POST-DAESH AND STILL DESPERATE:
The Ongoing Drivers of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Tunisia, and Lebanon

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Introduction

Despite the military defeat of Daesh, many of the drivers which initially encouraged individuals to join a violent extremist group have not been addressed. Radicalisation does not occur in a vacuum and it has been increasingly shown that individuals adhere to violent extremist ideology because of contextual frustrations.[1] They adopt a new worldview and identity roles in their search for alternatives to their personal status quo.[2] Violent extremist groups have been incredibly adept at understanding this and adjusting their recruitment techniques accordingly. However, 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 — of these measures have engaged with or attempted to address the root human security causes which encourage vulnerable and marginalised individuals to turn to violent extremism.

This paper seeks to highlight and identify some of the ongoing socio-economic and political drivers of radicalisation across the WANA region, with a particular focus on Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan. All three of these countries have been affected by violent extremism despite large contextual differences in demographics, recent histories, and governance structures. However, the commonalities between the countries become clear when the socio-economic and political frustrations facing their populations are considered. These frustrations can function as drivers of radicalisation, and will be the focus of this paper.

The paper initially takes a thematic approach before considering each country in turn. This way it is hoped that important radicalisation trends, such as the role of relative deprivation and geographical marginalisation, might be highlighted between the three countries. By turning a spotlight onto the often tangible grievances which can make violent extremism appear as a valid option to individuals across the region, this paper may serve as both an effective review of the literature and a guiding note for the integration of P/CVE measures into future human security programming.

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[1] Stephen D. Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam, "Fueling Extremes," *Scientific American Mind* 27 (2016): 36; "Brief on Countering Extremism (CVE)," The Council on American-Islamic Relations, July 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.cair.com/government-affairs/13063-brief-on-countering-violent-extremism-cve.html.; Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson, and Leen Aghabi, *Trapped Between Destructive Choices: Radicalisation Drivers Affecting Youth in Jordan,* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2017), 9-21, accessed August 17, 2017, http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/trapped-between-destructive-choices-radicalisation-drivers-affecting-youth-jordan

[2] Ameen Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong.* Trans, Barbara Bray (London: Penguin books, Inc., 2003); Michael A Hogg, "From Uncertainty to Extremism: Social categorization and Identity Processes," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23 (2014): 338-342; Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock (eds.), *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty* (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2012).

1. Socio-Economic Factors

Radicalisation does not occur in a vacuum. Whilst ideology can undoubtedly play a role, the common factor amongst the following drivers of radicalisation is that they are representative of everyday frustrations which can affect multiple groups across the population. **Each socio-economic driver may not be sufficient on its own to encourage violent extremism**, but pushes people towards alternative options because of the atmosphere of frustration and desperation it cultivates. Given the new worldview and sense of purpose they offer, violent extremist groups can be seen as an opportunity for many people faced with the stagnant socio-economic and political status quo.

1.1 Marginalised Groups

There are a wide range of frustrated and marginalised groups across the region. This makes identifying who is susceptible to radicalisation difficult, and effective and efficient P/CVE programming harder. What is clear, however, is that the majority of those who join violent extremist groups are driven, to some extent, by socio-economic or political frustrations. It is these factors which should be addressed by P/CVE efforts within a broader human security framework.

Although certain groups may have clear ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliations, identities can also be widespread, interconnected, and difficult to pinpoint. For example, broad social groups such as youth or women can be seen as marginalised. So can those living in certain geographical areas such as Western Tunisia, Northern Lebanon, or Southern Jordan. These areas have complex relationships with the central government, and are sometimes overlooked or used as scapegoats as a result. Such georgraphical marginalisation can contribute towards weaker national identities and the propensity to develop other group loyalties in such areas.

Given their very low participation in the labour force, it is easy to see why **women should be considered as a marginalised group in the WANA region**.[3] However, women are commonly overlooked and perceived of as passive in radicalisation literature. There has been a certain amount of research done concerning female recruits from the West,[4] but little in the WANA region. Since the rise of Daesh, there has been a sharp increase in female foreign fighters, and women are not only becoming '*jihadi*-brides' but are also utilised "for a range of activities including logistics, recruitment,

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[3] Hafez Ghanam, "Economic Inclusion Can Help Prevent Violent Extremism in the Arab World," (Washington DC: Brookings, November 10, 2015), accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2015/11/10/economic-inclusion-can-help-prevent-violent-extremism-in-the-arab-world/.

[4] Sara Zeiger, "Policy and Program Recommendations: Role of Women in Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism," Hedayah Center, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-3032016135138.pdf; Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015; Jayne Huckerby, "When Women Become Terrorists," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/opinion/when-women-become-terrorists.html.

political safeguarding, operations, suicide bombing and combat."[5] The appeal of extremist groups for women often stems from the agency such groups offer them. In their work on *jihadi* feminism, Abu Ruman and Abu Hanieh draw attention to a number of key points of analysis.[6] First, they attribute the increase in female Daesh members to the political project Daesh represents, one which offers Western and Arab women an alternative compared to what is available to them in their home communities. Second, compared to their traditional and limited role in al-Qaeda, women joined Daesh as fighters and were engaged in violent attacks and confrontations with police in their home countries and ISIS-controlled areas. Even if martyrdom is acceptable to them, women go with the aim of living, not just dying, in Daesh-controlled areas. Female engagement in violent terrorism is a direct response to the frustration and resentment they have towards the socio-political conditions in the region. On this particular point, women's motivations are similar to those of their male counterparts.

With the highest rate of average population growth in the world, it is unsurprising that **the WANA region has an unprecedented number of young people**.[7] For example, the national median age in Jordan is currently 22, and two-thirds of the population are under the age of 30.[8] The individuals making up such a youth bulge can be considered as the broadest marginalised group, both in terms of number and background. Youth are far more likely to be unemployed than older generations and have very limited political participation. Often viewed as a potential threat by governments, youth are usually framed as a problem to be managed opposed to an important potential for the nation. Young people are surrounded by uncertainties about their future and this is inevitably exarcebated by economic difficulties. Insufficient government attention to the needs and viewpoints of young citizens has compounded feelings of frustration and weakened social cohesion amongst the youth of many WANA states.[9] The lack of opportunities to have their voice heard or goals met means that there is an appetite amongst some youth for alternative affiliations, and an outlet for their frustrations. Violent extremist groups are very adept at reaching out to such individuals and fulfilling such needs for purpose and support.

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[5] Saltman and Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," 5.

[6] Mohamad Abu Ruman and Hasan Abu Hanieh, *In Love with Martyrdom: Formation of Jihadi Feminism from al-Qaeda to the Islamic State (in Arabic),* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017).

[7] "Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality" UNDP, May 26, 2016, accessed February 22, 2018, http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2016/english/ExecutiveENG.pdf

[8] *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015.

[9] "Arab Human Development Report 2016", UNDP.

