: Definitions and Concepts

Terrorism

While there is no general UN definition on terrorism, the UN General Assembly adopted in 2006 the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy which reflects a global consensus on addressing the issue of terrorism.

Despite the lack of a universal definition, many countries understand terrorism as follows: *Violence or threat of violence aimed at influencing a government or an international organization, or to intimidate the public, or a section of the public, for the purposes of a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.*

Violence

As a peacebuilding organization, Search understands that **violence** comes in many forms: **direct** (or interpersonal), **structural**, and **cultural**.

***Direct violence** is any activity carried out with the intention of causing harm to a person's physical existence or property. **Structural violence** is when systems and institutions are unjust, treating distinct groups differently, and so do not provide equal rights to all groups. **Cultural violence** includes values, perceptions, and worldviews that advantage one group of people over another and that legitimise direct and structural violence and perpetuate militarism to achieve or maintain it.⁵¹*

Radicalization

In determining a working definition of radicalization, two key points of discussion are to be considered. One relates to the markers of radicalisation and a second relates to the context in which radicalisation is considered. David Mandel explains, “*radicalisation is [an increase] in the degree of extremism expressed by an individual or group*”.⁵² By connecting radicalization to the notion of extremism, Mandel associates the process of change with a set of political ideas that opposes a society's core values.

Radicalization could be defined also as: *A process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or undermine contemporary ideas and [values].⁵³*

Radicalization could be ‘cognitive’ (having violent extremism beliefs and feelings) and/or ‘behavioural’ (manifesting a determination to commit violence in the furtherance of extremist beliefs and feelings).⁵⁴

Violent Extremism

⁵¹ Quamber S.S., “*Mediation and Dialogue Guidebook*” (Search for Common Ground Pakistan, 2013).

⁵² Mandel D., “*Radicalization: What Does It Mean?*,” in *Radicalization: What Does It Mean?* (Brussels: Institute of Physics Press, 2009).

⁵³ “*Radicalisation and Extremism*,” (Safeguarding Children in Gloucestershire, 2017).

⁵⁴ Romaniuk P., “*Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism*,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015, 8.

Search defines **violent extremism** as “*The choice individuals make to use or support violence to advance a cause based on exclusionary group identities.*”⁵⁵

Importantly, Search’s definition remains sensitive to the MENA context: based on this consideration, it considers that “*The particular identity of the perpetrator of violence does not determine what constitutes violent extremism, nor does the nature of the ideology, even if that ideology may be considered radical by many. Rather, violent extremism relates to an individual or group’s violent advancement of an exclusionary ideology, which seeks to eliminate the ‘other’ group, culture, or identity.*”⁵⁶

This definition would also include those who advocate, support, and legitimise violence without engaging in direct violence. Hence, violent extremist supporters should not be neglected by CVE programming.

Search defines violent extremism as the choice individuals make to use or support violence to advance a cause based on exclusionary group identities. The particular identity of the perpetrator of violence does not determine what constitutes violent extremism, nor does the nature of the ideology, even if that ideology may be considered radical by many. Rather, violent extremism relates to an individual or group’s violent advancement of an exclusionary ideology, which seeks to eliminate the ‘other’ group, culture, or identity.

CVE and TVE

As a peacebuilding organization, **Search** goes beyond Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to examine violent extremism through a **Transforming Violent Extremism** (TVE) lens. Based on this specific approach, SFCG considers that transforming violent extremism requires recognizing that:

*while violent extremism exists, the reasons and motivators leading to an individual being drawn to violent extremist movements can be transformed into a different type of agency or engagement. This is distinct from countering violent extremism which is reactive to extremist violence rather than aimed at altering the dynamics that motivate it.*⁵⁷

Search defines violent extremism as the choice individuals make to use or support violence to advance a cause based on exclusionary group identities. The particular identity of the perpetrator of violence does not determine what constitutes violent extremism, nor does the nature of the ideology, even if that ideology may be considered radical by many. Rather, violent extremism relates to an individual or group’s violent advancement of an exclusionary ideology, which seeks to eliminate the ‘other’ group, culture, or identity.

