



African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism



Some community members in search of metal scraps at refuse site. Photo Credit: UNDP Kenya

**POVERTY, MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION FUEL VIOLENT
EXTREMISM**

ACSRT Online Terrorism Survey

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POVERTY, MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION FUEL VIOLENT EXTREMISM

ABOUT ACSRT

The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) was established as a structure of the African Union in 2004. The decision to establish the Centre was taken in 2002 as part of the AU Plan of Action to Prevent and Combat of Terrorism. Its primary role is to assist AU member States build their Counter-Terrorism capacities. Its mandate includes the conduct of research, analysis and studies on the terrorism situation and terrorist groups in Africa, maintaining a terrorism database, centralizing information on terrorism and sharing this with AU Member States. The Centre conducts assessment missions to various AU Member States in order to ascertain their Counter-Terrorism capability and compliance with International Legal instruments and then provide advice on what needs to be done. In its capacity building effort, the Centre conducts seminars, workshops and training sessions in various aspects of Counter-terrorism for Member States and facilitates the drafting of their Counter-Terrorism legislation, strategies and Plans of Action in accordance with human rights requirements.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent Extremism has been viewed as multi-faceted and extremely diverse phenomenon making it difficult to be predicted by one particular variable. For Violent Extremist movements to develop and fester, and for individuals to join these movements, require an alignment of situational, social/cultural, and individual factors. Although political factors such as governance deficit, state failure, lack of trust between government and the citizenry and other grievances play significant role in the escalation and development of Violent Extremism, social and psychological factors concerning group and individual identity have also emerged as driving factors. Presumably, poverty, exclusion, and marginalization are an explosive combination that causes people to lose hope and to become easy prey for violent extremist groups' recruitment. Against these backgrounds, an online survey was conducted to examine whether or not poverty, marginalization and exclusion can lead to Violent Extremism in Africa.

The survey which was conducted on ACSRT online platforms (website, Facebook and twitter) received a total of 321 responses. The results show that, 222 respondents representing 69% of the total surveyed believed that poverty, marginalization and exclusion can lead to violent extremism in Africa. On the contrary, 99 of the survey respondents representing 31% of participants hold the opinion that poverty, marginalization and exclusion do not lead to violent extremism. The survey therefore concludes that poverty, marginalization and exclusion are major factors of violent extremism in Africa.

The policy implication of the survey is that placing emphasis on kinetic military strategies alone to combat violent extremism is not sufficient but addressing crucial social factors such as poverty, exclusion and marginalization will go a long way in addressing violent extremism and terrorism on the continent. The ACSRT recommends strong advocacy and awareness creation towards the ratification of the Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development adopted by the African Union on 27th June 2014 in Malabo as a formidable instrument that engineers a human security approach to prevent Violent Extremism by addressing the issues of poverty, marginalization, injustice and social exclusion in African Union Member States.

INTRODUCTION

Violent Extremism and Terrorism remain significant threats to international peace and security. Although no country is immune to this threat, Africa has been particularly susceptible. Weak institutions, porous borders, inadequately trained or ill-equipped security forces, historical grievances and lack of economic opportunities have created conditions for extremist ideologies to grow and fester in parts of the continent.¹ Violent extremism could thus be viewed as deriving from multifactorial and extremely diverse dimensions which do not lend to prediction by one single variable.

To date, most counterterrorism efforts have been security and intelligence led, with an emphasis on military and kinetic strategies to defeat terrorism.² Over the past decade; Global efforts begun to examine the root causes of violent extremism and focused on strategies to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE)³, with emphasis placed on an international legal framework and the role of international institutions, regional organizations, governments and local communities. While several institutional frameworks for countering terrorism, such as the UN Counter Terrorism strategy and the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, have recognized the important role of the other sectors of the economy in prevention measures, there has been conflicting reports, researches and analysis on the specificity of poverty, marginalization and exclusion as important predictors of violent extremism in Africa.

Poverty, exclusion, and marginalization are an explosive combination that causes people to have no hope and to become easy prey for extremist groups⁴. For violent extremist movements to develop, and for individuals to join them, requires an alignment of situational, social/cultural, and individual factors. Recruiters of Jihadist organizations are taking advantage of the vulnerability of individuals, particularly young people who want at all costs to escape from their very precarious life situation. According to the African Bureau of the UNDP, the largest countries with main economic activities concentrated in only a few zones are the easiest targets for Jihadist organizations because they include peripheral areas that are

¹Cilliers, J. (2003). Terrorism and Africa. *African Security Studies*, 12(4), 91-103.