1.2 Relative Deprivation, Lack of Opportunities, and Unemployment

Evidence from throughout the WANA region illustrates the role economic and social 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**.[10] The combination of a large number of young people and a stagnant economic environment contributes to the reality that "the unemployment rate among the young in the Arab countries is nearly double that in the world at large."[11] Whilst unemployment in itself is not a cause of support for violent extremism, the feelings of frustration and lack of purpose that it cultivates can contribute to a susceptibility to radical rhetoric.

It is interesting to note that Tunisia has a comparatively high average age for the region, at around 30.[12] Furthermore, it has lower birth rates and a lower average number of children per family than most countries in the region. Some have argued that this is an important factor for the country's resilience since the 2011 revolution.[13] Despite the acts of extremist violence that have taken place in the country, and ongoing protests in January 2018 across certain areas, Tunisia has managed to avoid civil war or large scale disruption. If this link between the maturity of the population, a resilience to violent extremism, and a sustainable shift towards democracy does exist, then it suggests an important incentive for the inclusion of family planning in development programmes. Furthermore, it reinforces the pressing need for support in countries like Egypt, which have a particularly large youth bulge and no forseeable solutions to their corresponding youth unemployment and widespread frustrations.

Compounding the problem of unemployment and underemployment is the culture of **nepotism** and **corruption**, which is regularly cited as a cause of frustration and dissatisfaction with the state.[14] A respondent to a study in Tunisia suggested that many "felt that only people with money and connections can get jobs, and those who lack financial or social standing may seek for any opportunity to escape the country for income, even if that means joining violent extremist organizations."[15] Nepotism can intensify feelings of social injustice and powerlessness while limiting the agency of young people to create positive change for themselves. Similar to unemployment,

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[10] "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.

[11] "Arab Human Development Report 2009", UNDP.

[12] Emma Graham-Harrison, "Anger that drove the Arab Spring is flaring again", The Guardian, January 21 2018, accessed January 21, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/21/is-a-new-arab-spring-under-way-tunisia-riots

[13] Ibid.

[14] Samar Muhareb, "A New Social Contract for the Middle East: The Case of Jordan," The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, January 30, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.fletcherforum.org/home/2017/1/29/a-new-social-contract-for-the-middle-east-the-case-of-jordan; "Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalisation: A Snapshot from Akkar," Levant7, January 2015; "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute, Winter 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-6-1_vea_report_-_beja.pdf.

[15] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute, 11.

nepotism in itself does not cause support for violent extremism, but the corresponding social, economic, and emotional symptoms which it creates can make the rhetoric offered by violent extremist groups more appealing.

Relative deprivation refers to the sociological theory within which individuals feel they are deprived in relation to others, whether in terms of opportunities, wealth, power, etc. High unemployment rates and a culture of nepotism can contribute to a feeling of relative deprivation, causing individuals to not only feel that they are poor or unable to access provisions, but, more importantly, feel an injustice at what is available to them compared to others. This can be worse for individuals who have worked hard to gain the relevant abilities and qualifications they have, but see no appropriate rewards or opportunities for having done so. Thus, P/CVE responses to the feeling of relative deprivation need to focus on the provision of equal and appropriate economic opportunities.[16]

Feelings of relative deprivation have been connected at times to the humanitarian aid given to refugees, particularly from international agencies or governments. Host communities, who often live in equally dire circumstances, can feel overlooked as a result. However, despite initial suggestions, **there is no evidence suggesting that the presence of refugees directly increases engagement in violent extremism in the region**, or that refugee communities are a large source of radicalisation.[17] Thus, while refugees have not been found to be a source of encouragement or support for violent extremism, the presence of a large refugee population can be a contributing factor to feelings of frustration and relative deprivation among the host communities, which can push people towards extremism. Weak economies and high unemployment rates can be further exacerbated by the increasing competition for jobs from refugees, who are often equally, if not more, qualified than local applicants.[18] A large influx of refugees can heighten a sense of injustice amongst host communities, and compound frustrations with the government for failing to deal with economic problems.

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[16] Ghanam, "Economic Inclusion Can Help Prevent Violent Extremism in the Arab World"

[17] Sean Yom and Katrina Sammour, "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan: Social and Political Drivers," (New York: CTC Sentinel, April 2017), 26.

[18] "Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalisation: A Snapshot from Akkar," Levant7, 16.

2. Political Factors

Scholars generally refer to the political situation in Iraq in the 2000s when analysing the rise of violent extremist groups in the region. In particular, they refer to the US occupation of Iraq and the subsequent political vacuum it created,[19] sectarian policies of the Maliki government in Iraq,[20] and the experiences in US prisons as providing the space for recruitment of disenfranchised Sunni youth and Ba'ath senior leaders.[21] These factors partially explain the underlying political and sectarian environment that contributed to the rise of violent extremist groups in the region.

Four other regional considerations have influenced radicalisation dynamics and should be considered. First, great hopes were raised during the revolts of 2011. The euphoria of these demonstrations was based on the realisation that political change is possible and that the will of the people can prevail despite decades of authoritarian rule. This desire for change was expressed in the rise of a number of ideologically-diverse political parties,[22] and the rise of previously suppressed groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia. This gave young people hope that their legal and open participation in the political domain was possible and through it, a sense of agency in the possibility of bringing about change was awakened.

However, youth were pushed back into the margins as the prospects for development and dignity faded in the years after the protests, the army returned to power in Egypt, and the political upheavals started in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. But this peripheral position was no longer acceptable to the youth who had become aware of their potential and their disadvantaged position. In their **search for agency,** and with the desire for immediate change, violent extremist groups emerged as the actor able to assert its power on the ground and to provide youth with a role and aspirations. **Syria became a possible destination for enacting suppressed youth agency.**

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[19] Kheir al-Deen Haseeb, "Daesh: The American Responsibility (in Arabic)," Mustaqbal al-Arabi443 (2016): 7-17; Lina al-Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding (in Arabic)," (Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, June 29, 2015), 7, accessed August 17, 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/06/29/ar-60542/ibk6.

[20] Abdulrazzaq Jedi, "An Evaluation of the Syrian Spill over in Iraq" (seminar presentation, "From Beirut to Baghdad: The Regional Impact of the Syrian Conflict," Doha, Qatar, April 14, 2014), accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/04/14-regional-impact-syrian-conflict.

[21] Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda* (London: al-Saqi, 2006), 44-50; Christopher Reuter, "The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State," Der Spiegel, April 18, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html; Will McCants, *The Believer; How an Introvert with a Passion for Religion and Soccer became Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Leader of the Islamic State* (Washington, DC: Brookings, September 1, 2015), accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/thebeliever; Martin Chulov, "ISIS: the Inside Story," *The Guardian*, December 11, 2014, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story.

[22] Shadi Hamid, *Political Party Development Before and After the Arab Spring* (Washington, DC: Brookings, December 2014), accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Beyond-the-Arab-Spring.pdf.

