
FACT SHEET

The Ongoing Drivers of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Tunisia, and Lebanon

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Despite Daesh's military defeat, many drivers that initially encouraged individuals to join, have not been addressed. Violent extremist groups understand this and are incredibly adept at adjusting their recruitment techniques.

The majority of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts have been reactive attempts to tackle the symptoms of radicalisation and have focused around state-centric security measures, military tactics, and a high involvement of security services. However, few, if any, measures have attempted to address the root human security grievances which encourage vulnerable and marginalised individuals to turn to violent extremism.

Socio-economic Factors

Radicalisation does not occur in a vacuum. Whilst ideology can undoubtedly play a role, the common factor among radicalisation drivers is that they are representative of everyday frustrations which affect multiple groups across the population. Each socio-economic driver — price hikes, unemployment, nepotism, government inefficiencies or a lack of political representation — may be insufficient on its own to encourage violent extremism, but creates an atmosphere of frustration and desperation that pushes people towards alternative options. The new worldview and purpose violent extremist groups offer, can be seen as an opportunity compared to the stagnant socio-economic and political status quo.

There is evidence from throughout the WANA region of the role socio-economic factors play in pushing people to join radical groups. According to the UNDP, Arab countries were less industrialised in 2007 than they had been in 1970, indicating a chronic stagnation in development and employment opportunities.¹ Given the large youth population and stagnant economic environment, “the unemployment rate among the young in the Arab countries is nearly double that in the world

at large.”² Whilst unemployment in itself is not a cause of support for violent extremism, the lack of purpose it cultivates can increase susceptibility to radical rhetoric.

Jordan

Price hikes and austerity measures introduced in Jordan in February 2018 have reinforced a strong and ongoing resentment amongst many civilians towards the government.³ While initial protests against the measures were small, analysts suggest that there is a quieter majority who are close to breaking point as a result of the increased living costs, high unemployment rates, and economic stagnation.⁴ Such conditions contribute to many of the cited drivers of violent extremism in Jordan. These drivers include: a search for personal identity and purpose,⁵ the presence of corruption and cronyism,⁶ distrust in the government,⁷ weak youth engagement,⁸ economic pressures and unemployment,⁹ and a strong opposition towards Israel, the West, and their perceived influence over the country.¹⁰ These should not be viewed

2 “Arab Human Development Report 2009”, UNDP.

3 “Jordanians protest over price increases”, Al Jazeera, February 24, 2018, Accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/jordanians-protest-price-increases-170224163930537.html>

4 Osama Al Sharif, “Jordanians Protest price hikes but in surprisingly small numbers”, Al Monitor, February 20, 2018, Accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/jordan-tax-price-hikes-publi-c-protests-no-confidence.html>; Suha Ma'ayeh, “Jordan protests against price rises signal growing resentment”, The National, February 5, 2018, Accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/jordan-protests-against-price-rises-signal-growing-resentment-1.702036>

5 Confidential unpublished report titled “Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan,” September 2016.

6 Ibid; Ali Younes, “Jordan: Violent Protests in Dhiban over Unemployment,” Al Jazeera, June 23, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/jordan-violent-protests-dhiban-unemployment-160623100230190.html>.

7 “Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan,” UNWOMEN, March 2016, 27.

8 Arab Human Development Report 2016, “Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality,” (UNDP, November 29, 2016).

9 Yom and Sammour, “Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan;” “Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan,” UNWOMEN; “Factors Impacting Propensity and Influence Pathways Toward Violent Extremism in Jordan: Executive Summary,” Madison Springfield Inc., November 2016; Confidential unpublished report titled “Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan.”

10 “Factors Impacting Propensity and Influence Pathways Toward Violent Extremism in Jordan: Executive Summary,” 9; Confidential unpublished report titled “Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan.”