²Aldrich, D. P. (2014). First steps towards hearts and minds? USAID's countering violent extremism policies in Africa. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(3), 523-546.

³Finkel, S. E., McCauley, J. F., Belasco, C. A., & Neureiter, M. (2016). Contextual Violence and Support for Violent Extremism: Evidence from the Sahel.

⁴Hörnqvist, M., & Flyghed, J. (2012). Exclusion or culture? The rise and the ambiguity of the radicalization debate. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(3), 319-334.

isolated and underserved⁵. This is the case with the Sahel region, where Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) now known as Jama'aNusratul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) is very active in the desert areas. This is also true of the Horn of Africa region where Al Shabaab operates as well as the Lake Chad Basin where Boko Haram is very active and has carried out numerous attacks.

Poverty is blight, and one that disproportionately affects sub-Saharan Africa. It is a vast and complex issue whose tentacles reach into many areas, including climate change, sustainable development and global security. The link between poverty and violent extremism is compelling, and means that if extremism is to be effectively addressed, we must fight injustice, corruption, impunity by the political elites and inequality too. A number of studies have found that personal identity issues and wider problems of marginalization, racism and social exclusion can act as a catalyst for radicalization and, potentially, violent extremism⁶. Poverty, marginalization and exclusion are broad range of personal and socio-cultural factors that may act as causes and drivers of radicalization and extremism. It is against these backgrounds that this online survey was conducted.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this survey was to ascertain the public opinion on poverty, marginalization and exclusion as possible causes of violent extremism in Africa. The survey was conceptualized on the assumption that poverty, marginalization and exclusion are favorable condition for radicalization. Radicalization was viewed as a step towards violent extremism, whereas terrorism was captured as a possible end product of violent extremism. Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework adopted for the study.

To achieve the survey objective, an online questionnaire was developed and posted on the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism's (ACSRT) online platforms including Facebook, twitter and website. ACSRT maintains active social media presence which has attracted scores of researchers, academics, security agents, intelligence organizations as well as individuals with profound interest in terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. Online survey has gained popularity in recent times and has been widely used. At the end of the survey which lasted for 31 days, 321 individuals participated.

⁵The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published a report on September 7, 2017 on the factors that incite young Africans to join radical groups

⁶Douma, P. (2006). Poverty, relative deprivation and political exclusion as drivers of violent conflict in Sub Saharan Africa. *ISYP Journal on Science and World Affairs*, 2(2), 59-69.

Gersten, *et al*⁷ has cautioned that if the sample size is too big, effects of little scientific importance however become statistically detectable and where the sample size is too small effects of scientific importance turn to be statistically insignificant. However, the central limit theory postulates that sample size of 30 and above naturally meets normality condition and statistically significant to draw inferences. Therefore, 321 participants were considered statistically significant for the survey irrespective of the homogeneity of the population.