Second, and closely related to the previous factor, is the **Sunni political crisis** in the region. The two sectarian rivals in the region — Saudi Arabia and Iran — continue to compete politically and ideologically in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. On the one hand, Iran has harnessed a number of political successes evident in the nuclear deal with the US, extending its influence in Syria and Iraq, and succeeding as a major actor in Yemen. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has failed to present itself as a trustworthy and capable political actor able to protect and represent Sunni political interests in the region.[23] Concurrently, Egypt — the traditional regional rival of Saudi Arabia — has declined in influence.[24]

For the Arab Sunni population, this current landscape means that they stand politically weaker in influencing any regional change. In **their search for a powerful Sunni actor in the region**, young people have supported violent extremist groups, even when they do not support their ideology or accept their brutality.[25] This search is deeply rooted in identity politics. According to Rawashdeh, the hundred years between 28 June 1914 — when the First World War started — and 28 June 2014 — when Baghdadi's announced his *caliphate* — help to explain the Arabs' deep identity crisis and search for relevance.[26] The fall of the Ottoman *Caliphate*, dividing the region into arbitrary nation-states, the Balfour Declaration, and the occupation of Palestine all represent major setbacks in the consciousness of Arabs.[27] Viewed this way, the rise of violent extremism is just one aspect of the complicated scene of identity politics in the region.

Third, Daesh went beyond previous groups by establishing a *caliphate* and revitalising the image of a Muslim community or *umma*. The appeal of this strategy and discourse was captured by marginalised and disengaged youth. The **weak national identities in the region were easily discarded in favour of a newly crafted powerful identity**. Sectarian, sub-national, and ideological identities prevail over national identities in the region. In a country like Lebanon, for example, state institutions are designed to accommodate and allocate for the different sectarian groups in the country, in a step that reinforces and empowers sectarian identities over national ones. In Jordan, tribal identities continue to dominate the political scene where voting for parliamentarians is usually determined by clan and tribal alliances. Jordanian ministerial positions also carefully balance northern, southern, and central tribal power centres in the country. In Tunisia, decades of bin Ali's authoritarian rule meant that the competition between secularists and Islamists emerged to full force in the years after the revolution. Brahem notes that the previous upper hand of the state over

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[23] Osama Al-Sabbagh, "Arab Sunnis between Extremism and Alliance (in Arabic)," *Rai Al-Youm*, July 3, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=281660.

[24] Maged Mandour, "The Weakening of Egypt's Regional Role," *Open Democracy*, April 24, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/maged-mandour/weakening-of-egypt-s-regional-role.

[25] Al-Sabbagh, "Arab Sunnis between Extremism and Alliance (in Arabic)."

[26] Hussain Al-Rawashdeh, "Jordan's Approach to Counter-Extremism (in Arabic)," in *Methods of Preventing and Combating Terrorism in the MENA Region and in the West* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017), 111.

[27] Ibid.

religion was reversed, until it was finally regulated in the constitution. Meanwhile, a number of religious ideologies entered Tunisia and gained support locally.[28]

Daesh's promise and creation of a state made it both unique and ultimately destructible. Given the strong importance it placed upon the creation, presence, and upkeep of a *caliphate*, it could be suggested that Daesh's military defeat should mirror an ideological one. Whilst a narrative premised around recreating the *caliphate* may have lost some of its legitimacy, there is still a search amongst many for what can be seen as a legitimate Sunni power. Perhaps this will reemerge around a rhetoric of revenge and nostalgia.[29]

Finally, **state repression** continues in the region. Although there is no linear relation between repression and extremism, since attacks also take place in liberal democracies, repression of the state can compound citizen's frustrations and contribute to radicalisation as a result.[30] For example, a recent UNDP study in sub-Saharan Africa found that 71 per cent of respondents cited government actions as the tipping point towards joining a violent extremist group.[31] Repressive security policies can push individuals towards radicalisation when human rights are undermined.[32] In Jordan, authorities have targeted relatives of those convicted of radicalisation crimes despite a lack of evidence for their link to the orginal crimes, indicating a strong state-security response and little respect for rule of law processes.[33] These policies reinforce the *takfiri* argument within *salafi-jihadi* groups which says that the state is the enemy. For example, in his discussion of Iraq, Saeed notes how in 2010 the predecessor of Daesh (the Islamic State of Iraq) defined the conflict as one tenth against the crusaders (American forces) and the rest is targeted against the apostates (army and police).[34]

This ideology is prevalent among adherents of violent extremist groups who perceive the state as their number one enemy. In this regard, state-centric security policies are perceived not in their broader purpose of stabilising the country but as tools for repression. Thus, it is imperative that P/CVE measures do not reinforce this hard state-security approach but instead focus on the human

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[28] Sami Brahem, "Tunisia's Approach to Fighting Terrorism through the 'National Counter-Terrorism Strategy' (in Arabic)," in *Methods of Preventing and Combating Terrorism in the MENA Region and in the West* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017), 149-150.

[29] Zahed Amanullah, Interview with Alethea Osborne, November 26, 2017.

[30] Khalil Anani,"On the 'Radical' Arab State (in Arabic)," *Al Araby*, April 14, 2017, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/2017/4/13/عن-المتطرفة-العربية-الدولة-1?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles.

[31] "Journey to Extremism in Africa", UNDP, 2017.

[32] Georgia Holmer, "Violent Extremism & Human Rights: A Path to Prevention," USIP, August 16, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.usip.org/blog/2016/08/violent-extremism-human-rights-path-prevention.

[33] For example, after the Karak attacks in December 2016 in Jordan, several distant cousins of the radicals involved in the attacks were discharged from the army. This was interpreted as an unfair and uncalled for when these individuals do not support the attacks or adhere to violent extremist ideologies. Anonymous civil society leader in conversation with Dr. Neven Bondokji, Extremism and Hate Speech Awareness Session, organised by Strong Cities Network, Salt, May 25, 2016.

[34] Haider Saeed, "The Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham in Iraq: Integrating the Sunni Policy in the Salafist Ideology (in Arabic)," in *The Rise of Religious Radicalisation in the Arab World: Significance, Implications and Counter-Strategies* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015), 67.

security needs of vulnerable and marginalised individuals and that the state works to present an image of working for and with its citizens opposed to against them.

