

AMONG FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

A Social Network Analysis of Influencers and Communication Channels in Sudan

Sudan has been a converging point for a variety of extremist groups and an at-risk country for violent extremism (VE). However, in the aftermath of the peaceful revolution that overthrew President Omar-al-Bashir, a less restrictive operating environment in Sudan offers a window of opportunity to address VE, as well as build an evidence base for effective responses.

This research, conducted by Search for Common Ground, sought to understand the dynamics of VE recruitment in Sudan and identify opportunities, entry points, and barriers for programmatic responses.

FINDINGS



Existing Perceptions of VE

Sudanese believe extremist ideologies are **imported** from abroad rather than being home-grown, making it difficult for identified influencers to recognize and address signs of radicalization and recruitment.

Violent extremism is **associated with the corruption of Bashir's government**. Communities also have **various interpretations** of what VE is.



Who is at Risk?

Young males are most at risk.

Factors that drive recruitment to VE include **marginalization** (often due to ethnicity or religious/ideological beliefs), **unemployment**, and **economic hardship**.



Rural vs. Urban

Rural youth often join local tribal militias to support their tribes. These militias, in turn, have reportedly aligned with VE movements or Bashir's government (or both) for resources and power.

Urban recruits often join VE groups for ideological and economic reasons, and typically join groups promoting Salafist ideology.