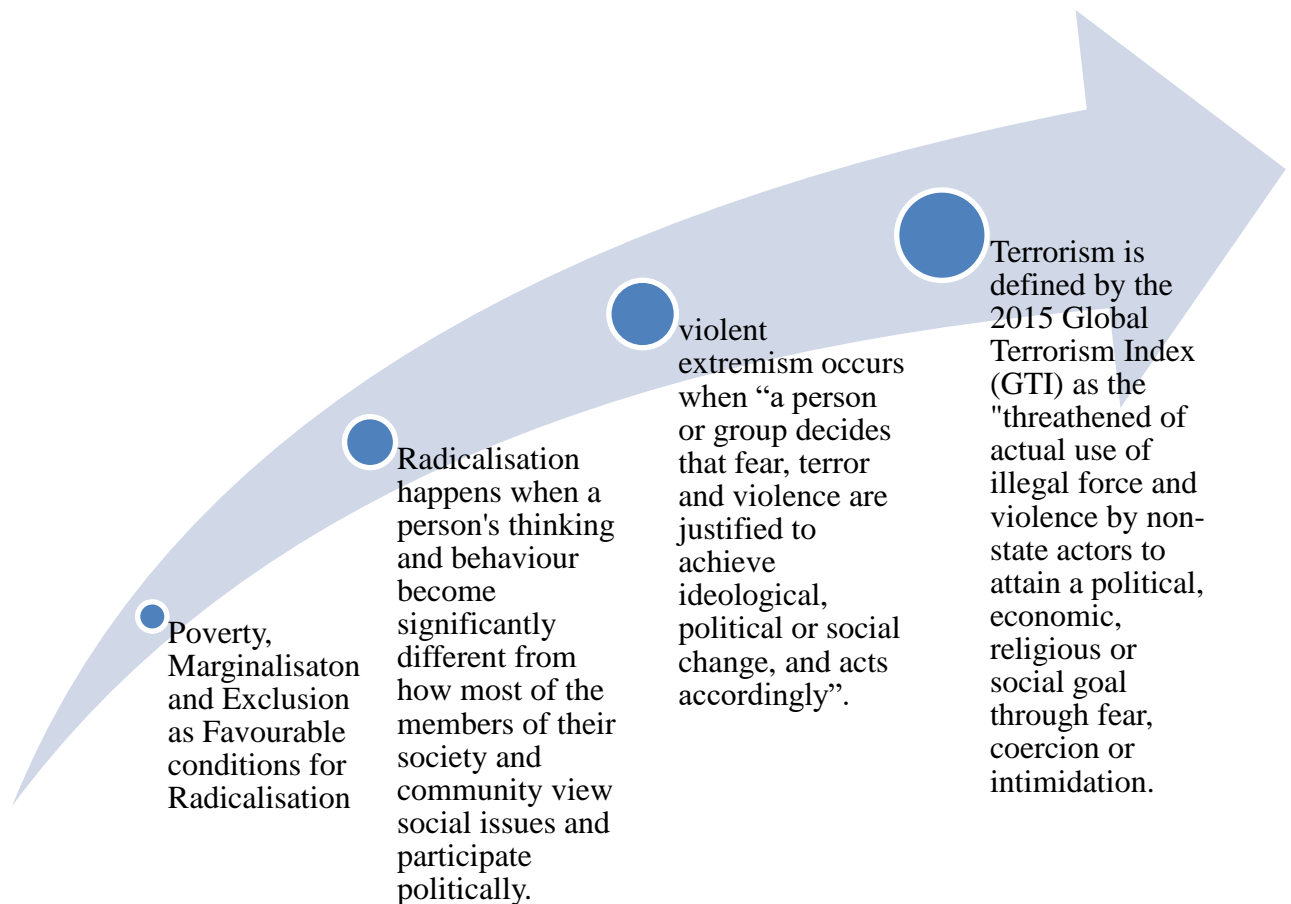


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework for the Survey

⁷Gersten, R., Fuchs, L. S., Compton, D., Coyne, M., Greenwood, C., & Innocenti, M. S. (2005). Quality indicators for group experimental and quasi-experimental research in special education. *Exceptional children*, 71(2), 149-164.