The political contexts of the region have interacted to create a situation in which violent extremist groups have been able to thrive and expand their appeal to marginalised and vulnerable individuals. There are endless nuances and caveats to the ways in which radicalisation drivers have manifested, but violent extremist groups have been very adept at understanding how to cater their recruitment accordingly. Many of the political drivers which have contributed to the rise of groups like Daesh are international and very difficult to programme against in a localised context. However, it is important to consider such factors in order to better understand the differing incentives of individuals who decide to join such groups. Furthermore, it highlights the important place that civic involvement and dialogue need to have within P/CVE measures so that there can be a safe and productive space for discussing and responding to political frustrations.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Jordan

Price hikes and austerity measures which were introduced in Jordan in February 2018 have reinforced a strong and ongoing resentment amongst many civilians towards the government.[35] Furthermore, while initial protests against the measures were small, analysts suggest that there is a quieter majority that is close to breaking point as a result of the increased living costs, high unemployment rates, and economic stagnation.[36] Such conditions contribute to many of the cited drivers of violent extremism in Jordan. These drivers include: a search for personal identity and purpose,[37] the presence of corruption and cronyism,[38] distrust in the government,[39] weak youth engagement,[40] economic pressures and unemployment,[41] and a strong opposition towards Israel, the West, and their perceived influence over the country.[42] These should not be viewed as discrete elements but instead their overlaps and combinations are illustrative of common frustrations faced by Jordanians. Furthermore, they can help explain why Jordan has produced one of the highest numbers of foreign fighters per capita.[43]

It is an oversimplification and incorrect to suggest that support for violent extremist groups is only found amongst certain socio-economic groups.[44] However, it can be suggested that the pervasive culture of nepotism and an ongoing resentment of government have contributed to a culture in which individuals, particularly marginalised youth, may look for other options to provide support and meaning to their lives. It has been suggested that while support for violent extremism is low across the country, many of the beliefs and norms which are seen as indicative of extremist thought,

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[35] "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

[36] 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-pubilc-protests-no-confidence.html; Suha Ma'ayeh, "Jordan protests against price rises signal growing resentment", *The National*, Febaruary 5, 2018, Accessed February 28, 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/jordan-protests-against-price-rises-signal-growing-resentment-1.702036

[37] Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan," September 2016.

[38] 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.

[39] "Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan," UNWOMEN, March 2016, 27.

[40] Arab Human Development Report 2016, "Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality," (UNDP, November 29, 2016).

[41] 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."

[42] "Factors Impacting Propensity and Influence Pathways Toward Violent Extremism in Jordan: Executive Summary," 9; Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan."

[43] 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/.

[44] Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan;" "From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups," Mercy Corps, September 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/jordan-jihad-lure-syrias-violent-extremist-groups.

especially from a Western lens, are high.[45] While these views do not automatically translate into the adoption of violent extremism, they may create an enabling environment for violent extremist groups, particularly amongst vulnerable communities.[46] Certain geographic clusters, including the cities of Zarqa, Salt, and Ma'an, have been cited as having higher levels of extremist thought than others in Jordan.[47] Some of these communities, such as Salt, are also the location of 2018 protests against the government. It is perhaps the ongoing marginalisation, corruption, and a lack of opportunities that pushed such areas towards public protest and — at times of desperation — violent extremism.

Whilst unemployment — with national rates of 18 per cent, and closer to 40 per cent for those under the age of thirty — can clearly contribute to desperate acts, it is a mistake to directly link unemployment with the choice to join an extremist group. A report by Mercy Corps found that none of the families of fighters who had joined Daesh or Jabat Al-Nusra had received monetary incentives.[48] Furthermore, the majority (19 out of 23) of the fighters they profiled were employed at the time of their recruitment, including as doctors and engineers.[49] A WANA Institute report which mapped the journeys of fighters from Ma'an has confirmed the same phenomenon, and found that fighters will in fact pay recruiters to facilitate their journey to Syria, opposed to being paid money themselves.[50] Thus, the argument that individuals joined radical groups in Syria because of economic matters loses weight and it is perhaps not unemployment which drives some to join violent extremist groups, but instead underemployment and relative deprivation.

Compounding the sense of frustration and mistreatment by the authorities which many young Jordanians feel, is the growing reality that succeeding in education does not necessarily improve their prospects. Unemployment rates are higher for those who hold undergraduate degrees than for those who hold just high school diplomas, and Jordan's Department of Statistics suggests that 21 per cent of Jordanian men with a bachelor's degree or higher are unemployed, and that number jumps to 71 per cent for women.[51] Yom and Sammour argue that "going to college penalizes young Jordanians because it reduces their likelihood of finding work commensurate with their skill level."[52] For many,

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[45] Alaa' Al-Rawashdeh, "Ideological Extremism from the Perspective of Jordanian Youth (in Arabic)," *Arab Journal for Security Studies and Training* 31 (2015); Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan;" "Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality;" Al-Rawashdeh, "Ideological Extremism from the Perspective of Jordanian Youth (in Arabic)."; "Factors Impacting Propensity and Influence Pathways Toward Violent Extremism in Jordan," Madison Springfieled Inc.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "Factors Impacting Propensity and Influence Pathways Toward Violent Extremism in Jordan," 8.

[48] Mercy Corps, "From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups," 3.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Neven Bondokji and Erica Harper, "Journey Mapping of Jordanian Foreign Fighters" (Amman: The WANA Institute, August 2017).

[51] Yom and Sammour, "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan: Social and Political Drivers," 27; Areej Abuqudairi, "Jordan: 'We Are Tired of Living Like the Dead,'" Al Jazeera, July 30, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/jordan-tired-living-dead-160728105144182.html.

[52] Yom and Sammour, "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan: Social and Political Drivers," 27.

this is connected to corruption and a lack of meritocracy.[53] This makes certain attempts by the government to tackle unemployment, such as the suggestion of replacing foreign migrant workers, who typically work in construction or food-services, with Jordanians, appear misguided and unsatisfactory for those looking for jobs.[54] The desperation of unemployment and a lack of prospects can also manifest in other ways; for example, in 2016, a group of unemployed men were talked down from jumping off a building near the interior ministry in Amman.[55]

Along with failing to enable individuals to enter the world of work, education systems in Jordan have been criticised for nurturing extremism. The reinforcement of certain stereotypes, such as discriminatory attitudes towards Shia, Christians, and women, along with a lack of critical thinking has helped to make individuals susceptible to violent extremism.[56] Furthermore, "the suppression of critical thinking and learning in favour of memorisation by rote increases vulnerability to VE/VEO recruitment as students are ill-prepared to question extremist teaching."[57] A lack of enquiry helps to explain why those with higher levels of education appear to be as susceptible to dogmatic and extreme Islamist rhetoric as those without it.

A distrust of the government and broad lack of faith in state systems can not only compound feelings of frustration and disconnect, but can also complicate P/CVE programming. Parents distrust the ability of the state to support them in helping to stop their children becoming radicalised, and have said that they would be unwilling to turn to the state as the potential repercussions against those they reported could be extreme.[58] Beyond the distrust many Jordanians feel for government programmes, P/CVE programmes are also sometimes seen as implementing a foreign agenda.[59] The strong state-security response to radicalisation reinforces a general mistrust of the government amongst much of the population.

In general, support for violent extremist organisations in Jordan appears to have declined in recent years.[60] However, socio-economic factors that enabled this support prevail. For example, a report conducted by UN Women found that 82 per cent of respondents in Jordan perceived social and

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[53] Younes, "Jordan: Violent Protests in Dhiban over Unemployment."

[54] Abuqudairi, "Jordan: 'We are Tired of Living Like the Dead.'"

