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Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso

Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity



BY AUGUSTIN LOADA AND PETER ROMANIUK

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CES	Conseil Économique et Social du Burkina Faso [Economic and Social Council of Burkina Faso]
CFA franc	Communauté Financière Africaine [African Financial Community] franc
CGCC	Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation
CVE	Countering violent extremism
DSB	U.S. Defense Science Board
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
GCTF	Global Counterterrorism Forum
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIABA	Le Groupe Intergouvernemental d'Action contre le Blanchiment d'Argent en Afrique de l'Ouest [Inter Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa]
ICG	International Crisis Group
MINUSMA	La Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali [UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali]
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest [Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa]
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
REN-LAC	Réseau National de Lutte Anti-Corruption [National Anti-Corruption Network]
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
U.S.	United States
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Burkina Faso has a reputation for being relatively peaceful and stable in an insecure region. Violent extremism has significantly impacted other Sahelian and West African states, especially in light of the conflict in Mali and the increase in terrorist violence in northern Nigeria. Burkina Faso's relative stability has meant that it has attracted less attention than its neighbors in international and regional security debates. Nevertheless, maintaining relative peace and security in Burkina Faso should be a priority for all stakeholders; and stability there is relative, not absolute. A crisis in Burkina Faso would be costly for Burkinabes and the region. Understanding the sources of relative peace and security in Burkina Faso can yield insights for countering violent extremism in the region and beyond.

This study asks, What is the extent of violent extremism in Burkina Faso today? What are the origins of violent extremism or its likely sources? What are the sources of resilience against violent extremism in Burkina Faso? To answer these questions, we undertook extensive desk research and placed a premium on field work, conducting in-depth interviews, convening focus groups with a wide range of stakeholders in five locations across Burkina Faso, and gathering a significant amount of original data.

We find that Burkina Faso is vulnerable to the threat of violent extremism because structural conditions, or “push factors,” that increase the risk of violent extremism are prevalent in the country. These include political drivers such as endemic corruption and impunity

for well-connected elites; socioeconomic drivers such as frustrated expectations, relative deprivation, and unmet social and economic needs; and cultural drivers, including religious factors.

Despite the prevalence of push factors, we found only modest evidence regarding extremism at the individual and group levels. We looked for “pull factors” resulting from spillovers from regional extremist violence, radicalization among individuals or groups domestically, and the presence of foreign extremists, i.e., from outside the region. We found a few cases of Burkinabe involvement in extremist activity but gained the impression that these incidents were isolated. Where we did find evidence of Burkinabe involvement in extremism, it was the result of organized recruitment efforts by well-resourced regional extremist groups, although we cannot claim that this reflects a trend.

In sum, Burkina Faso is vulnerable to violent extremism, but the threat is not imminent. There is a prevalence of push factors but a near absence of pull factors. To some extent, this reflects the nascent counterterrorism measures being advanced by the Burkinabe government to manage this vulnerability, often with the support of regional and international partners. Many sources of resilience are present in Burkina Faso. These derive from the state and civil society and provide a basis for stakeholders to act to prevent violent extremism in Burkina Faso.

We recommend that stakeholders—the government of Burkina Faso, donor governments, and civil society—

take steps to nurture resilience through measures that promote development and social cohesion. These include initiatives to improve governance, address identity-based grievances, and build the capacity of the Burkinabe state to counter violent extremism, as well as measures to advance the work of civil society in such key sectors as education and with key actors, such as youth.

In the short term, a successful political transition in 2015 and a more robust response to the grievances expressed by the population are the best chances to maintain peace and stability and to mitigate the effects of structural conditions that might otherwise lead to conflict and violent extremism.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, the UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel, former Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, presented to the Security Council the UN integrated security strategy for the Sahel. Although the situation in Mali had rightly commanded the world's attention that year, leading to military intervention by France and the deployment of support missions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations, Prodi underscored to the council that "[t]he situation in Mali is clearly seen by all to be symptomatic of what will happen in other parts of the Sahel if a timely response is not generated to the challenges facing the entire Sahel region."¹ The Secretary-General's report on the situation in the Sahel leaves little doubt about the scope and complexity of problems facing the region: "The security environment in the Sahel remains fragile. The threat of terrorism, trafficking and organized crime requires a comprehensive response. Our collective focus needs to be simultaneously on security, diplomacy and development, taking subregional and regional threats and opportunities into consideration Business as usual is not an option."² The integrated strategy itself is built around four pillars: governance, security, and humanitarian and develop-

ment programming. Among the multitude of regional and international bodies tasked with implementing the strategy, UN counterterrorism mechanisms are equally prominent alongside other security and development actors. Among the five Sahelian countries that Prodi deemed to be in greatest need is Burkina Faso.³