Push and Pull factors

Search consider that Push and pull factors are often used when discussing CVE. They are important in understanding radicalization.

⁵⁵ Lena Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide,” 1st ed. (Washington DC: Search for Common Ground, 2017), 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide,” 4.

[P]ush factors are any condition or grievance that creates a sense of frustration, marginalisation, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups.⁵⁸

[P]ull factors [are] forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organizations, such as a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realization.⁵⁹

Based on this approach, Search consider also that :

Establishing a working definition of push and pull factors can prove useful for understanding the myriad of influences acting on an individual considering joining violent extremism. It also aids in capturing the importance of socio economics and local politics, as well as compelling identity narratives, the role of the media, and recruitment tactics by violent extremist groups.

Alternative Narratives

Search's approach to VE narratives and Alternative Narratives based on its "Transforming Violent Extremism" Guide for Peacebuilders⁶⁰

As a peacebuilding organization, Search approaches narratives as “a set of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences that inform the way an individual or group perceives their place in the world around them. They often blend elements of historical truth with constructed storylines and can resonate deeply with people’s sense of self and how they make sense of events in their own lives.” Search “understands narratives can be positive or negative and function as a natural part of the human experience.”

In the space of CVE, Search considers that “narratives are often used by extremist groups to seed resentment, disconnection, and violence in order to gain sympathy and draw in new members.” “Extremist groups also rely on propaganda and visceral images of their activities to wield influence in both their target community and around the world. Examining these narratives is therefore an essential component of CVE efforts.”

Based on the mentioned Guide, Search considers that, in order to engage with narratives, we should take into consideration the following four principles:

1. Amplify narratives that reinforce the power of emotion and human connection.
2. Focus on how narratives are constructed and shared rather than their content.
3. Choose credible, resonant messengers.
4. Engage and work with professional media outlets to equip them with skills in Common Ground journalism.

⁵⁸ Slachmuisjlder, L. . “*Transforming Violent Extremism: A peacebuilder’s guide,*”. Search for Common Ground. 1st ed. Washington DC:, 2017

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Definition by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue:

"Alternative narrative is a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimize extremist narratives".

Definition by the Council of Europe:

The Council of Europe approached the issue of counter and alternative narratives from a perspective of fighting hate speeches⁶¹. To this end, CoE gives this definition "*Counter and alternative narratives are tools to change and undermine hateful or extremist narratives and reinforce human rights-based narratives. They do so by challenging negative stereotypes, by discrediting violent messages, for example, through humour or other methods to show that another interpretation of reality exists.*"⁶²

With regards to Counter Narratives, CoE consider that if **Counter Narratives** "aim to reach: a) those who may or already sympathize with extremist views, preventing their further involvement b) those who already hold extremist views, supporting individuals in changing their views and behavior" **Alternative Narratives** "aims to strengthen positive, inclusive and constructive ideas and aim to reach the whole population, including producers of hate speech who may be able to become acquainted with a new narrative altogether. Different types of responses are needed for different groups."⁶³

The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) approach of Alternative and Counter Narratives:

In its "Issue Paper provided in support of the European Commission's preparatory EU IT Forum on "Countering Violent Extremism: Online Communications,"⁶⁴ the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) set three types of narratives and draw a table to precise the differences between them:

<i>What</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Who</i>
Alternative Narratives	Undercut violent extremist narratives by focusing on what we are 'for' rather than 'against'	Positive story about social values, tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy	Civil society or government
Counter Narratives	Directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging	Challenge of ideologies through emotion, theology, humour, exposure of hypocrisy, lies and untruths	Civil society
Government Strategic Communications	Undercut extremist narratives by explaining government policy and rationale	refuting misinformation, and developing relationships with key constituencies and audiences	Government

⁶¹ Hate speech, as defined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, Anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, as well as discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin).

⁶² "We CAN" is a Manual added to the Council of Europe Toolbox against hate speech. Revised edition, 2017 (rm.coe.int/wecan-eng-final-23052017-web/168071ba08).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The Forum was held on 27 October 2015 in cooperation with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