[55] Abuqudairi, "Jordan: 'We are Tired of Living Like the Dead;'" "Suicide Case Every Three Days in Jordan (in Arabic)," *AlGhad*, July 6, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, http://alghad.com/articles/1433942-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%83%D9%84-3-%D8%A3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-(%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88).

[56] Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan."

[57] Ibid,14.

[58] "Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan," UNWOMEN, 24.

[59] Ibid., 27.

[60] A 2014 poll by the Center for Strategic Studies found that only 62 per cent of Jordanians considered ISIS to be a "terrorist group," whereas a 2015 poll by the International Republican Institute found that 89 per cent of Jordanians considered ISIS to be a "terrorist organisation." The change in public opinion may be attributable to the death of Moath al-Kasasbeh in 2015. Furthermore, criticisms are held across Jordan for any group which condones the killing of Muslims by other Muslims.

economic factors to be the biggest radicalisation drivers in the country.[61] Another report, carried out in 2016, found that 79 per cent believed anger over unequal economic opportunities is a very, extremely, or important factor in attracting Jordanians to violent extremism.[62] Yet another study, carried out amongst university students, cited social factors such as dysfunctional families, peer influence, weak feelings of national identity, and the spreading usage of drugs, as sources of support for violent extremism.[63] Thus, while ideology can provide a strong pull factor for individuals its success is linked to a lack of alternatives.[64] Given the high levels of corruption, unemployment, and relative deprivation, which are increasing as a result of government measures in 2018, it is unsurprising that young people are attracted to the promises and rhetoric of violent extremist groups. Given the political and economic climate, it should be asked what alternatives to violent extremism can P/CVE measures provide to marginalised individuals in the future?

3.2 Lebanon

The political context of Lebanon is unlike any other country, and its unique idiosyncrasies inevitably impact on the rise of violent extremism in the country. Many of the economic and social problems in Lebanon are similar to those in Tunisia or Jordan, such as unemployment, lack of opportunities, and a large influx of refugees. However, the responses to, and rhetoric of, such problems are significantly altered due to the country's sectarian divisions, including the presence of Hizbullah, and the absence of a strong centralised power. Thus, it is worth considering how some of these factors specifically affect the drivers of violent extremism in 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 registered amongst its citizens, are now factors that help to increase its propensity to extremism. The very structure of Lebanon's confessional political system reinforces sectarian identities by dividing power along religious lines.[65] The system is outdated and no longer reflects demographic realities on the ground, but political stagnation and sectarian tensions mean that little effort has been made to change it.[66]

This 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. At times, group loyalties can extend even to those who are outside of the national boundaries. For example, Sally Nelson has argued, "Lebanese Sunnis who draw their sense of identity from the sect rather than the nation thus express a great deal of loyalty towards their Syrian co-religionists".[67] This has

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[61] "Women and Violent Radicalisation in Jordan," UNWOMEN, 7.
[62] Confidential unpublished report titled "Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan."
[63] Al-Rawashdeh, "Ideological Extremism from the Perspective of Jordanian Youth (in Arabic)."
[64] Yom and Sammour, "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan," 25.
[65] Sally Nelson, "Is Lebanon's Confessional System Sustainable?" *Journal of Political and International Studies* 9 (2013): 332-387.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 363.

been illustrated by the instances of Lebanese Sunnis travelling across to Syria to fight alongside Sunni rebel forces.[68]

Sectarian differences across the country can often be mapped geographically, as can areas of high unemployment or poverty rates, and there appears to be a link between opportunities and religious identity. In particular, there is a clear divide between the poorer, Sunni-dominated northern regions, such as the Akkar Governorate, and the south of Lebanon which has a strong Shia presence, traditionally represented politically by Hezbollah and the Amal movement. This can compound tensions along religious lines as poor Sunni populations can feel resentment towards others and increased feelings of relative deprivation. Furthermore, perceptions of nepotism and a lack of transparency from local municipalities, which are often perceived as offering development projects and opportunities to those that have the right personal connections, can further fuel resentment and rivalry between groups.[69]

Historically poor and neglected governorates like Akkar have been particularly affected by the influx of Syrian refugees in the last five years, and it has been argued by Levant7 that, "the recent influx of refugees, the near collapse of the state, and exacerbated economic hardship caused by the closing of the border have all compounded the region's vulnerability to radicalization, particularly among the Sunni majority."[70] Levant7's study has placed a clear importance on how the presence of Syrian refugees has affected the Sunni population's susceptibility to radicalisation. However, Raphael Lefevre has argued that opposed to the growth of Sunni extremism in Lebanon being a spillover from Iraq and Syria, "the roots of Sunni radicalization are local and run deep."[71] He argues that the most prominent factors behind the rise of Sunni extremism in Lebanon are the growing resentment of Hezbollah and the lack of options for the Sunni community to support beyond the increasingly disconnected Future Movement.[72] This view is further explained by Al Mawla, who clarifies how Sunni Salafism in Lebanon has turned violent.[73] He has documented a series of allegations, media manipulations, and orchestrated attacks in Sunni areas carried out by Hezbollah in order to create tensions between the Lebanese army and Sunni population.[74] Since then, the decision of Hezbollah to side with the Syrian regime has intensified Sunni feelings of resentment and marginalisation.

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of the local level of distrust and resentment between Sunni and Shia groups in Lebanon, it is important to revisit the historical context. The Sunni

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[68] Nour Malas and Farnaz Fassihi, "Syria's Escalating War Bleeds into Lebanon," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 9,2013, accessed August 17, 2017, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323361804578388410856381092.html?mod=WSJ_article_comments#articleTabs%3Darticle.

[69] "Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalisation: A Snapshot from Akkar," Levant7, 15.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Raphael Lefevre, "Tackling Sunni Radicalization in Lebanon," Carnegie Middle East Center, December 24, 2014, accessed August 17, 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/12/24/tackling-sunni-radicalization-in-lebanon-pub-57592.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Saouad Al Mawla, *"Salafis in Lebanon: New Manifestations of a Movement*," Policy Analysis Series (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, January 2015), 1-4.

