

Envisioning a Path Forward >

Building an Evidence Base for the Sudanese
National Strategy to Prevent, Counter &
Transform Violent Extremism

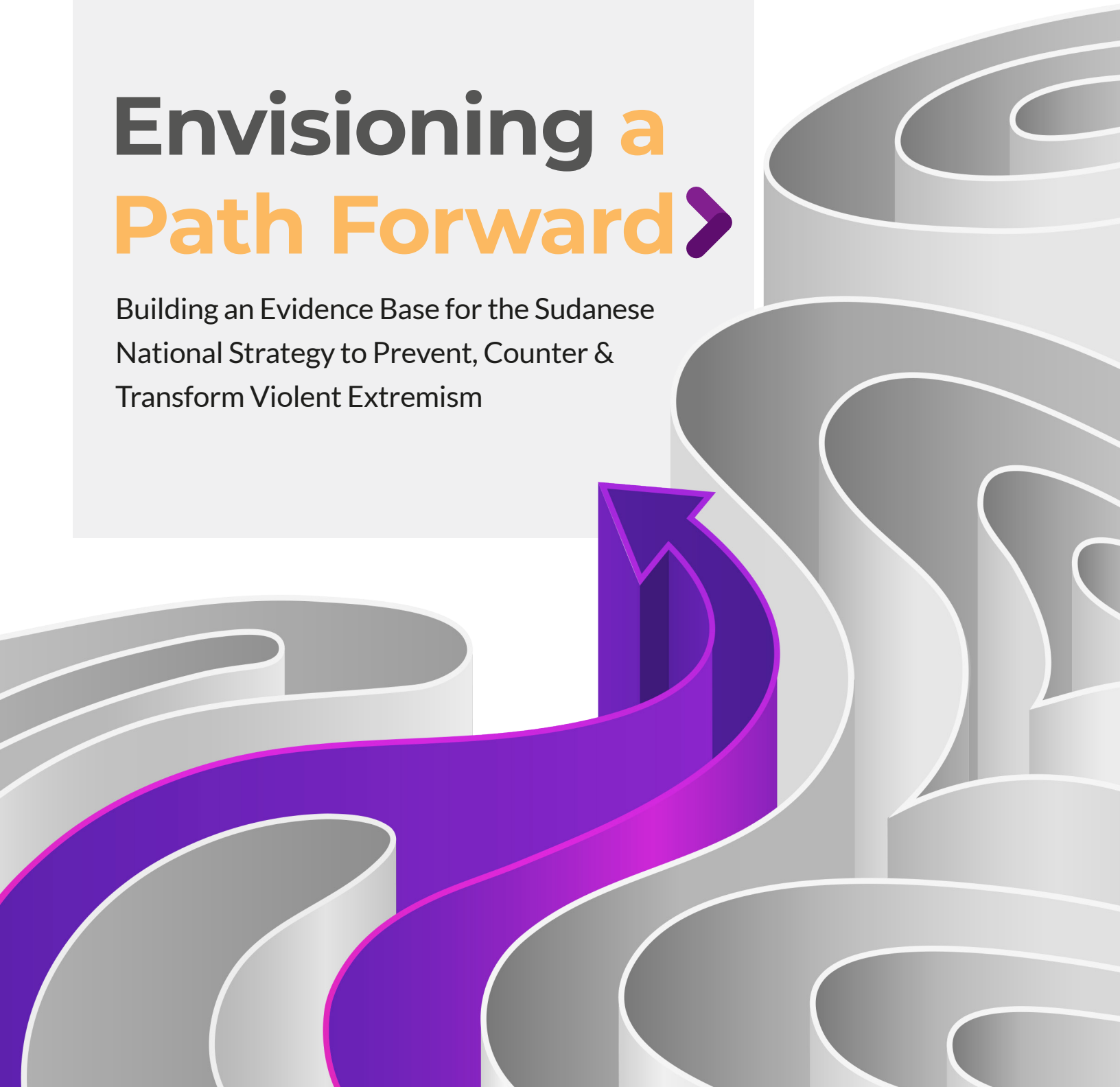


Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Glossary of Terms	4
Executive Summary	5
Findings Summary	5
Research Objectives.....	7
Methodology	8
Data Collection	9
Study Ethics & Limitations	11
Findings	13
A Sudanese Definition of Violent Extremism	14
Differentiating VE & VEO Types	15
Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) Operating in Sudan	17
Intellectual Influences of VE Narratives & Ideologies.....	18
Regional Dynamics	22
VE Recruitment Patterns	24
Women and Recruitment.....	28
Monetary Motivations.....	29
The Journey to Extremism: From Sudan to the Islamic State.....	30
The Profile of a Sudanese VEO Recruit.....	31
The Role of the Transitional Government.....	31
Crime, Prisons & Violent Extremism	34
A Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent & Counter Violent Extremism in Sudan	37
Conclusions & Recommendations	38

Acknowledgments

This study was undertaken by Search for Common Ground Sudan (Search) in partnership with Sudan National Commission for Counter Terrorism (SNCCT) and with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sudan.

First, Search would like to thank the Government of Sudan, which was instrumental at all levels in making this study a reality. In particular, Search wants to express its appreciation for the efforts of SNCCT colleagues, with a special mention of Dr. Isaam Marzoug, Rasha Naseraldeen and the representatives from various ministries in the technical committee.

Sincere gratitude goes to the UNDP team led by Mr. Tomokazu Serizawa, Khalid Eltahir, and Iman Mohamed for their continuous guidance and support.

Search appreciates the efforts of the data collection teams headed by Dr. Bashir Alsharif in Khartoum, Dr. Ali Dahab in Gadaref and Dr. Ashraf Osman in Al Jazeera. Also, Search appreciates the efforts of Ms. Nihad Salaheldeen Ibrahim who supported transcription and translation of the report and Mr. Abduljabar Mohammed Ahmed who supported in the logistics, coordination and mobilization of study participants.

Search is immensely grateful for the civil society organizations, religious leaders, academics researchers, brave families, women, youth and governmental officials in Khartoum, Gadaref and Al Jazeera states who generously gave their time and perspectives to nourish the study especially during a time of uncertainty and upheaval in the country. A special thanks to Ansar Affairs Authority, the Islamic Fiqh Academy, Almagased Center, Alkhateem Adlan Center for Enlightenment, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, Youth Forum, Life and Peace Institute and Badya Center for Integrated Development Services (Badya) for their various contributions in reviewing and validating the findings and analysis of this report.

This study was led by Tagelsir Alnageeb, Reem Tambal and Omar Salem. This report was written by Omar Salem.



The views in this report reflect the findings of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the United Nations Development Programme or Search for Common Ground.

Glossary of Terms

Search: Search for Common Ground

UNDP: United National Development Program

SNCCT: Sudan National Commission for Counter Terrorism

CSO: civil society organization

CVE: countering violent extremism

FGD: focus group discussion

KII: key informant interview

PVE: preventing violent extremism

CVE: preventing and/or countering violent extremism

IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IS: The Islamic State

ISIS: The Islamic State in Iraq and A-Sham

ISIL: The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

VE: violent extremism

VEO: violent extremist organization

Executive Summary

This study was conducted by Search for Common Ground (Search) from September 2021 to May 2022 in partnership with the Sudanese National Commission for Counter Terrorism (SNCCT) and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sudan. It follows previous Search-led research on violent extremism in Sudan which culminated in the report *Among Friends and Family*.¹ It deepens the evidence on the drivers and root causes of violent extremism (VE) in Sudan to support the development of a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and resilience to radicalization programs for Sudanese prisons.

Findings Summary



Sudanese religious leaders, government officials, politicians and civil society organizations define violent extremism in terms similar to other regional and international definitions of violent extremism.



The Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL) is the most prominent and active violent extremist organization recruiting from and operating in Sudan.



There are critical regional factors such as border security, proliferation of small arms and light weapons and a lack of regional cooperation that contribute to rising VE recruitment and activity within Sudan.



Narratives that Islam is threatened by foreign governments and ideologies or that it is broken and needs to be fixed are key to the recruitment of Sudanese into VEOs. These narratives are disseminated online and through sympathetic religious institutions and schools which are frequently funded by donors in the Gulf States.

¹ Search for Common Ground. (2020, August). *Among Family and Friends*. <https://www.sfcg.org/report-sfcg-among-family-and-friends-august2020/>



There are critical regional factors such as border security, proliferation of small arms, crackdowns on VE groups in neighboring countries and a lack of regional cooperation that contribute to rising VE recruitment and activity within Sudan.