As Prodi's assessment suggests, Burkina Faso shares much in common with its neighbors. Most pressingly, regional states exhibit high levels of poverty and underdevelopment, with all of the attendant consequences for human security. In 2013, Burkina Faso was ranked 183 of the 186 countries in the Human Development Index, one place behind Mali, one place ahead of Chad, and with Niger in last place.⁴ Burkinabes, as with citizens of other Sahelian and West African states, strongly perceive their government to be corrupt.⁵ According to Freedom House, with the exception of Ghana and Benin, Burkina Faso and its neighbors are "partly free" while others across the Sahel (Mauritania and Chad) are "not free."⁶ Across the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, which measure voice and accountability, governmental effectiveness, regulatory quality, and the rule of law, among other metrics, the states of the Sahel and West Africa

1 UN Security Council, S/PV.6988, 26 June 2013, p. 2.

2 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Sahel Region*, S/2013/354, 14 June 2013, p. 11.

3 The others are Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. UN Security Council, S/PV.6988, 26 June 2013, p. 2.

4 UN Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2013; The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*, 2013, p. 144, table 1, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf.

5 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2013," n.d., <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/>. Burkina Faso is ranked 83 of the 177 states in the index. It is bested by Ghana, ranked 63, but is slightly higher than its other neighbors.

6 Freedom House, "2014 Freedom in the World," n.d., <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>.

consistently cluster in the lowest one-third among countries included.⁷ By any measure, it seems regional states appear to share a common fate.

At the same time, in one respect at least, Burkina Faso is different. Although the first two-plus decades after independence were characterized by unrest and upheaval, Burkina Faso has gained a reputation for relative peace and political stability. President Blaise Compaoré came to power in a 1987 coup and, under the current constitution, is due to end his second and final five-year term as civilian president in 2015. For the duration of his 27-year rule, Burkina Faso has been free from civil war, armed conflict, and terrorism. This contrasts sharply with its neighbors. Most notably, Mali has been impacted by a long-standing rebellion among the Tuaregs in the north, which yielded an opportunity for regional extremist groups to claim territory in 2012 prior to the French intervention and multilateral response. Côte d'Ivoire has been plagued by civil war and violence for more than a decade, most recently after then-President Laurent Gbagbo, who is now detained at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, refused to acknowledge the results of the October 2010 election. In Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, formal mechanisms to facilitate postconflict dialogue and reconciliation have been established. Meanwhile, in nearby northern Nigeria, attacks by the Islamist group Boko Haram have increased in their frequency and sophistication. Along with its splinter group, Ansaru, there is some suggestion that Boko Haram has benefited from ties to other regional extremist groups, including Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa), both of which have been active in Mali.⁸

The crises in Mali and northern Nigeria have impacted security in Niger, where Tuaregs have rebelled in the past. Amid an increase in violent incidents and abductions of foreign nationals, Western governments have boosted their security engagement in Niger, including through an influx of assistance to the Nigerien government and the establishment of a base for U.S. drone operations in the region.⁹

From this perspective, Burkina Faso's success in avoiding extremist violence and protracted armed conflict is indeed remarkable. In light of the gravity of crises elsewhere, however, this success has meant that Burkina Faso has attracted less attention from the international community than surrounding states. A premise of this report is that the relative peace and stability in Burkina Faso ought to be better understood and more prominent on the regional and international agenda. Indeed, maintaining the relative peace and stability in Burkina Faso should be a priority for all stakeholders because a crisis there would have costly destabilizing impacts for Burkinabes and the region. Understanding the sources of relative peace and stability in Burkina Faso may yield lessons that can inform measures to counter violent extremism in the region and beyond.

Not surprisingly, Burkina Faso has been identified in past research as a critical case in understanding conflict prevention generally.¹⁰ By extension, we suggest that Burkina Faso should be seen as a critical case in understanding terrorism prevention specifically. The timeliness of focusing on Burkina Faso is underscored by the fact that current levels of peace and stability are relative, not absolute. Almost all Burkinabes acknowledge the existence of a range of social conflicts, leading one study to conclude recently that "Burkina Faso is not

7 See World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," n.d., <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>.

8 Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Evolving Tactics and Alliances in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 6 (June 2013): 10–16.

9 International Crisis Group (ICG), "Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?" *Africa Report*, no. 208 (19 September 2013), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/niger/208-niger-another-weak-link-in-the-sahel-english.pdf>; Eric Schmitt, "Drones in Niger Reflect New U.S. Tack on Terrorism," *New York Times*, 11 July 2013, p. A3.