[74] Ibid.

marginalisation which took place in Lebanon throughout the decades in which Syria controlled Lebanon escalated into a sense of Sunni victimhood and political crisis with the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri in 2005[75] and the following assassinations of key Sunni political figures.[76] While the refugee presence has exacerbated problems in the country, it cannot be blamed for creating them. Instead, for a country that places so much importance on religious identities and demographics, the influx of Syrian refugees has changed the proportional populations of religious groups and thus heightened already existing tensions and insecurities between Sunnis and Shias.[77] Therefore, when Hezbollah described its involvement in Syria as a "*jihad* duty," Sunni groups responded that it was their *jihad* duty to fight Hezbollah.[78]

There are few alternatives for the Sunni community in Lebanon to support other than the Future Movement, which means that rising disenchantment with the party, which has its leadership living abroad, can result in a large number of people seeking other avenues through which to vent their political frustrations. Lefevre has written,

> "the situation is particularly worrying because the majority of Lebanon's Sunni community lives in areas that are socioeconomically marginalized from the rest of the country. The city of Tripoli has emerged as a symbol of these trends. Long considered the jewel in Lebanon's crown, Tripoli has recently lost much of its economic and political firepower and is now struggling with recurring violence, poverty, and pockets of Islamic radicalism."[79]

Close to the Akkar governorate, the city of Tripoli is a Sunni concentrated area that has many of the same conditions that Akkar does, and according to a UN-ESCWA report in 2011, 60 per cent of Tripoli's households are 'deprived', with almost half of them 'extremely deprived'.[80] Whilst ISIS does not command areas of land in Lebanon, as it does in Syria and Iraq, some have suggested that it has footholds in the northeast of Lebanon, particularly along its border with Syria.[81] Both Levant7 and Leferve's studies report similar results for these northern areas of Lebanon: an increased propensity for extremist groups in the face of unemployment, underemployment, resentment for Hezbollah, and disenchantment with the Future Movement.

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[75] Nelson, "Is Lebanon's Confessional System Sustainable?"

[76] Bissane El Cheikh, "The Tension of the Sunni Environment in Lebanon Produces Individual Extremism not Organized Terrorism (in Arabic)," in *The Rise of Religious Radicalisation in the Arab World: Significance, Implications and Counter-Strategies* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015), 47-49.

[77] Sally Nelson, "Is Lebanon's Confessional System Sustainable?"

[78] El Cheikh, "The Tension of the Sunni Environment in Lebanon Produces Individual Extremism not Organized Terrorism (in Arabic)," p. 47.

[79] Lefevre, "Tackling Sunni Radicalization in Lebanon."

[80] "Lebanon Millennium Development Goals Report 2013-2014," UNDP, 2014, 25, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.un.org.lb/Library/Assets/2013-2014-Millenium-Development-Goals-Lebanon-Report.pdf.

[81] Fady Dergham, "The Spread of ISIS Into Lebanon: A Strategic Response to Counter the Threat," *Defense Magazine* 96, April 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/spread-isis-lebanon-strategic-response-counter-threat

Much of Lebanon, and particularly areas like Beirut, are battling to keep their moderate and open-minded reputation. Images, including a widely circulated photo of a girl wearing a skimpy outfit while carrying an ISIS flag, have been used as evidence by some that many Lebanese do not take the ideology associated with such groups seriously.[82] Furthermore, Lebanon was the birthplace of a social media trend in which locals posted pictures of themselves burning ISIS flags with the corresponding hashtag #burnISISflagchallenge.[83] Such efforts build a feeling inside and outside the country that Lebanon could have a particular immunity to extremist groups. However, as it was accurately noted by the Washington Post, "it only takes a minority of extremists to cause a lot of trouble."[84]

Recently, organisations and the government have attempted to create a more coordinated CVE effort in Lebanon, and the prime minister, Saad Hariri, launched a national CVE strategy in 2017.[85] Furthermore, since the beginning of 2018, the EU has been working with the Lebanese National PVE Coordinator to organise workshops which focus on the role of prison rehabilitation and internet monitoring.[86] These workshops hoped to highlight the need for alternative narratives to the violent discourse offered by extremist groups and highlighted the power of such narratives despite the military defeat of Daesh. While the use of alternative narratives and prison reform are important points to consider within P/CVE strategies, it is difficult in Lebanon to gather all relevant stakeholders given the lack of political unity or coordination. It seems natural to have doubts about how effective such efforts can be across such a divided country.

A lack of government legitimacy, high rates of both unemployment and underemployment, weakening social ties, widespread feelings of distrust and disenfranchisement, corruption, and a large refugee population, are all drivers of extremism which are by no means unique to Lebanon. However, there are particular caveats to the Lebanese situation which exacerbate such frustrations. The presence of Hezbollah and its involvement in the Syrian war, along with the lack of a strong Sunni political representation are reinforcing certain prejudices and cultivating a growing sense of vulnerability amongst Sunni communities. In such circumstances, extremist groups are more than happy to offer themselves as an alternative authority to fill the resulting political vacuums.

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[82] Liz Sly, "Lebanon's Sunnis at Risk of Radicalisation," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2012, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/lebanons-sunnis-at-risk-of-radicalization/2012/10/30/90a15816-229f-11e2-92f8-7f9c4daf276a_story.html?utm_term=.114d6ea33aa1.

[83] Ewan Palmer, "'Burn ISIS Flag Challenge' Goes Viral in Arab World," *International Business Times*, September 4, 2014, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/burn-isis-flag-challenge-goes-viral-arab-world-1464002.

[84] Sly, "Lebanon's Sunnis at Risk of Radicalisation."

[85] The Daily Star, "Hariri launches national strategy against violent extremism", July 18 2017, Accessed February 21 2018, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Jul-18/413136-hariri-launches-national-strategy-against-violent-extremism.ashx; An example of an organisation attempting to coordinate CVE efforts is UNESCO: "Beirut International conference explores ways to counter violent extremism in cyberspace", UNESCO,19 May 2017, Accessed February 19 2018, https://en.unesco.org/news/beirut-international-conference-explores-ways-counter-violent-extremism-cyberspace.

[86] "EU and Middle East and North Africa Join Forces in Beirut to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism", European Union Extrenal Action, January 18 2018, Accessed February 26, 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/38415/eu-and-middle-east-and-north-africa-join-forces-beirut-prevent-and-counter-violent-extremism_en

3.3 Tunisia

Any discussion concerning Tunisia has to place the country clearly within its recent history of the 2011 Arab revolutions and subsequent events. 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, Tunisia was the first, and only, country in the region to make substantial steps towards democratic processes with relatively little bloodshed. However, seven years after the start of the so-called Arab Spring there are a lot of questions still 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. It is not surprising then that 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."[87]

While it has been of low intensity at times, violent extremism in Tunisia has persistently spread since the overthrow of Ben Ali in 2011.[88] It has been reported that, as well as significant numbers of Tunisians leaving the country to join extremist groups abroad, "several sleeper cells, some of which are in contact with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and IS, reportedly exist throughout the country in both urban and suburban areas."[89] The reasons for this ongoing presence of violent extremism in Tunisia are multiple and have been cited by differing sources as including: an ongoing lack of civilian trust in political powers,[90] corruption,[91] unemployment,[92] inequality, and marginalisation,[93] Tunisia's geographic position,[94] and inefficient and clumsy government responses to radical groups.[95]

Having sparked a wave of revolutions across the Arab world in 2011 and emerged as one of the region's sole democracies, it is darkly ironic that Tunisia is now thought to have supplied more

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[87] International Republican Institute, "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," 5.

[88] "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.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Christian Caryl, "Why Does Tunisia Produce So Many Terrorists?" *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/15/why-does-tunisia-produce-so-many-terrorists-nice-france-truck-terrorist-attack/.

[91] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute.