Recruitment in Sudan can be understood through several theoretical typologies based on how the spread of ideology and recruitment unfold. The 'net' and 'funnel' typologies appear to be the most prominent recruitment approaches.



Female research participants who joined VEOs were recruited by similar technical means as their male counterparts. But, they were also attracted by a sense of freedom they felt adherence to traditional gender roles may provide.



There are no apparent monetary incentives or motivations for Sudanese who have joined international VEOs. Most research participants came from families of relative wealth and privilege.



The transitional government is in a sensitive position that risks fueling VE-propaganda and recruitment as it seeks to implement otherwise popular reforms.



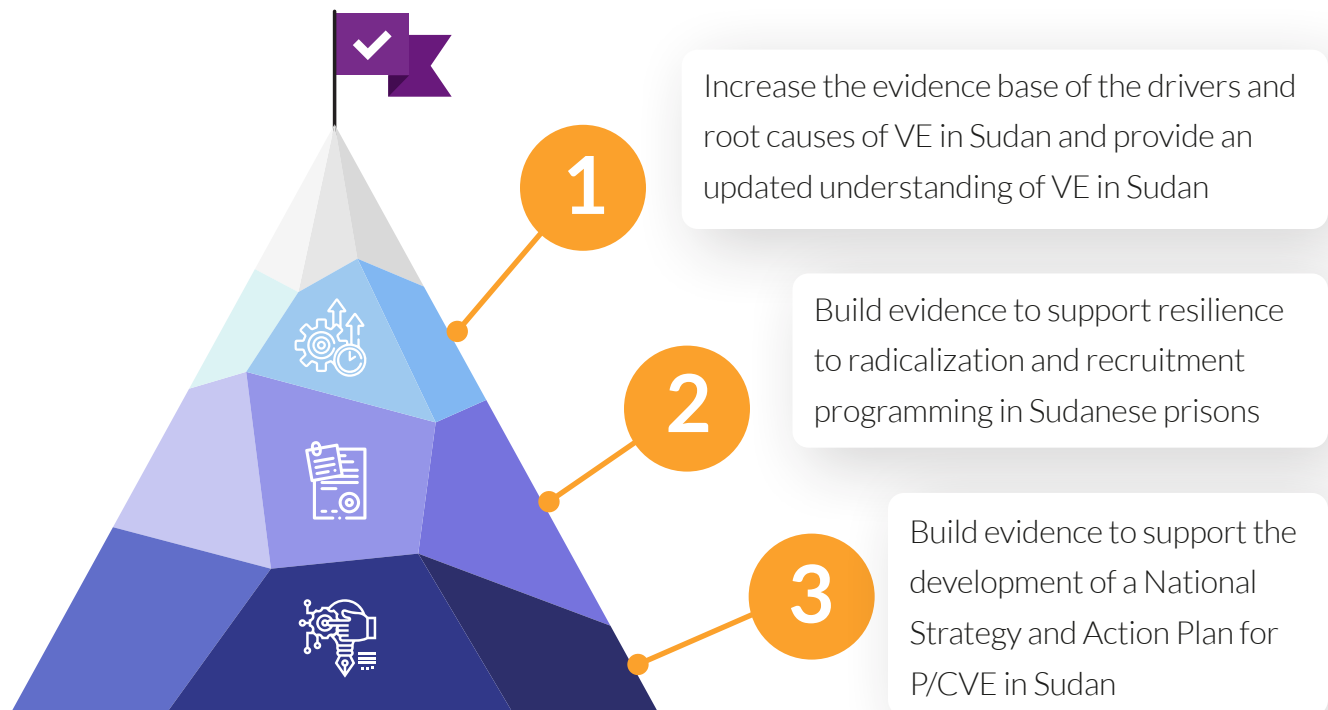
Sudanese prisons provide opportunities for VE recruiters. There are currently no programs in the prisons to specifically prevent the spread of VE ideologies. In some cases, imprisonment of VEO participants is believed to have led to more extreme VE ideation.



Religious leaders, government officials and civil society see a clear role for themselves and their respective institutions in a comprehensive plan to prevent violent extremism.

Research Objectives

This study takes a largely qualitative approach. It was formulated in part during a two-day workshop, on August 30 and 31st, 2021, in which representatives from the SNCCT, UNDP and Search reviewed the existing research on VE in Sudan, discussed gaps in the evidence base, and explored important areas for expanding the evidence to support a P/CVE curriculum for Sudanese and a comprehensive national strategy for P/CVE in Sudan. This study focused on three broad objectives:



Methodology



Data Collection

The findings of this study are based on 115 interviews with diverse stakeholders from Gadarif, Jazeerah and Khartoum conducted between September 2021 and March 2022:

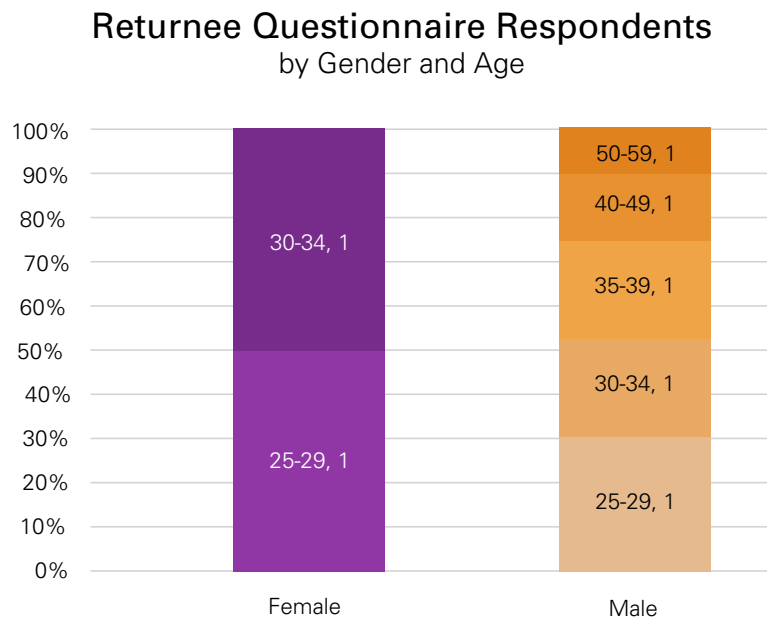
Civil society representatives - the research team interviewed 22 individuals representing civil society organizations. These interviews explored the topic of violent extremism in the Sudanese context and sought to understand what resources are dedicated to the PVE currently.

Religious leaders - 21 imams, pastors and religious scholars participated in interviews exploring religion's role in violent extremism in Sudan and their views on preventing violent extremism.

Sudanese experts - the research team interviewed 20 Sudanese academic scholars who study violent conflict and the socio-political dynamics of Sudan.

Government officials - 19 government officials representing a variety of national and state level ministries relevant to security, education, and justice were interviewed. The officials provided insights from the lens of their respective ministry.

Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women - The research team interviewed 10 individuals who were presently incarcerated for crimes not related to VE, at the time of the interviews. These interviews focused on understanding the prevalence of VE rhetoric and recruitment in their respective prisons. Four individuals who were currently incarcerated for crimes or charges related to VE; most were apprehended en route to join VE groups outside of Sudan. These interviews attempted to explore some of their motivations for joining such groups and their experiences with VE organizations. Finally the research team interviewed two formerly incarcerated individuals who had been released and completed programs at The Intellectual Dialogue Center in Khartoum, which aim to rehabilitate radicalized individuals through engaging with moderate religious narratives. These interviews



also sought to understand motivations but were also intended to explore the extent to which deradicalization with the Intellectual Dialogue Center or other programs are possible in the Sudanese context.

Political party officials - Six officials from diverse political parties in Sudan offered their perspectives of the topic of VE to the research team. The officials provided candid views on the role of political rhetoric in inspiring violence and violent extremism in Sudan.

Private sector representatives - The research team spoke with six business leaders representing various facets of the Sudanese private sector to understand their views on VE issues and to explore economic factors.

Returnees - The research team conducted interviews with five so-called returnees. Returnees are Sudanese nationals who traveled outside of Sudan (frequently Libya, Iraq, Somalia or Syria) to join and participate in VE organizations. Additionally, 15 different returnees responded to a 50-question questionnaire.

VE-affected families - The research team conducted ten focus groups with members from VE-affected communities and VE-affected families. These are communities and families from which men and women have left to join VE groups. The team conducted four FGDs in Oumdurman (Khartoum), five in Gadarif and one in Jazeera.

Study Ethics & Limitations

There are a variety of limitations to this study and important caveats to highlight for readers. The research process took place during the historic events which began in October of 2021 in which the military took charge of the transitional government. The large-scale protests affected the day-to-day lives of the research team and impacted the ability of the team to access certain respondents.