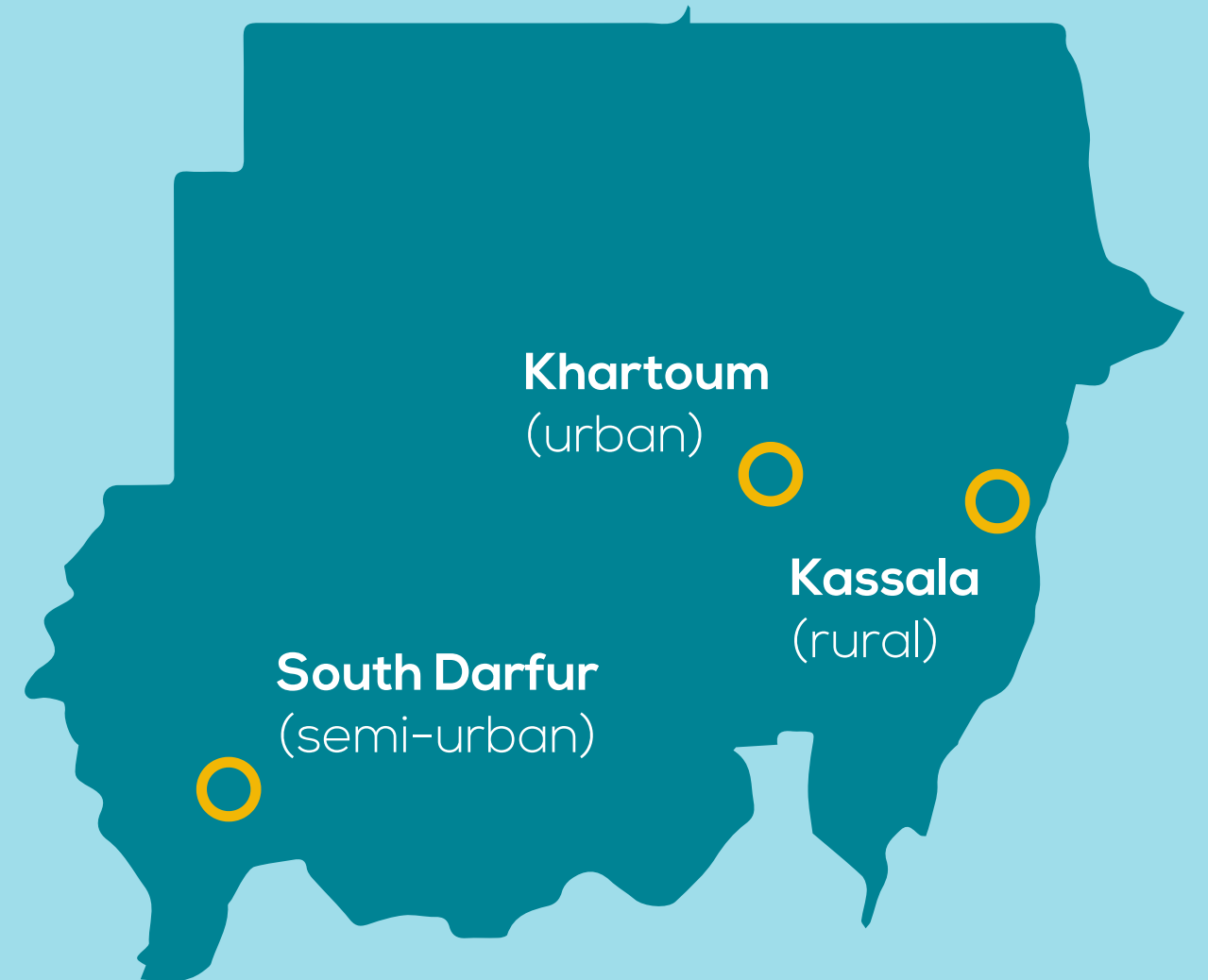


High-Income vs. Low-Income

High-income individuals tend to be motivated by **ideological reasons** and are more likely to **join ISIL**.

Low-income individuals are generally driven by **economic reasons** and are more likely to join **Al Shabaab** and **Boko Haram**.

TARGET AREAS



TARGET SAMPLES

153
Women & Men

18-35
Years Old*

*This demographic is generally considered at risk.



With whom do individuals discuss their frustrations?

Friends are the primary confidants, followed closely by **immediate family members**, female ones in particular. These influencers can provide an entry point to target at-risk individuals.



Solutions to Frustrations

When individuals discussed their frustrations with friends and family members, a wide range of solutions were proposed to resolve them. However, very few offered concrete and actionable solutions.

In addition, violence was offered as a solution equally by both friends and family members.



Entry Points for Extremist Rhetoric

Friends, especially on university campuses, could be an **entry point for recruiters and extremist messaging**. Sudanese of all ages are also exposed to such messaging in **markets**, where they spend a lot of time.

Women can often act as influencers providing violent and non-violent solutions, and can act as recruiters for other women in some cases.



Where are frustrations discussed?

Mostly **at home in close networks**, but also on **university campuses** and **social networks** like Facebook and WhatsApp.

Though marketplaces are highly frequented, they are not usually a place to discuss frustrations due to **scrutiny by intelligence services**.

What are the information pathways?

Respondents overwhelmingly receive information from online platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp followed by television and radio, and then in-person conversations with family and friends.



Where do the opportunities lie?



Influential Religious Voices can potentially play an important role due to their deep cultural ties and networks and Sudanese religious traditions of moderation and tolerance. Salafi leaders are associated with the Bashir government, but Sufi leaders were seen as credible and as voices of tolerance and inclusivity.



Media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have been instrumental in mobilizing for peaceful protests and act as a primary source of information, followed by television and radio. They can be leveraged to promote positive and peaceful narratives, and engage with those at risk of recruitment.



Civil Society Organisations play an important role in building resilience and peace in communities but few address VE due to operational restrictions. CSOs that do address VE rarely collaborate and communicate. However, the opening-up of civic space provides a good window of opportunity to change this.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS



Support a Sudanese-led definition of VE and local drivers;



Increase awareness and capacity among peer and family networks;



Ensure inclusion of women as key influencers to enhance resilience to VE;



Integrate digital and online media to target at-risk individuals;



Strengthen and establish collaborative relationships among civil society;



Target markets for positive narratives of inclusivity, tolerance, and diversity;



Support further research to continue to monitor the impact of the transition on existing or emerging drivers of recruitment.