[92] Caryl, "Why Does Tunisia Produce so Many Terrorists;" George Packer, "Exporting Jihad," *The New Yorker,* March 28, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring.

[93] Packer, "Exporting Jihad."

[94] Packer, "Exporting Jihad;" "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute,; Siham Drissi, "The Reality of the Terrorist Phenomenon in Tunisia's Nascent Democracy," *The Washington Institute*, 2015, August 17, 2017, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-reality-of-the-terrorist-phenomenon-in-tunisias-nascent-democracy.

[95] Alice Su, "Look What Freedom Has Brought Us: Terrorism on the Beach," *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/06/tunisia-sousse-isis-democracy/397169/; Hugh Naylor, "Can Tunisia crack down on terror while preserving its democracy?" *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2015, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/can-tunisia-crack-down-on-terror-while-preserving-its-democracy/2015/06/30/70991772-1e62-11e5-a135-935065bc30d0_story.html?utm_term=.9d62ce52bac1.

foreign fighters to Syria, Libya, and Iraq than any other country.[96] As well as the export of fighters, there has also been ongoing low level disruption inside Tunisia itself, at times sparking violent and attention-grabbing events. After an attack on the US embassy in September 2012, organised in part by Ansar Al-Sharia, the government adopted a more severe security approach to Islamic groups. The assassination of two politicians in February and June 2013 further pushed the government to declare Ansar Al-Sharia a terrorist organisation and ban it from the country.[97] As a result, operatives scattered; some across the border to train with Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and others went to join ISIS in Syria.[98] In 2015, the strengthened ties between ISIS and Tunisian cells were illustrated when more than 60 foreign tourists were killed in attacks at the Bardo museum in Tunisia and the Marhaba Hotel in el Kantaoui, with ISIS quickly claiming responsibility for both. These attacks have had a devastating effect on the reputation of Tunisia as a sea of calm in the region and caused its tourism industry to be almost obliterated. Furthermore, skirmishes have become regular along the border with Libya, and in March 2016 a group of Tunisian extremists tried, but failed, to take control of the city of Ben Guerdane, which is 30km from the Libyan border.

The freedoms allowed to flourish after the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime and the emergence of democratic systems has provided a boost for Islamist groups who had been forced underground by the former secularist regime.[99] It has been suggested that cultural marginalisation of religious thought and actors during Ben Ali's rule have resulted in a shallow religious knowledge and the absence of a trustworthy and legitimate religious authority in Tunisia.[100] This created a hybrid situation whereby youth were ignorant about religion but at the same time thirsty for religious knowledge. Local religious authorities able to respond to such a need have been lacking and thus, youth have been susceptible to the extremist recruitment of groups claiming to have religious legitimacy and knowledge.[101]

Furthermore, since 2011, groups have been able to better organise, travel, and share information. This has led some to suggest that while many of the reforms introduced since 2011 have attempted to placate the demands of the revolution they have left some of the security apparatuses fatally weakened and incapable of responding to the threats of violent extremism. This concern may have been partially diluted by the efficient response to the attacks on Ben Guerdane in 2016 but it seems clear there is still an ongoing lack of faith in the competency of official forces in tackling the problem.[102]

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[96] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute, 17.
[97] David Kilcullen, *Blood Year: Islamic State and The Failure of the War on Terror* (Carlton, Australia: Black Inc., 2016), 130.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Eric Reguly, "Tunisia: North Africa's New Hihadi Hotbed," *The Globe and Mail*, February 15, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/tunisia-north-africas-new-jihadihotbed/article34041469/.
[100] Packer, "Exporting Jihad."
[101] Brahem, "Tunisia's Approach to Fighting Terrorism through the 'National Counter-Terrorism Strategy' (in Arabic)," 159.
[102] Caryl, "Why Does Tunisia Produce So Many Terrorists?"

Raised expectations after the revolution in 2011 have also meant that many are perhaps more impatient and resentful of government failures than before. A study carried out by the International Republican Institute (IRI) at the end of 2016 reported that there is "a nexus between high expectations that have been disappointed by the post-revolution Tunisian government and continued grievances over issues such as the dearth of economic opportunity, corruption and harassment by security services."[103] After 2011, just when many Tunisians were expecting their standard of living and wellbeing to improve, it often began to fall. IRI suggests that this has been exacerbated by the government's inability to mitigate citizens' expectations and the ongoing presence of "corruption, regionalism, and state harassment."[104]

As is typical for the region at large, the level of unemployment in Tunisia is above the global average and thought to be significantly higher for young people, at around 40 per cent.[105] Similar to Jordan, those who have higher levels of education are even more likely to be unemployed than those without education.[106] The frustration of this situation is one of the reasons so many people took to the streets in 2011. However, despite initial hopes, the economic situation has worsened for many. The main cause has been the catastrophic impact events of the last five years — particularly the 2015 attacks — have had on the tourism industry.[107] It is thought that "the already struggling economy has lost as much as $2 billion" between 2015 and 2016.[108] With few options in sight, many unemployed youth, despite having experience and qualifications, now feel increasingly hopeless and can become susceptible to recruitment from extremist groups as a result.

Compounding the problem of unemployment is the lack of entertainment for young people. For example, individuals interviewed in the poor area of Douar Hicher complained about having few outlets in which to have fun, and criticised the efforts that did exist for being run by 'wealthy kids' who did not understand the needs of locals.[109]

Many people in Tunisia also feel that the government structures in place will not support or provide for them. Thus, some look for support and provisions elsewhere. Similar to Jordan and Lebanon, there is a widespread culture of nepotism and bribery in Tunisia, but respondents in Tunisia also mentioned the fact that officials and civil servants have little incentive to work hard or effectively, as

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[103] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," International Republican Institute, 4.

[104] Ibid., 5.

[105] UN Radio,"Tunisia Youth Unemployment a 'Serious Problem,' says UN Chief," March 29, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2016/03/tunisia-youth-unemployment-a-serious-problem-says-un-chief/#.WW827xhh1mB.

[106] Packer, "Exporting Jihad"

[107] Karina Piser, "Tunisia's Democratic Reforms Overshadowed by the Threat of Returning Jihadis," *World Politics Review*, March 3, 2017, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/21419/tunisia-s-democratic-reforms-overshadowed-by-the-threat-of-returning-jihadis.

[108] Guy Taylor, "Arab Spring Star Tunisia Emerges as Islamic State's No. 1 Source for Foreign Fighters," *The Washington Times*, September 14, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/sep/14/tunisia-emerges-as-isiss-no-1-source-for-foreign-f/.

[109] Packer, "Exporting Jihad."

they are paid regardless of their efforts.[110] Unsurprisingly, this means that public officials, along with security services, are often seen as corrupt, self-serving, and unwilling to listen to the concerns of civilians.[111] Unmet expectations, and a mistrust of the services and official channels of complaint available to them means that many Tunisians see themselves, or their community networks, as the primary providers of security and opportunity, as opposed to the state.