This study briefly discusses monetary motivations of VE recruits; however, the research team did not include economic or statistical analyses in its research design. The findings around money as a push or pull factor are derived from interviews and not experimental design given limited access to a small sample population.

All interviews with incarcerated individuals were conducted with advice and permission of the Sudanese Prisons Administration and the SNCCT. The research team adhered to relevant international standards for research involving incarcerated persons.² Despite the voluntary participation of incarcerated individuals, the candor of their responses should be understood in their current prison context and the level of trust enumerators could reasonably garner during a limited interaction.

² Institute of Medicine, Board on Health Sciences Policy, Research, C. O. E. C. F. R. T. D. R. F. P. O. P. I. I., Pope, A., Vanchieri, C., & Gostin, L. O. (2007). Ethical Considerations for Research Involving Prisoners. National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK19885/>

Returnees and those with VEO experience participated in interviews and responded to the questionnaire after being contacted by SNCCT officers handling their cases to inquire about their willingness to participate. The research team and SNCCT facilitators made it clear that participation in this research would not result in any direct benefits or influence the outcomes of any current or future legal proceedings. Despite their informed consent, the candor of these participants should also be understood in their context.

Another limitation of this study is the extent to which the research team could examine the role of family members in recruitment. VE affected family members answers to focus group questions should be understood in the

context in which they were provided: in a time of heightened security concerns when trust was difficult to build.

Finally, given that the interviews with participants took place over a considerable period that spans significant political changes in Sudan, it is worth noting that some of the responses may have been significantly different if asked at a later stage. For example, some religious leaders, CSOs and politicians were interviewed well before the events of October 25, 2021. It is very likely that some of their views and perhaps general outlook toward the VE landscape may have changed after that inflection point or other critical changes in the Sudanese political landscape.

Findings



A Sudanese Definition of Violent Extremism

There is no universally agreed upon definition of violent extremism.³ A primary recommendation of past research on VE in Sudan has been to form a clearer understanding of what violent extremism means to Sudanese in order to better identify and address it.⁴ The research team, therefore, sought to craft a common understanding of the term among Sudanese to better frame this study.

Sudanese civil society organizations (CSOs) share similar views of what violent extremism is. When asked how their organizations define violent extremism, representatives from several CSOs all mentioned ideology in their definitions. Some included violence based on gender or ethnicity into this definition, while others specifically mentioned a perversion of the Islamic concept of jihad to recruit youth.

The research team interviewed representatives from several political parties and movements. When asked to define violent extremism in the Sudan context, most of the representatives' definitions included a common theme that VE is a sense that one's beliefs or opinions, religious or political, are superior and sacrosanct such that violence is justified to defend or spread those beliefs. One interviewee pointed out that violent

extremists frequently refuse to detach religion from politics, and they therefore consider secular politicians as offering an alternative to their religion.

The research team conducted focus groups with members of VE-affected communities in Khartoum (Omdurman) and Gadarif and asked how they understood the terms violent extremism and terrorism respectively. These communities largely expressed that violent extremism to them is a departure from moderate religious views. Others emphasized that VE groups are not Muslim and have departed from the religion. One FGD participant stated "They're not like us [Muslims]; they have a different religion." When asked about the term "terrorism" nearly all participants defined it in terms of specific acts of violence.

³ OHCHR. (2022). OHCHR | OHCHR and terrorism and violent extremism. Retrieved 2022, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/terrorism#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20broader%20phenomenon,in%20binding%20international%20legal%20standards>.

⁴ Search for Common Ground. (2020, August). Among Family and Friends. <https://www.sfcg.org/report-sfcg-among-family-and-friends-august2020/>

Another interviewee more pointedly stated that no country has a clear definition of VE, but everywhere those who fight in the name of Islam are considered violent extremists. Additionally, interviewees who had participated in VE groups, were either unfamiliar with the term “violent extremism,” or they asserted that it is a label placed on those who have views that deviate from the mainstream.

Research participants of various backgrounds share a fairly uniform view of violent extremism.

Elites, such as civil society members, academics and politicians, tended to take a broader view of VE as being violence based on extreme ideological views. Sudanese of various ages living in VE-affected communities spoke about VE largely as a religious issue with extremists departing from moderate Islam or breaking from Islam altogether. These definitions closely align with the IGAD definition that VE is a “phenomenon that refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.”⁵



Finding: Sudanese religious leaders, government officials, politicians and civil society organizations define violent extremism in terms similar to other regional and international definitions of violent extremism

Differentiating VE & VEO Types

The definition of VE laid out by comprehensive and inclusive of various political, ethnic and religious motivations and drivers. Most research participants acknowledged that VE is not a euphemism for Islamic extremism. In fact within Sudan there are a number of ethnic militias and armed groups which are unquestionably responsible

for more violence and death in Sudan than international extremist groups like IS or Al Qaeda.

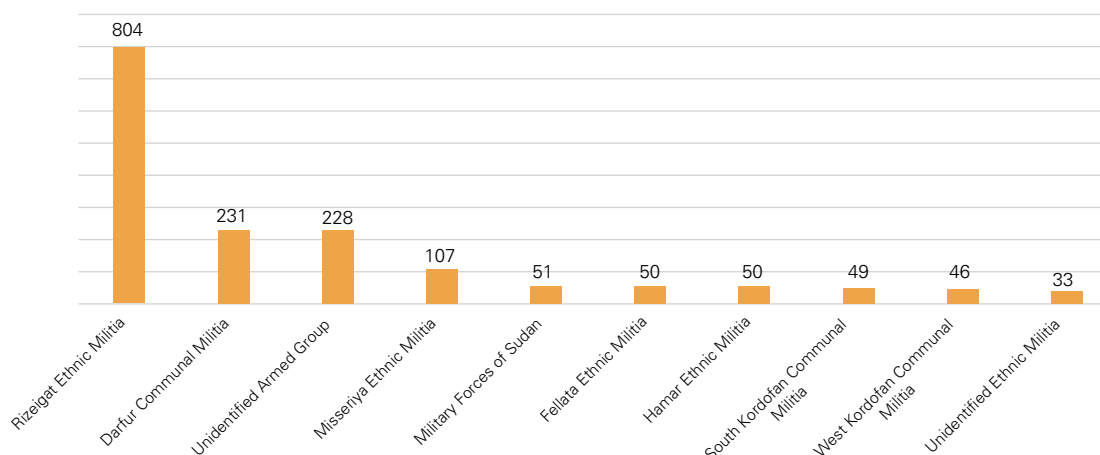
According to the Armed Conflict Location Event Data (ACLED) project between January 2021 and May 2022, 2,137 people were killed in Sudan as a result of violent conflict. The most

⁵ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. (2018, April). Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. <https://cve.igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-IGAD-Regional-Strategy-for-Preventing-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>

People Killed in Attacks by Armed Group Name

Top Ten Groups by Fatalities

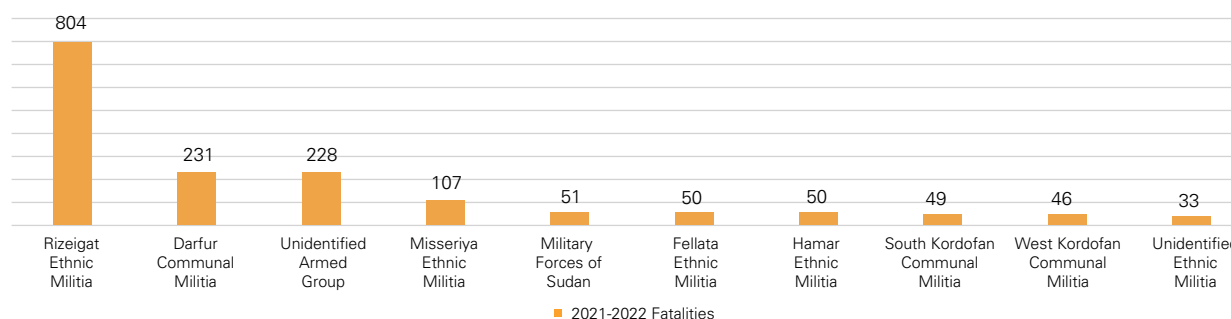
January 2021 - May 2022



impactful groups were so-called ethnic militias and unidentified armed groups operating in states like Darfur, South and West Kordofan and Abyei.⁶ These violent conflicts involving ethnic militias are typified by cyclical patterns of retaliatory violence, cattle raiding, migration, water conflict and other resource-scarcity issues that exacerbate inter-ethnic divides and tribal cleavages.