OUTCOME OF THE SURVEY

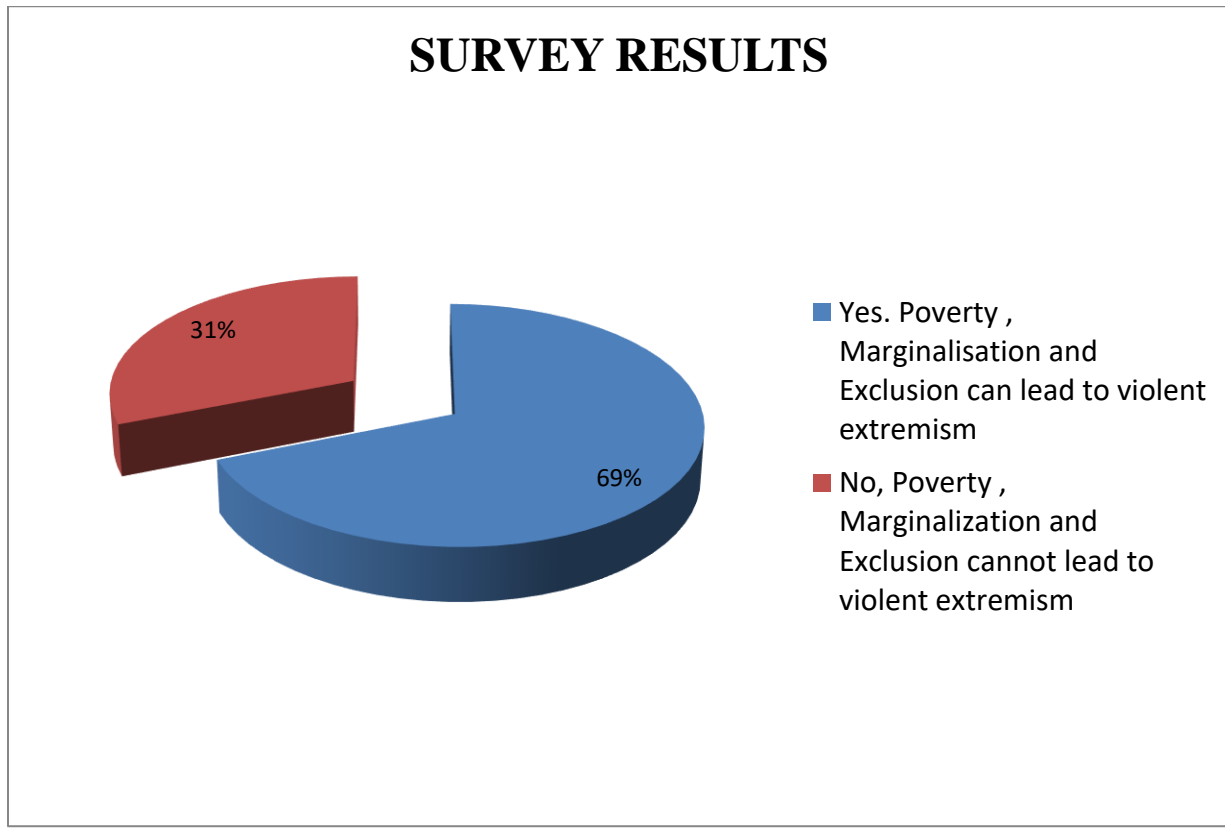


Fig. 2: Survey Results

The results obtained from the survey demonstrate that majority of the participants (69%) representing 222 out of a total of 321 survey respondents believed poverty, marginalization and exclusion are predicative conditions for violent extremism. On the contrary, 31% of the survey participants, representing 99 out of a total of 321 people who took part of the survey do not hold the opinion that poverty, marginalization and exclusion could lead to violent extremism in Africa. This presupposes that, poverty, marginalization and social exclusion are favorable predictors that have created conducive conditions for violent extremists' ideologies to grow and persists in parts of the continent. The outcome of the survey therefore corroborates many other studies in many part of Africa that have listed poverty, marginalization and social exclusion as major push factors of violent extremism and terrorism in Africa⁸.

Poverty is a widespread and persistent characteristic of Sub Saharan African countries. Within most states there is a huge gap between a small elite group, an embryonic middle class and an impoverished mass of

⁸Douma, P. (2006). Poverty, relative deprivation and political exclusion as drivers of violent conflict in Sub Saharan Africa. *ISYP Journal on Science and World Affairs*, 2(2), 59-69.

peasants and urban poor. In the wake of the political independence of many African States, the former colonizers and other so-called advanced or developed states have initiated activities and programmes targeting the most deprived and poor segments of these societies. Although some improvements have been accomplished in the fields of health care, education as well as economic development, the material well-being of the vast majority of Africans has not improved substantially over this period. In fact, poverty remains the most pervasive feature of livelihood of majority of Africans, urban and rural dwellers alike. Numerous studies have also shown that increasing inequality hinders economic growth and undermines social cohesion, increases political and social tensions and drives instability and conflict.

However, poverty and deprivation have been dismissed as drivers of Western-focused transnational terrorism⁹. Other researchers' have also indicated that neither poverty nor socio-economic deprivations are direct root causes of violent extremism and terrorism¹⁰. Although researchers who dispute poverty and deprivation as direct root causes of violent extremism recognize that, there is a correlation between poverty and civil war, and hence some broader-based forms of violent extremism¹¹¹². Nonetheless, these researchers believe that poverty may be a side-effect of some other cause; and hence it is not possible to isolate it as a direct cause of violent extremism. Even though these empirical evidences contradict the assertion that poverty, marginalization and social exclusion fuel violent extremism, there are more compelling proves especially in the African context to suggest poverty, marginalization and social exclusion are direct possible causes of violent extremism and by extension terrorism in Africa. For example, the UNDP report (2017) titled "Journey to Extremism in Africa" provides more practical insights and demonstratable evidences on conditions under which some 495 combatants were recruited to join Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and ISIS in parts of Nigeria, Somalia, Lake Chad Region, Mali and other conflict zones as fighters¹³.