10 Mary B. Anderson and Marshall Wallace, *Opting Out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2013); Mark Canavera, "The Spirit of Forgiveness: Tradition, Leadership and Strategies for Social Cohesion in Burkina Faso," CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, December 2006, <http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/88186/STEPS-The-Spirit-of-Forgiveness-Tradition-Leadership-and-Strategies-for-Social-Cohesion-in-Burkina-Faso.pdf>.

the haven of peace and stability it used to be seen as.”¹¹ There are growing signs of instability and unrest in the country.¹² Since the protests following the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998, public demonstrations have been more frequent and more likely to turn violent. Most notably, the death of a student after having been beaten by police in Koudougou in February 2011 led to three months of tension across the country. To the surprise of observers, elements of the military mutinied and, at one point, forced President Compaoré to leave the capital. In this environment, there is increasing concern as to whether historical levels of social cohesion can be maintained or whether prevailing social cleavages will tend toward conflict rather than peace. The proximity of terrorist groups active in neighboring states has led some to speculate whether future violence in Burkina Faso may be motivated by extremism. At the same time, the possibility that regional conflicts may spill over into Burkina Faso has given rise to concern. On at least one occasion, MUJAO has described Ouagadougou as a target for suicide bombing.¹³

The range of economic and social challenges facing Burkina Faso are complex and multidimensional, but they should be viewed in the context of the current political situation in the country. The profound uncertainty surrounding the prospect of political transition in 2015 makes various threats to social cohesion worse. The creation of a Senate in May 2013 is perceived by many as a move by President Compaoré to facilitate the amendment of article 37 of the constitution, thereby removing term limits and permitting him to run for reelection. A mass defection from the President’s party in early January 2014, followed by large but peaceful protests across Burkina Faso against the removal of term limits, contribute to the sense that

Burkina Faso is at a turning point in its political development. Therefore, in the near term, the gravest threat to peace and stability in Burkina Faso comes not from violent extremism but from a failure to manage political transition. A successful political transition would be of significant symbolic importance and an essential first step in addressing long-standing and widespread grievances among the populace. Conversely, a failed political transition will further aggravate existing grievances. Under these circumstances, the appeal of violent extremist narratives might increase. Burkinabe elites should prioritize the maintenance of peace, stability, and social cohesion as 2015 nears for many reasons. Preventing the spread of violent extremism is one such reason.

Against this background, this report addresses three questions.

- What is the extent of violent extremism in Burkina Faso today?
- What are the origins of violent extremism or its likely sources?
- What are the sources of resilience against violent extremism in Burkina Faso?

To answer these questions, we have undertaken extensive desk and field research, including interviews and focus groups in five locations across the country. We draw on relevant literature and utilize a framework for understanding the drivers of violent extremism that disaggregates levels of analysis and distinguishes between “push factors,” i.e., structural conditions or “characteristics of the societal environment that are alleged to push vulnerable individuals onto the path to violence,” and “pull factors,” or individual motivations and group-level dynamics that underscore the importance of human agency in the process of radicalization.¹⁴

11. Eloïse Bertrand, Adrien Sindayigaya, and Bruno Deceukelier, “Identifying Opportunities for Civil Society–Led Conflict Resolution in Burkina Faso: Final Report,” Search for Common Ground, September 2013, p. 4, http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilt/evaluations/BRK_NED%20Burkina_final%20report%20EN.pdf.

12. See ICG, “Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty,” *Africa Report*, no. 205 (22 July 2013), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/205-burkina-faso-with-or-without-compaore-times-of-uncertainty-english.pdf>.

13. Ibid., p. 36 (citing “Le Mujao annonce de prochains attentats à Bamako, Ouagadougou et Niamey,” *Agence France-Presse*, 23 February 2013). For an annual appraisal of the terrorism threat in the country, see U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2012: Africa,” 30 May 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/209979.htm>.

14. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), February 2009, p. iii, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadt978.pdf.

We find that Burkina Faso is vulnerable to violent extremism. The structural conditions that can increase the risk of violent extremism are prevalent there. These include underlying economic conditions, most notably poverty, underdevelopment, and unemployment, and political drivers such as corruption, impunity, and poor governance. In interviews across the country, we found widespread and far-reaching disaffection with economic and political conditions in Burkina Faso, which contribute to a range of specific grievances, for example, pertaining to education, and the prevalence of social cleavages, including some inter- and intracomunal tension, conflict between farmers and herders, and land disputes, especially involving mines.

Despite this broad risk, the threat of violent extremism in Burkina Faso is not imminent and remains low by comparison to neighboring states. Burkinabes tend not to express their grievances in extremist terms. Although identity-based cleavages exist and have sometimes given rise to tensions, they have not yielded protracted violence as in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Nigeria. We found anecdotal but consistent evidence about Burkinabe participation alongside extremists in regional conflicts, regional extremists entering Burkina Faso, and the presence of foreign extremists, i.e., from outside the region, in Burkina Faso. Although several interviewees had heard of such instances, we gained the impression that these have not been large-scale occurrences. In addition, we heard of multiple mechanisms at the community level, formal and informal, through which the risk of violent extremism and, in some cases, the presence of extremists have been identified and managed. Beyond the counterterrorism actions of the government, which increased significantly after the French intervention in Mali, Burkina Faso possesses

several sources of resilience that have mitigated against the spread of violent extremism. We identify sources of that resilience within the state and civil society.