Such groups often fight for tangible resources and historical rivalries and rarely fight for clearly-defined extremist ideologies. This is a key differentiating factor between these ethnic armed groups of Sudan and ideologically-driven groups given the designation of violent extremist organization (VEO).

People Killed in Attacks by Armed Group



This research focused on this latter definition of what a violent extremist organization is and the remainder of this report uses that definition throughout.

⁶ Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen. (2010). "Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5) 651-660. <https://acledata.com/>

Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) Operating in Sudan

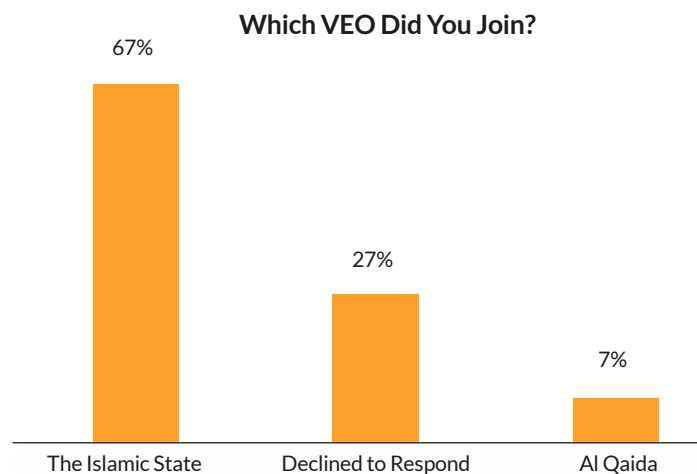
The research team spoke with a number of Sudanese who had joined the so-called Islamic State (IS or ISIS/ISIL) in Syria, Iraq and Libya as well as local experts and organizations working on VE issues. While not using the same terms, interviewees all agreed that the Islamic States (IS) is the primary organization

recruiting in Sudan. Of the 15 returnees who responded to the research team's questionnaire, 11 had joined IS, one had joined Al Qaeda and four declined to answer. Other Sudanese VE recruits who were interviewed had joined, or attempted to join IS or Al Shabab.

When asked which groups are actively recruiting in Sudan, a former IS recruit stated that the group does not matter "as long as the flag is calling for Islam, I'm ready to defend and be with it." Another man who had joined IS in Syria but returned to Sudan stated that "IS is the only one implementing the Law of God (Sharia),"

when he was asked why he joined that group specifically. His comment and comments from other Sudanese with similar experience suggest that Sudanese who are recruited into VEOs are more interested in an ideological standard and a particular group's perceived adherence to such a standard over other factors.

Sudanese intelligence and security officials interviewed for this research indicated that IS, Al-Qaida, Al-Shabab, and Boko Haram all are known to operate or recruit in Sudan. But each group targets or attracts different types of Sudanese for recruitment.



Finding: The Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL) is the most prominent and active violent extremist organization recruiting from and operating in Sudan.

Intellectual Influences of VE Narratives & Ideologies



Felt that ideological group was being physically threatened

There is a pervasive narrative that Islam is threatened. Those interviewees who had joined IS also articulated this narrative as their reason for joining, with some stating that there is an “international alliance opposing Islam” or that they “just want to protect Islam.” 14 of the 15 IS returnees who responded to the questionnaire indicated that before joining they felt the Islamic Umma (the Islamic Community) was being threatened by foreign governments and ideologies. Experts and Sudanese government officials identified this narrative in its various forms as a primary attractor for recruits.



Sudanese with internet access

The internet and social media have come to play a critical role in contemporary political mobilization in Sudan.⁷ An estimated 31% of Sudan’s population has access to the internet, and there are 1.3 million Sudanese social media users.⁸ Unsurprisingly, social media and the internet were the most commonly mentioned spaces for incubating and sharing VE ideologies among Sudanese and between neighboring countries. find lectures for the best imams and see all its [IS’s] news.” Other Sudanese who were recruited into VE organizations mentioned various online platforms and channels run by IS, Al Qaeda or Al Shabab. They mentioned these spaces as being important for learning about the groups, their beliefs and their news. Former IS members interviewed for this research indicated that social media and other websites were key in their recruitment.

1.3M

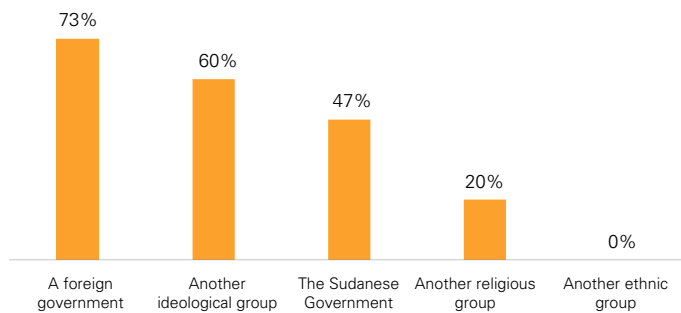
Sudanese social media users

In the words of one Sudanese IS recruit interviewed, social media had “channels for IS where you Nearly all research participants who were interviewed for the research stated their belief that

⁷ Kadoda, Gada & Hale, S.. (2015). Contemporary youth movements and the role of social media in Sudan. 49. 215-236. 10.1080/00083968.2014.953556.

⁸ Kemp, S. (2020, February 18). Digital 2020: Sudan. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-sudan>

Who was threatening your ideological group?



hate speech and VE are somehow connected. Yet, very few could articulate exactly how they believe these two things function together or whether there is some type of causal relationship between the use of hate speech and the likelihood of participating in VEOs. Nonetheless many pointed to the prevalence of religious hate speech as being directly tied to VE. Many religious leaders interviewed considered the misconstruing of Hadith and Quran as itself a form of hate speech. But, hate speech against Christians, Jews and Shia Muslims and broadly referring to others as “infidels” is common in VE recruitment materials.

Sudanese experts interviewed also point to conservative teachings from the Gulf States and Egypt influencing young Sudanese both online and in-person. Youth immigration to and interaction with neighboring Arab countries leads them to depart from the traditionally moderate Islam practiced in Sudan, according to Sudanese academics and CSOs interviewed. This is corroborated somewhat by the fact that several of the returnees interviewed

The website Al Meshkat

(شبكة المشكاة الإسلامية) was mentioned specifically by Sudanese returnees as an important source of information that helped to shape their views. The site includes a variety of content from Wahabist and Salafist Islamic thinkers and writers. Its ownership is unclear, but it operates out of Saudi Arabia. One section of the site provides Islamic proclamations or rulings (fatwa) in a format similar to advice columns found in mainstream newspapers. An exemplary article headline is “Is It Permissible to Pray for Infidels and Jews to Go to Hell?” The subsequent fatwa said it is indeed permissible. Another headline reads “Is It Permissible to Build Christian Churches in a Muslim Country?” The subsequent ruling is that building or renovating a Christian Church in a Muslim country is unacceptable. Much of the site’s contents do not directly call for violence but provide thinly-veiled dehumanization of non-Salafi Muslims and invoke moments of violence in Islamic history as precedent or supporting evidence for the rulings. The website is a prominent example of thinking from Saudi Arabia and surrounding countries reshaping the ideological landscape of Sudan with hate speech.

Several Sudanese experts point to a historical narrative of “Jihadism” that was used during the time of Omar Al-Bashir which justified acts of violence against the South Sudanese. These experts use that example to demonstrate the historical use of the concept of Jihad to manipulate Sudanese politically to support the regime’s military oppression of the south. Such narratives align with those Salafi ideologies that generally call for the marginalization of all non-Muslims. They assert that such uniquely Sudanese narratives have manifested in contemporary Sudanese politics and play a role in VE recruitment by evolving the historical narrative to fit the international VEO narratives.

for this research had lived or worked in Saudi Arabia or had other sorts of family ties there. One returnee stated that his religious education came largely from his time in high school in Saudi Arabia. But despite learning Salafism in Saudi Arabia, Sudan offered a new freedom to specifically preach and learn about (violent) Jihad saying “You’ll find sermons from some [Sudanese] sheikhs about Jihad. We couldn’t have this in Saudi Arabia but [in Sudan] we can.” He alluded to the notion shared by Sudanese experts that the Saudi government has stifled the preaching of violent jihad within its country while simultaneously exporting it.

Muslims who ascribe to a Salafi view of Islam are not all members of VEOs and are not all violent, but Salafism has had an important intellectual impact on jihadist VEOs. The Salafi movement was founded in what is now Saudi Arabia. It promotes a strictly literal interpretation of the Quran and essentially views non-Salafis as non-Muslims. Salafi publications frequently provide lists of different secs of Islam which they believe to have deviated from the “truth.”⁹ It has remained the de facto state religion since the establishment of the Saudi kingdom.¹⁰ The



You’ll find sermons from some [Sudanese] sheikhs about Jihad. We couldn’t have this in Saudi Arabia but [in Sudan] we can.