In addition to poverty, social exclusion and marginalization are also fertile grounds for the growth of violent extremist ideologies. This is because people with shared experiences of marginalization and exclusion are more susceptible to a legitimizing 'single narrative' which binds together multiple sources

⁹Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jespersion, S., Reddy-Tumu, S, & Winterbotham, E. (2015). Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. Royal United Services Institute, www.rusi.org

¹⁰Ranstorpe, M (2016). The Root Causes of Violent Extremism. RAN ISSUE PAPER, Ran Centre of Excellence (2016).

¹¹ Allan et al 2015 *ibid*

¹²Ranstorpe 2016 *ibid*

¹³UNDP (2017). Journey To Extremism In Africa: D R I V E R S , I N C E N T I V E S A N D The Tipping Point For Recruitment. Available at <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf> , accessed on 09/10/2018

of resentment. In conflicts involving violent extremism, socio-economic discrimination and marginalization do help to explain why extremist groups are able to recruit supporters in large numbers. However, research on the use of a single narrative to justify, recruit and motivate into extremist groups are limited, and we consider this to be an area for productive further research in Africa in a bid to prevent and combat terrorism.

CONCLUSION

There are multiple ways to examine the root causes of violent extremism. There is no single cause or pathway to radicalization and violent extremism. There is a wide array of factors on the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. Violent Extremism mechanisms are a product of interplay between push- and pull-factors within individuals. Push factors such as marginalization, inequality, discrimination, injustice and many others drive individuals to Violent Extremism whereas pull factors such as fragile states, the lack of rule of law, corruption, impunity of the political elites, poverty and many more nurture the appeal of Violent Extremism. This survey was carried out to establish poverty, marginalization and exclusion as possible root causes of Violent Extremism. With a total of 321 survey respondents, 69% indicated that poverty, marginalization and exclusion are possible causes of Violent Extremism whereas 31% hold a contrary opinion. The survey therefore concludes that poverty, marginalization and social exclusion fuel Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Africa. The survey outcome emphasizes the need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only militaristic security based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the root causes and drivers of Violent Extremism that could lead to Terrorism. This involves collectively evolving appropriate responses that would enhance community resilience and make community members less susceptible to terrorist recruitment and attacks.

POLICY IMPLICATION OF THE SURVEY OUTCOME

The policy implication of the survey is that placing emphasis on kinetic military strategies alone to combat violent extremism and defeat terrorism will not be enough unless they are conducted in tandem with addressing the root causes such as marginalization, poverty and social exclusion, injustice, lack of rule of law, and bad governance in Africa. Although military strategies may be justifiable in combative situations, more practical and lasting solutions must be targeted in preventive measures. Policies geared towards preventing and combating violent extremism must necessarily consider creating conducive economic atmosphere and a sense of belonging, particularly for young people to be productive and

contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities and countries. Therefore, the Human Security approach to preventing and countering Violent Extremism, with the citizenry and their local communities as the primary referent objects of national security policy formulation and implementation are worthwhile pathway to eschewing impunity and abuse of human rights and help build trust, social cohesion and sense of belonging between Government and the citizenry. Without these, military expenditure and counter terrorism operations particularly in violent extremism zones where poverty and marginalization are pervasive will be a mirage.

RECOMMENDATION

ACSRT considers the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development adopted by the African Union on 27th June 2014 in Malabo as a formidable instrument for good governance, that seeks to protect and empower the local communities and the citizenry as a means of addressing issues such as injustice, exclusion, poverty and marginalization in African Union Member States. In essence, the Charter seeks to empower local authorities and communities to participate in the governance process through decentralization, local governance and local development. The adoption of the Charter is indeed a laudable turning point by AU member states. It seeks to address the issue of inclusion of the citizenry in governance decision making and implementation that directly affect them at the local level.

The challenge however is that the Charter has still not been ratified by the required number of 15 AU Member States that would bring it into force. As at 30th September 2018, 13 Member States have signed the charter and only 3 Member States (Burundi, Madagascar and Namibia) have ratified and deposited the Charter at the African Union Commission (AUC). It is therefore recommended for stakeholders in the business of preventing and countering violent extremism particularly ACSRT, Peace and Security Department of AU, international NGOs and CSOs working in conflict zones to advocate and create the necessary awareness that would ensure early ratification by the 15 Member States so required. The early ratification of the Charter could provide further impetus to the efforts of making economic development paramount at the local level in Africa and ensuring inclusion, social cohesion, resilience, and human security at the local level and thus surge the preponderance of Violent Extremism at the local level in African Union Member States.