The final consideration for Tunisia's relationship to violent extremism are its geographic conditions. In particular, Tunisia's border with Libya is seen as an ongoing source of radical rhetoric and it is almost impossible to totally patrol, meaning that fighters can cross into Libya for training, and weapons can easily be smuggled back into the country. Within the country itself there are widespread notions, particularly among the young, about the economic discrepancies which exist, particularly between the coastal and inland areas.[112] The perceived difference in treatment by the government towards particular regions of the country, and the practical disparities in day to day living for those in the more prosperous coastal areas compared to those living inland, can build resentment and internal divides in the Tunisian population. This can contribute to a feeling of marginalisation, relative deprivation, and personal grievances which can push people towards other groups which appear to provide them with a clearer identity and purpose.

Attempts to respond to Tunisia's problems with violent extremism are ongoing. The public budget for security doubled between 2011 and 2016, from 10 per cent to 20 per cent.[113] Furthermore, in June 2017 the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research allocated $1.2 million to be used over five years on studying the roots of radicalisation amongst young peope and how to combat it.[114] 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.[115] Furthermore, it appears that there is a lack of clear coordination between parts of the government, and responses to radical groups tend to be repressive and ad-hoc.[116] Certain strategies, such as travel limitations for Tunisians under the age of 35, can also stoke frustrations amongst marginalised groups and build resentement for the security services.[117]

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[110] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," *International Republican Institute*, 12.

[111] Ibid., 14.

[112] "Promoting Youth Engagement and Countering Violent Extremism in Libya and Tunisia," *United States Institute for Peace*, 2016, accessed August 17, 2017, https://www.usip.org/grants-fellowships/grants/promoting-youth-engagement-and-countering-violent-extremism-libya-and.

[113] "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.

[114] Khaoula Sliti, "Tunisian Researchers Probe the Roots of Radicalisation", *Al-Fanar Media*, 19 June 2017, Accessed Febraury 26 2018, https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2017/06/tunisian-researchers-probe-roots-radicalization/

[115] "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

[116] "Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy,"

[117] Sarah Mersch, "Tunisia's Radicalised Youth", Deutsche Welle, December 21st, 2016, Accessed February 26 2018, http://www.dw.com/en/tunisias-radicalized-youth/a-36868952

Considering drivers of radicalisation and recent events within the country, it is understandable why state-centric security measures are necessary, however human security measures also need to be adopted. The disillusionment amongst citizens, particularly young people, with the government and security services needs to be directly addressed. Furthermore, it is imperative that government, civil society, and religious leaders attempt to work together, opposed to simply for their own interests, in an effort to increase trust and communication between organisations and across different parts of the country.

4. Conclusion

This report has focused in particular on socio-economic and political drivers of violent extremism in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Beyond functioning as a summary of such drivers, this report hopes to highlight their persistent nature and the need to continually address them. Shared conditions across the region include high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and relative deprivation. These can fuel feelings of discontent and uselessness, which can further push individuals to search for other channels through which to find purpose and structure in their lives. Such problems are compounded by a distrust in state institutions and a widespread perception of the strong role corruption and cronyism play in society, including in career opportunities and political representation.

Socio-economic and political frustrations in Jordan are ongoing, and appear to be growing. Bubbling resentment for the government can be seen in the small protests held in response to price hikes at the beginning of 2018. However, it is important to note that while individuals may be driven by economic frustrations, their motivation does not neatly equate to unemployment and poverty but is instead more accurately linked to underemployment or relative deprivation. The widespread perception of corruption and nepotism across Jordan compounds individual frustrations over the lack of opportunities in the country. Furthermore, with promises of success after education appearing increasingly unrealistic, it is unsurprising that many of the large youth population in the country may feel disenfranchised with the state and seek alternative sources of support or meaning. Violent extremist groups have been historically adept at adapting their recruitment techniques in response to such grievances and it is imperative that P/CVE measures do the same.

Lebanon's demographic gives the country a unique national context. The vacuum created by the lack of a centralised government means that an already weak national identity is eroded further and instead, identity is primarily structured along sectarian lines and in-group loyalties. In particular, Sunni groups in traditionally marginalised areas of northern Lebanon have few clear political representatives in Lebanon, and hold strong loyalties towards the Sunni groups in Syria. As a result, it may be easier for them to be influenced by events in Syria and the rhetoric of injustice that is peddled by violent extremist groups operating there. Furthermore, the presence and strength of Hizbollah in the country, and its loyalty to the Assad regime in Syria, can heighten already strong Shia-Sunni tensions. Such tensions, while sometimes specific to Lebanon, are combined with conditions found more widely across the region including economic and political uncertainty, a weak infrastructure, high rates of unemployment, and corruption. Thus, as in Jordan or Tunisia, socio-economic and political drivers are demonstrably affecting the propensity to violent extremism in the country.

Tunisia provides a fascinating comparison to Lebanon and Jordan due to its apparent paradox of being perceived as both the biggest success from the so-called Arab Spring and the largest exporter of foreign fighters per capita. Fundamental problems which were facing the population, and

particularly the youth, in 2011, are still prevalent today. These include unemployment and lack of opportunities, along with barriers to civic engagement and political participation. Hopes were raised in 2011 about the changes that may take place in the country but the inevitable difficulties of achieving such changes, and disagreements about what a post-Ben Ali Tunisia might look like, has instead often reinforced feelings of injustice and frustration. The freedoms which did develop in the wake of the revolution allowed groups, including Islamist organisations, to operate more openly and as other options increasingly appeared to achieve little, individuals may have become more susceptible to an extreme discourse. In a pattern seen across the region, economic problems in Tunisia have been further compounded by terror attacks which have decimated the tourist industry.

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 which run along sectarian, tribal, or ethnic lines, and weaken a sense of national identity or pride. 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 actively attempts to support and encourage resilience across a multitude of marginalised groups in the hope of aiding communities to resist and demystify the appeals of violent extremism in the future.

Significant events, such as the murder of the Jordanian pilot Moath Al-Kasasbeh, or the attacks at the Bardo museum in Tunisia, shape public opinion towards violent extremist groups. Support or sympathy for such groups appears to have dropped in recent years as a result of what are seen as impious fighting methods, and perhaps as a result of disenchanted returnees' accounts of the reality of *jihad*. However, it is important to realise that the drivers that initially encouraged such allegiances have not gone, and in some cases socio-economic and political tensions have been exacerbated instead, for example as a consequence of the price hikes in Jordan at the beginning of 2018.

By highlighting the socio-economic and political factors which can manifest as drivers of violent extremism in Jordan, Tunisia, and Lebanon, this paper has sought to illustrate the importance of reconceptualising P/CVE efforts within a human security paradigm. With current socio-economic and political grievances left unchecked, there is a real possibility that if a new extremist group emerges which can market itself as the solution for marginalised individuals' grievances it could be just as successful in garnering recruits as any other has been thus far. Therefore, support which goes beyond militaristic state-centric security measures must be given to the youth populations across all three countries, and the region more broadly.

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