⁹ Salafi Publications. (2022). Salafi Publications. Retrieved May 20, 2022, from <https://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?secID=GSC&loadpage=displaysection.cfm>.

Saudi government and Saudi non-government organizations have spread this version of Islam throughout the world for decades as a form of soft power by establishing and funding schools and mosques.¹¹ Elements from Kuwait and Qatar have similar soft power approaches which entail the spread of Salafi ideologies

through education and development aid. Sudan has been a popular target for such initiatives from Gulf countries, and experts interviewed assert that such ideological influence has created fertile ground for the VE in Sudanese communities.



Finding: Narratives that Islam is threatened by foreign governments and ideologies or that it is broken and needs to be fixed are key to the recruitment of Sudanese into VEOs. These narratives are disseminated online and through sympathetic religious institutions and schools which are frequently funded by donors in the Gulf States.

10 Wagemakers, J. (2021, June 23). Chapter 14 The Citadel of Salafism. Brill. <https://brill.com/view/book/9789004435544/BP000026.xml>

11 Saudi Arabia Exporting Salafi Education and Radicalizing Indonesia's Muslims (No. 7). (2014). German Institute of Global and Area Studies. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184727/gf_international_1407.pdf

Regional Dynamics

Beyond their role in spreading VE narratives and ideologies, Sudan's neighbors have contributed more tangibly to the proliferation of VE activity in the country. Sudanese security experts, academics and government officials point to several interrelated regional factors directly and indirectly contributing to the spread of VE actors and materiel to Sudan:

NEED FOR MORE REGIONAL COOPERATION



Since the transitional government took power in 2018, counter-terrorism cooperation with authorities in Egypt have been on the rise.¹² Sudan is also a member of MENAFATF a regional body dedicated to stopping money laundering and terrorism finance. IGAD is also another regional body which dedicates resources to PVE and CVE of which Sudan is a member. However, Sudan has no bilateral, legally-binding security agreements in place with its neighbors to formalize cooperative relationships to counter violent extremism.

FLIGHT OF VE ACTORS FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES



Crackdowns on VE organizations in Egypt have led to tactical retreats into Sudan, where they have historically relied on the Sudanese security forces' indifference or inability to effectively respond. Experts assert that elements of IS and the Muslim Brotherhood have been pushed out of Egypt to seek a more conducive operating environment in Sudan. This notion was affirmed publically after a violent clash between Sudanese security forces and a suspected IS cell in Khartoum; a significant number of the cell's members and its alleged leader are foreign nationals.¹³

¹² Aman, A. (2021, October 15). Egypt looks to expand counter-terrorism cooperation with Sudan. Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/egypt-looks-expand-counter-terrorism-cooperation-sudan>

¹³ Weiss, C. (2021, October 13). Sudan reports crackdown on suspected Islamic State cells in Khartoum. FDD's Long War Journal. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/10/sudan-reports-crackdown-on-suspected-islamic-state-cells-in-khartoum.php>

BORDER SECURITY



Sudan shares borders with Libya and Egypt to the North, Chad to the West, the Central African Republic to the South-West, South Sudan to the South, Ethiopia to the South-East, and Eritrea to the East. Security forces are known to patrol the Libyan and Chadian border to interdict the flow of violent extremists transiting through the region.¹⁴ Given the large size of these borders and the massive size of Sudan, however, such patrol resources are highly constrained. This inability to secure its borders contributes to the aforementioned phenomenon of foreign VE actors fleeing to Khartoum for safe haven. Additionally, there are various human trafficking networks which have existed in eastern Sudan and have historically been used to bring migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia through Sudan to attempt to reach Europe or Israel.¹⁵ These avenues for human trafficking present clear opportunities from VEO members from the Horn of Africa or the Arabian Peninsula to enter Sudan or to use Sudan as a transit point.

THE REGIONAL PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS



Sudanese security experts point to the influx of small arms and light weapons from the West to Libyan rebels, the fall of the Gadafi government, civil war in Libya, and subsequent rise and fall of IS in Libya as creating ample opportunity for small arms and light weapons to be smuggled into Sudan to empower and embolden VE organizations in country. Additionally, small arms and light weapons are an important fund-raising opportunity for VE organizations in the region to finance their operations through the smuggling and sale of such armaments.¹⁶



Finding: There are critical regional factors such as border security, proliferation of small arms, crackdowns on VE groups in neighboring countries and a lack of regional cooperation that contribute to rising VE recruitment and activity within Sudan.

¹⁴ Sudan. (2020, December 1). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/sudan/>

¹⁵ CHR Michelsen Institute. (2017, September). Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Eastern Sudan (No. 2). <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/6325-human-smuggling-and-trafficking-in-eastern-sudan.pdf>

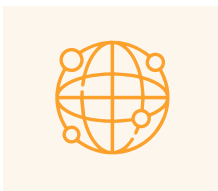
¹⁶ Fitzgerald, M. (2021). Small Arms and Light Weapons as a Source of Terrorist Financing in Post-Qadhafi Libya (No. 6). Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/07/SALW-as-a-Source-of-Financing-in-Post-Qadhafi-Libya.pdf>

VE Recruitment Patterns

According to Sudanese security and intelligence officials and returnees who were interviewed for this research, most VE recruits in Sudan begin learning online through social media and other websites.

According to one government official the common theme being shared in this stage is that “violence is the fastest way to achieve goals and seek justice from enemies.” There are a number of approaches being used in Sudan to bridge online and real-world spaces to move from abstract thought and debate toward participation in VEOs.

Scholars researching violent extremism have created a helpful typology for the various forms of recruitment. Recruitment approaches are categorized as:



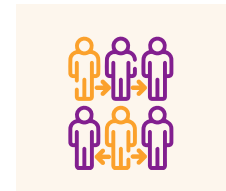
THE NET

The net approach entails the release of propaganda into communities which are perceived to be receptive; some targets are affected or inspired and some are not.



THE FUNNEL

The funnel describes a phased or incremental approach to recruitment that targets individuals from sympathetic communities who are seen as ready for full recruitment, and attrition from the recruitment process still creates passive supporters.



THE INFECTION¹⁷

The “infection” approach is typified by direct and personal appeals to individuals in communities that are hard to reach or unsympathetic, leveraging the grievances of specific targets and the social bonds between the recruiter and the target.

The progenitors of the typology point out that each approach can be effectively employed in online spaces.

¹⁷ Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly, “Al-Qaida: terrorist selection and recruitment” (Santa Monica, California, RAND Corporation, 2006), pp. 76-80.

The research team uncovered various examples of each recruitment approach being used by VEOs in Sudan:

THE 'NET'

VEOs recruiting in Sudan use net approaches very frequently through social media and websites. IS employs numerous websites as part of its net strategy, and is believed to have a global online following of 80,000 people.¹⁸ Each of the Sudanese IS recruits the research team spoke with indicated that videos and news from IS channels were an important source of inspiration to become involved. Nearly half of the Sudanese IS recruits said that they first learned of IS online. Such net recruitment tactics are also used in person through visits to schools and mosques by recruiters who would give speeches spelling out injustices happening to Muslims around the world and demand action. According to one IS recruit

who had fought with IS in Iraq, they would have lessons in his mosque “and there were brothers and imams who came to tell us about our Iraqi and Syrian brothers being killed, and they told us about the injustice.” This individual had been interested in Jihad since his days in high school in Saudi Arabia and was therefore a prime target for undifferentiated calls to action by IS recruiters. This points to the net recruitment pattern as being successful with Sudanese who do not require significant change in attitude to be recruited by VEOs. VE Recruiters in Sudan use this approach within existing conservative communities. Very little preparatory ground work is needed for such recruitment.



IS social media and websites

THE 'FUNNEL'

Examples of this phased approach to recruitment were common among Sudanese recruits to IS. The recruitment begins online and potential recruits go through a grooming process with recruiters

¹⁸ Scott, M. (2022, February 11). Islamic State evolves 'emoji' tactics to peddle propaganda online. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/islamic-state-disinformation-social-media/>

and facilitators abroad with the eventual goal of traveling to IS held territory and achieving a sort-of “full membership” whereby they are living under their interpretations of Sharia Law and are serving in an official role.

One IS recruit stated that through “our Imams and Sheikhs [they] were able to contact people in Iraq.” The grooming process then requires the adoption and demonstration of certain beliefs. For women this might require drastic changes in the way they dress, like wearing niqab for example. For men and women, the process requires changing their attitudes toward other Muslims through curated Hadith and Tafasir shared directly by recruiters and indirectly through IS media outlets. The process also serves as a filter for IS recruiters to select individuals who are ‘ready.’