1 “Arab Human Development Report 2009: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries,” UNDP, May 26, 2009, 10, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/Arab_human_developmentreport2009.html.

as discrete elements as their overlaps and combinations are illustrative of common frustrations faced by Jordanians. These conditions help explain why Jordan has produced one of the highest numbers of foreign fighters per capita in the past, and more pressingly, they indicate the reasons why many marginalised Jordanians might be tempted to look to such groups for support in the future.¹¹

Lebanon

The characteristics of the Lebanese state which have made it seem particularly accommodating and diverse in the past — namely the large number of religious and ethnic groups amongst its citizens — now increase its propensity to extremism. Many of Lebanon's economic and social problems are similar to those in Tunisia or Jordan — such as unemployment, lack of opportunities, corruption, and a large influx of refugees. However, the responses to, and rhetoric of, such problems are significantly altered due to Lebanon's proximity to Syria, the presence of Hezbollah, and the absence of a strong centralised power. Lebanon's outdated confessional system, compounded by the lack of a strong centralised government, means that there is an increasing tendency for different groups and neighbourhoods to informally organise and reinforce their own security, particularly those which feel abandoned or ignored by the government.

Perceptions of nepotism and a lack of transparency from local municipalities, which are often perceived as offering development projects and opportunities to those with the right personal connections, can further fuel resentment and rivalry between groups.¹² It is unsurprising that violent extremist groups capitalise on Lebanon's status as a fertile breeding ground for heightening regional Sunni-Shia divides, and try to fuel group rivalries and weaken national loyalties for their own extremist gains.

Tunisia

Tunisia was seen as the shining light of the 2011 revolutions and this position makes it unique in the region. After the removal of the Ben Ali leadership, it was the first, and only, country in the region to make substantial steps towards democratic processes with relatively little bloodshed. However, more than seven years after the start of the so-called Arab Spring, many questions remain unanswered about what has been achieved. Post-revolution expectations have rarely been met and many in Tunisia, particularly the young, are still

facing unemployment and barriers to civic involvement and political freedom. As a result, some have turned to other groups for “the finances, opportunities and the future prosperity Tunisians expected the post-Ben Ali, democratically-elected state to deliver.”¹³

Attempts by the state to respond to Tunisia's problems with violent extremism are ongoing. The public budget for security doubled between 2011 and 2016, from 10% to 20%.¹⁴ Furthermore, in June 2017 the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research allocated USD1.2 million to be used over five years on studying the roots of radicalisation amongst young people and how to combat them.¹⁵ However, up to this point there has been little national strategy beyond traditional state-centric security policies involving weapons seizures, arrests, and operations to disrupt local extremist groups.¹⁶

The Need to Focus on Human Security

P/CVE efforts must be reconceptualised within a human security paradigm. A disconnection or marginalisation from the government can push communities to rely primarily on themselves or informal support groups, such as religious networks, for support and infrastructure. This can exacerbate social divides along sectarian, tribal, or ethnic lines, and weaken a sense of national identity. Such conditions contribute to frustrations that are felt across a wide range of groups, and the breadth of those affected can make the appropriate recipients of P/CVE programming difficult to pinpoint. Nonetheless, it is vital that P/CVE efforts actively attempt to support and encourage resilience across a multitude of marginalised groups in the hope of aiding communities to resist and de-mystify the appeals of violent extremism in the future.

With current socio-economic and political grievances left unchecked, there is a real possibility for a new extremist group to emerge and market itself as the solution for marginalised individuals' grievances. Thus, youth populations across Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the region need to be given support that goes beyond militaristic state-centric security measures.

¹³ International Republican Institute, “Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia,” 5.

¹⁴ “Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy,” The International Crisis Group, June 22, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/jihadist-violence-tunisia-urgent-need-national-strategy>.

¹⁵ Khaoula Sliiti, “Tunisian Researchers Probe the Roots of Radicalisation”, Al-Fanar Media, 19 June 2017, Accessed February 26 2018, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2017/06/tunisian-researchers-probe-roots-radicalization/>

¹⁶ “Tunisia: Extremism and Counter-Extremism”, The Counter Extremism Project, Accessed February 26 2018, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/country_pdf/TN-01032018.pdf

¹¹ Ian Bremmer, “The Top 5 Countries where ISIS gets its foreign recruits,” Time Magazine, April 14, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, <http://time.com/4739488/isis-iraq-syria-tunisia-saudi-arabia-russia/>.

¹² “Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalisation: A Snapshot from Akkar,” Levant7, 15.