Sudanese IS recruits first learned of IS online.

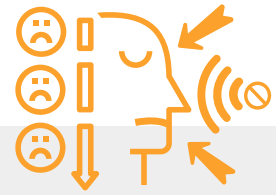
An additional phase of the funnel recruitment pattern in Sudan is the ability of recruits to actually reach their intended destination. All of the IS recruits and returnees the research team interacted with asserted that making money was

not a motivating factor for joining the group and that they in fact had to pay for their own travel and expenses to join (or attempt to join) the group in territory it controlled. Of the 26 Sudanese VE recruits who informed this research, only 9 had actually lived in territory controlled by the respective group. The remainder were arrested while traveling to join the groups. This constitutes a funneling process whereby those Sudanese who are arrested are effectively removed from membership but are nonetheless supporters. This funneling process results in an intermediate phase of membership in which recruits are unable to travel or arrive at the destination controlled by IS, but they are still active in recruitment of others and proliferation of messaging.

Overall, the funnel recruitment pattern is found in Sudanese communities that have traditionally practiced Sufism or other moderate forms of Islam, because recruitment requires investment in sustained shifts in ideology and attitudes toward others.

THE 'INFECTION'

A very prominent example of the infection approach to recruitment in Sudan occurred at the University of Medical Sciences and Technology in Khartoum throughout 2015, when over 20 medical students (0.4% of the student body) traveled in successive waves to Syria to join IS.¹⁹ Authorities believe the recruitment began with the president of the university's Islamic Cultural Association who used his position to directly appeal to his fellow association members, convincing them to travel to Syria through Turkey to serve in medical roles for IS.²⁰



This infection recruitment pattern by which a single person clandestinely recruits from within an institution or agency is uncommon in Sudan, likely due to the success of the net and funnel patterns thus far. But, this approach is likely to be increasingly leveraged by recruiters as Sudan becomes less hospitable to VEOs or if VEOs seek to infiltrate government and security institutions.



Finding: Recruitment in Sudan can be understood through several theoretical typologies based on how the spread of ideology and recruitment unfold. The 'net' and 'funnel' typologies appear to be the most prominent recruitment approaches.

¹⁹ Gadher, D. (2017, February 5). British medics studying in Sudan flock to join Isis. News | The Sunday Times. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-medics-studying-in-sudan-flock-to-join-isis-80vcjvkj>

²⁰ Sandford, B. S. D. S. A. M. H. (2015, July 17). UK medical student "recruited for IS" at university in Sudan. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-33502534>

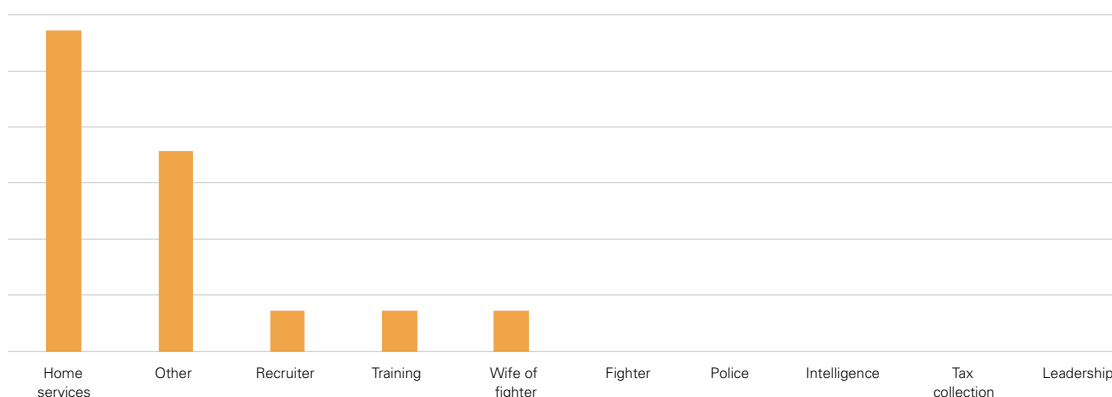
Women and Recruitment

Female research participants who had joined IS or other VEOs generally went through a similar funnel recruitment approach that began online and moved to making connections with members abroad. However, given the rigid interpretations of how men and women should intermix and interact with each other to which IS subscribes, recruitment of women by men is done only online through social media or in person by female friends or family.

In both cases, one intelligence official stated that recruitment of Sudanese women tends to focus on “emotional manipulation and taking advantage of their social situations,” whereby these women can find a renewed sense of power in situations where their male family members, for example, are abusive or oppressive. While this type of emotional manipulation is the case for both men and women, the interviewee’s statement points to an important aspect of empowerment and a sense of purpose mentioned by female recruits interviewed: a sense of freedom to fulfill their perceived religious duties through serving in traditional gender roles. The research team

interviewed a Sudanese woman who had also participated in IS. She stated that she saw her role in the organization as “to marry and make a family as well as teaching and giving medical aid for women.” She was attracted to IS because of its ideology and its “will to live in a fully Islamic country.” Another woman returnee interviewed said “the whole life is attractive, easy, and no money is needed. I was free from anything except raising my children to be jihadists.” These women affirmed past research on VE which has described IS efforts to include women by assigning them agency as those who build the Ummah by having children, who represent Islam by preserving their dignity through modesty,

What is the Primary Role of Women in the Group?



and who protect the Caliphate through violence only when necessary.²¹ The female research participants who had been recruited by VEOs directly and indirectly asserted this notion.

The male IS returnees were asked about what they witnessed the role of women to be during their time with IS. The men highlighted that women played important roles as medics, teachers and in some cases electricians.



Finding: Female research participants who joined VEOs were recruited by similar technical means as their male counterparts. But, they were also attracted by a sense of freedom they felt adherence to traditional gender roles may provide.

Monetary Motivations

Local experts had a wider variety of views on the role that poverty plays in VE. While most agreed it can play some part in VEO recruitment, others also cited issues such as education, environment, and substance as important factors.

Other interviewees stressed that poverty has very little to do with extremism, pointing out that many of the Sudanese nationals who have joined VEOs were from wealthy families, and many of those working to spread VE ideologies are themselves wealthy.

Interviewees who had returned from IS roundly stated that

the idea that they joined IS for money is propaganda spread by “enemies of Islam.” Many of the interviewees highlighted that they used to have nice paying jobs in Saudi Arabia and their families are generally wealthy. Most report sacrificing and donating their own money to travel and join others in Iraq, Libya or Syria.



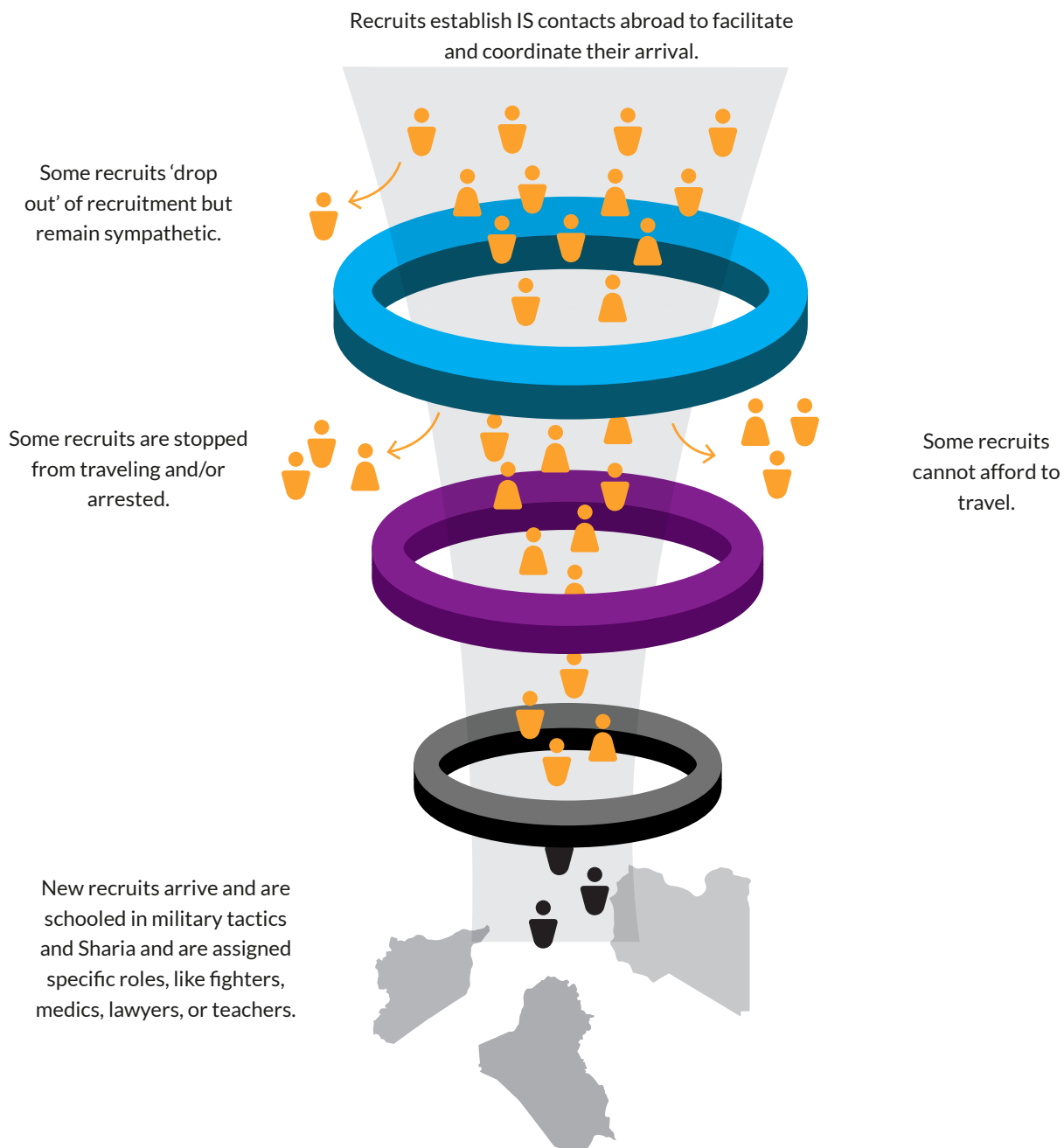
Finding: There are no apparent monetary incentives or motivations for Sudanese who have joined international VEOs. Most research participants came from families of relative wealth and privilege.

21 Termeer, A., & Duyvesteyn, I. (2022). The inclusion of women in jihad: gendered practices of legitimization in Islamic State recruitment propaganda. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15(2), 463–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2038825>

The Journey to Extremism: From Sudan to the Islamic State

Recruits begin learning online through social media and other websites.

They have other Sudanese friends with the same interest in joining or who are further along in the recruitment process.



The Profile of a Sudanese VEO Recruit

Based on data acquired during interviews with Sudanese returnees and detainees who were recruited by and participated in IS, Al Qaeda or Al Shabab, we can draw the following profile of a Sudanese recruit to VEOs.

The recruit is a male under 30 years of age. He first learned about the group through social media, but he has some friends who consider themselves members. While he feels like he can talk to his family about political issues, he cannot share his political beliefs publicly. He feels discriminated against for his ideology. In fact, he feels that because of his ideology, he is physically threatened by violence from foreign governments and the Sudanese government. He believes his ideology itself is threatened by the advancement of other ideologies. Not only are he and his beliefs physically and ideologically threatened, but the entire Muslim Umma (community of believers) is threatened. He comes from relative wealth and is not motivated by money. He is willing to spend his own money to join the group.

The Role of the Transitional Government

The research team interviewed government officials from various ministries, representatives of CSOs, private sector stakeholders, political party leaders and IS-affiliated Sudanese to discuss the ongoing democratic transition in Sudan and how the reforms of transitional government might mediate violent extremism in the country.

Interviewees representing CSOs and private sector stakeholders in Khartoum were divided

as to whether new policy changes by the transitional government may lead to reductions in VE. On one hand, several interviewees point out that Sudan has not had a clear policy to counter violent extremism and therefore any efforts to implement a coherent policy will see some success in mitigating VE. However, others argue that, if such policy changes are ineffective or are seen to challenge conservative interpretations of Sharia, they may exacerbate VE in Sudan and lead to new forms of opposition

” *Bad management makes people feel disadvantaged, and this kind of marginalization can feed into VE.*

from more conservative Sudanese or greater hostility from VEOs.

Local experts interviewed in Gadarif were also split in their opinions on whether the policies of the transitional government would mitigate or exacerbate VE in Sudan. Among these experts the issue of exacerbating extremism focused less on continued transitional government missteps in implementing the Juba Agreement that may lead to renewed/increased conflict between the government and the myriad armed groups with which it has sustained protracted conflict throughout the periphery states for decades. They argue that any efforts of the new government to reduce marginalization through successfully implementing the Juba Agreement will mitigate the sense of powerlessness required for VEOs to recruit successfully.

Other interviewees in Gadarif point to a need for the transitional government to take a stronger management role in areas such as airport and border security, immigration policy, media censorship, and monitoring of CSOs to

prevent the spread of extremism. While interviewees did not agree on the same list of management areas, many aligned with the sentiment that “bad management makes people feel disadvantaged, and this kind of marginalization can feed into VE.”

Interviewees in Jazeera were direct in stating the policy changes that they see as potentially inflaming sentiments among Muslim Sudanese and fertilize VEO recruitment. The transitional government repealed an apostasy law which made it a crime for Muslims to convert to other religions or abandon religion, and the transitional government allowed the use of alcohol by non-muslims. Another interviewee mentioned the mandate of increased women’s participation in government as being another policy change that will likely be met with scorn from conservative Sudanese. The interviewees in Jazeera pointed to these examples especially as transitional government reforms that are likely to exacerbate VE and increase support for VEO’s among Sudanese.

SUDANESE RETURNEES

Sudanese who had left the country to join IS and were interviewed for this research provided very strong opinions about the transitional government that were consistently negative. One stated that the transitional government's new policies "expel Islam from society... and will be met with violent reactions because these policies do not go along with our religion or traditions." Another returnee who had joined IS in Iraq asked "the transitional government is calling for atheism, usury and drinking alcohol... do you think this is what Islam is?" Another added "The former government was not applying Sharia, while this one is just being ruled by atheists."

In summary, the Sudanese transitional government is in a sensitive position. It is reforming Sudan's historical tolerance of international VEOs, but in doing so may increase animosity from such groups. Additionally, the transitional government has taken steps to create an inclusive, secular government; but, while such steps are popular among many Sudanese, they may create demonstrable fuel for VE-propaganda and indirectly aid their recruitment.



Finding: The transitional government is in a sensitive position that risks fueling VE-propaganda and recruitment as it seeks to implement otherwise popular reforms.

Crime, Prisons & Violent Extremism

Sudanese who have been arrested on charges of belonging to extremist groups in Sudan, those who voluntarily return, or those that have been brought in coordination with the security services of the countries in which they were arrested, are kept in the custodies or monitored by the security forces and are usually not brought to trial but have been “treated” through programs such as the Intellectual Dialogue Center.

Nearly all of the former participants in international VEOs rejected the notion of a relationship between what they see as Jihad and criminal activities. “There are many who are in prison because they are jihadists, but Jihad is not a crime,” stated one interviewee who had joined IS in Iraq.

In each of the interviews Sudanese who had participated in VEOs stated that they never kept friends who were involved with criminal activities such as theft or the sale

of illicit drugs. Those interviewees who had been, or were currently, incarcerated stated that their first experience with police and the Sudanese justice system was when they were apprehended for traveling to join IS. When asked if any of their fellow participants in the organization were ever involved in crimes in their home countries, the participants only highlighted that those who had been in prison in the past were only in prison “for Jihad” and were therefore imprisoned by anti-Islamic governments. Sudanese government officials view participation in VE groups as a crime and therefore see a direct correlation between these two. But, government informants also emphasize the importance of crimes like weapons trafficking and human trafficking as being essential to the activities of most VEOs which is why many VEO participants end up in prisons.



125

Prisons



25k

Inmates

Historically, prisons have acted as fertile grounds for cultivating extremists in the Muslim world. Sayyid Qutb an early leader of the Muslim Brotherhood had written and shared most of his thinking on jihad while in prison in Egypt.²² Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the current leader of Al-Qaeda served a three-year sentence in an Egyptian prison²³ Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the leader of IS, was held for 10 months in Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq.²⁴ In each case, these men left prison more radicalized, having recruited fellow prisoners and sometimes guards in the process. Prisons offer recruiters ample opportunities to introduce their doctrines while gaining trust and support from fellow prisoners and leveraging prisoners' perceptions of victimization.²⁵

There are 125 national, state and local prisons throughout Sudan with an estimated population of 25,000 people, according to Sudan's Prison Administration.

The research team interviewed 10 incarcerated individuals. These individuals were serving sentences for crimes not related to violent extremism and were not known to be affiliated

with VEOs. These individuals had mixed opinions about ongoing recruitment by VEOs in their context, but the pervading idea is that the prison environment offers a lot of opportunities to VEOs and recruitment is likely happening covertly. According to one interviewee "no prisoner could publicly say that he is affiliated with an extremist group because he would face punishment if he did so." Nonetheless VEO members are known by other prisoners, six of these interviewees stated that they have met fellow inmates who claimed to be affiliated with IS or Al-Qaeda. "The prison is a suitable place to discuss these thoughts, especially if they have a good relationship with prisoners, recruitment will be easy." A mother whose daughter was killed in Libya after joining IS spoke to the research team and provided her grim outlook on prison and VE. Referring to her daughter's friends who had been caught in Libya, imprisoned in Sudan and later released only to return to IS in Libya, she said plainly that "those two friends attempted to recruit our other daughter, when they got out of prison which means prison didn't affect them; it made them worse."



The prison is a suitable place to discuss these thoughts, especially if they have a good relationship with prisoners, recruitment will be easy.

22 Magazine, S. (2006, February 1). A Lesson In Hate. Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-lesson-in-hate-109822568/>

23 BBC News. (2015, August 13). Profile: Ayman al-Zawahiri. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13789286>

24 BBC News. (2019, October 28). Who was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50200392>

25 Yaacoub, S. (2018). British and Lebanese Prisons: Are They Fertile Breeding Ground for Terrorism? Journal of Strategic Security, 11(3), 79–92. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538518>

”

Those two friends attempted to recruit our other daughter, when they got out of prison which means prison didn't affect them; it made them worse.

Sudanese civil society generally lacks programs and initiatives that aim to rehabilitate extremists in prison or the general prison population. At the time, none of the CSOs interviewed by the research team had programs in Sudanese prisons and none of them had worked specifically on rehabilitating those convicted of violent extremism or those returning from VEOs abroad.

However, the Intellectual Dialogue Center takes a unique approach to countering and preventing violent extremism. Established under the government of Omar Al-Bashir, the center works with people referred to them by the security and intelligence agencies. The center brings imams, professors and other intellectuals into dialogue sessions with those who have been referred to them. The goal

is to work with these extremists and their families to urge a change of attitude and perceptions. An administrator for the center stated that these dialogue sessions have been very successful in finding “Islamic common ground” with participants who eventually abandon their violent beliefs. The center also organized activities to produce and distribute leaflets among university students as a form of Da’wah (proselytization) to discourage extremism or participation in VEOs. The center works with government agencies, volunteer imams, The Islamic Fiqh Academy, and other specialized organizations in Sudan (such as Almagasid). At the time of the interview, the center was not operating due to budgetary constraints and the shifting government priorities.



Finding: Sudanese prisons provide opportunities for VE recruiters. There are currently no programs in the prisons to specifically prevent the spread of VE ideologies. In some cases, imprisonment of VEO participants is believed to have led to more extreme VE ideation.

A Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent & Counter Violent Extremism in Sudan

The research team set out to understand stakeholder views on creating a comprehensive strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism in Sudan.



CIVIL SOCIETY

The CSOs interviewed during this research pointed out that there are currently very few organizations working on countering and preventing violent extremism and that there is not a clear strategy in which CSOs could play a role. Interviewees noted, however, that CSOs should play a critical role in such a strategy because of the diverse perspectives they can provide to propose alternative approaches.

Additionally, CSOs see themselves as critical in the process of awareness raising among the Sudanese public about violent extremism by creating P/CVE materials to be included into curriculums, advocating for legislation and publishing creative content on TV and radio.

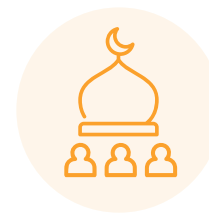
In a national strategy going forward, CSOs see their role as ensuring that government policies are informed by the communities they affect and inclusive of youth, women, and other marginalized groups. They see themselves as linking communities with the government and as a tool to pressure the government when necessary.



GOVERNMENT

Interviewees see the role of government as being to enact legislation that deters VE, to prevent VE through intellectual dialogue, and enforcing immigration policies that expel convicted extremists back to their country of origin.

In a future strategy interviewees believe that there should be alignment between educational institutions, religious leaders and government agencies to create a unified approach to preventing and addressing VE.



RELIGIOUS LEADERS

The various religious leaders interviewed believe their role in a VE strategy should be to preach moderate views, to raise awareness about VE, and to improve social cohesion. They called for greater institutional involvement in creating integrated cultural and sports activities that build trust and social cohesion.



Finding: Religious leaders, government officials and civil society see a clear role for themselves and their respective institutions in a comprehensive plan to prevent violent extremism.

Conclusions & Recommendations





A COMMON VE DEFINITION FOR STRATEGIC PURPOSES

This study finds that Sudanese religious leaders, government officials, politicians and civil society organizations define violent extremism in terms similar to other regional and international definitions of violent extremism. Therefore definitions of VE like that of IGAD which frames VE as “beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals” can create a shared basis of understanding on which to build a comprehensive strategy to prevent and counter it.²⁶



ADDRESS ROOT ISSUES WHICH UNDERLIE RECRUITMENT

The Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL) is the most prominent and active violent extremist organization recruiting from and operating in Sudan. A national comprehensive strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism in Sudan should promote diverse and proactive prevention approaches that focus on addressing drivers of recruitment such as isolation, marginalization and feelings of injustice at their sources. IS uses media and online content in its net and funnel approaches to recruitment in Sudan. While media and the internet can play a role in prevention components of the Sudanese P/CVE strategy, programs that solely take a counter narrative approach have been shown to be largely ineffective or counterproductive.²⁷ Additionally, banning or censoring certain online content may backfire and cause extremists to be more deeply entrenched in their beliefs, by feeding into the narratives of ideological threats from the transitional government or foreign governments. The strategy should call for broad-based participation from local CSOs, religious leaders and government officials who are trained on the best practices of P/CVE programming.²⁸

26 Intergovernmental Authority on Development. (2018, April). Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. <https://cve.igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-IGAD-Regional-Strategy-for-Preventing-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>

27 Miller, G., & Higham, S. (2015). In a propaganda war against ISIS, the U.S. tried to play by the enemy's rules. Washington Post. Retrieved May 20, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-a-propaganda-war-us-tried-to-play-by-the-enemys-rules/2015/05/08/6eb6b732-e52f-11e4-81ea-0649268f729e_story.html?utm_term=.9f75dccb6fc#comments

28 https://www.sfcg.org/countering-violent-extremism/SFCG-Countering_Violent_Extremism-An_Introductory_Guide_MENA_English.pdf



HIGHLIGHT POSITIVE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

VEO narratives that Islam is threatened by foreign governments and ideologies or that it is broken and needs to be fixed are key to the recruitment of Sudanese into VEOs. As mentioned above, simply arguing against these narratives with facts or using counter messaging has been shown to be ineffective at dissuading people from such beliefs. Independently highlighting the unique religious and cultural histories of Sudan to establish alternative (not counter) narratives can build social cohesion while addressing so-called push factors like isolation, marginalization and a threatened identity felt by those vulnerable to VE recruitment. Future research should focus on highlighting and amplifying positive historical narratives of religious tolerance in Sudanese society.



ADDRESSING REGIONAL FACTORS THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL STRATEGY

This study found that border security, proliferation of small arms and light weapons and a lack of regional cooperation contribute to rising VE recruitment and activity within Sudan. A comprehensive national strategy should align relevant security agencies around Sudan to address border security and related issues. Regional diplomatic efforts should focus on creating or strengthening bilateral relationships aimed at preventing and countering VE. The strategy should include international advocacy efforts that seek financial and material support for the strategy's action points from international and regional organizations.



VE PREVENTION IN PRISONS

Sudanese prisons provide opportunities for VE recruiters. There are currently no programs in the prisons to specifically prevent the spread of VE ideologies. In some cases, imprisonment of VEO participants is believed to have led to more extreme VE ideation. Therefore, the Sudan Prison Administration should adopt programming that trains staff on handling incarcerated people convicted of VE related crimes or those incarcerated people who are suspected to be affiliated with VEOs. Additionally, prisons should adopt rehabilitation programs which aim to mitigate susceptibility to violent extremism among the regular prison population and to rehabilitate VEO members serving time in prison.²⁹

Recruitment in Sudan can be understood through several theoretical typologies based on how the spread of ideology and recruitment unfold. The 'net' and 'funnel' typologies appear to be the most prominent recruitment approaches.

²⁹ https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Summary-of-recommendations-on-VEPs.pdf