This study focuses on violent extremism in Burkina Faso, but our findings are consistent with the handful of studies that have examined peace and stability in Burkina Faso more generally. That stability, according to recent research, has ebbed and flowed over time with the shifting balance of power among groups of Burkinabe elites, including political parties, trade unions, traditional leaders, the army, and business leaders, among whom privilege is distributed. Yet, internal and external pressures have weakened the dominant coalition, and stability is increasingly fragile.¹⁵ According to one study, the general risk of conflict is increasing: “[S]ocial, economic, and political frustrations among the population—and the youth in particular—as well as increasing disputes over natural resources—especially land—make us fear an increase in intensity of ... conflict.”¹⁶ Indeed, it is common to hear predictions of violence should President Compaoré seek to extend his time in office.¹⁷ Similarly, the International Crisis Group foresees a “real risk” of sociopolitical crisis and the threat of “social explosion” but observes a contrast between Burkina Faso and neighboring states in that it is “unlikely that the emergence of ... religious extremist movements will pose a serious security threat in the near future.”¹⁸ One study examining violent extremism in Burkina Faso says there is a “negligible” risk that extremism will take root in the short term. It similarly notes only “weak signs” of the presence of Islamic fundamentalism there.¹⁹

Our findings contribute to the small but emerging consensus for preventive action to maintain peace

15 Estelle Koussoubé et al., “Political Economy of Growth and Poverty in Burkina Faso: Power, Institutions and Rents,” *Développement Institutions and Mondialisation*, DT/2014-01, January 2014.

16 Bertrand, Sindayigaya, and Deceukelier, “Identifying Opportunities for Civil Society–Led Conflict Resolution in Burkina Faso,” p. 33.

17 Armel Bailly, “Burkina Faso President’s Re-election Bid Could Spark ‘Social Explosion,’” *Africa Review*, 19 February 2014, <http://www.africareview.com/News/The-problem-with-Compaores-reelection-bid/-/979180/2212406/-/1hiourz/-/index.html>; Sten Hagberg, “Burkina Faso: Is President Compaoré Finally on the Way Out?” *Think Africa Press*, 15 January 2014, <http://thinkafricapress.com/burkina-faso/enough-enough-compaore-long-rule>.

18 ICG, “Burkina Faso,” pp. i, 35.

19 William F.S. Miles, “Deploying Development to Counter Terrorism: Post-9/11 Transformation of U.S. Foreign Aid to Africa,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 3 (December 2012): 41 (citing William F.S. Miles et al., “Strengthening Stability Through Development in Burkina Faso,” USAID, September 2010).

and stability in Burkina Faso. In the next section, we define key terms, elaborate our analytical framework, and describe our methodology, which has emphasized the use of interviews and focus groups to gather qualitative data.

The following sections focus on the push and pull factors pertaining to violent extremism in Burkina Faso. We argue that despite a broadly stated vulnerability to violent extremism, the threat is not imminent. To help explain peace and stability, we devote a separate section to

sources of resilience in Burkina Faso. We describe such sources that originate in the state and civil society and that have aided social cohesion.

In concluding, we offer a range of recommendations for stakeholders to continue to address the structural factors that give rise to high levels of disaffection and to target specific support to nurture Burkina Faso's resilience against violent extremism. Given that Burkina Faso has not been the victim of terrorist violence, prevention should be the primary objective for policy and programming going forward.

This study follows the workshop on countering violent extremism (CVE) in West Africa and the Sahel cohosted by Burkina Faso and Denmark in Ouagadougou in April 2013. That workshop was held

Figure 1. Map of Burkina Faso



in collaboration with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and organized by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation.²⁰ The subsequent action agenda elaborated a series of proposals to advance the goal of countering violent extremism in the region. Among those is the idea of undertaking national assessments to aid decision-makers in considering responses to violent extremism.²¹ In this regard, it is apt to recall that Special Envoy Prodi concluded his June 2013 address to the UN Security Council by warning that “we cannot forget the Sahel, or we will have more Malis.”²² Beyond keeping the Sahel and Burkina Faso on the international agenda, our objective in this report is to ensure that the conditions for peace and stability in Burkina Faso are accurately identified and, in turn, robustly supported by stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

20 See <http://www.thegctf.org>. Prior to March 2014, the Global Center on Cooperative Security was known as the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC).

21 CGCC, “Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Engagement in West Africa and the Sahel: An Action Agenda,” July 2013, <http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Action-Agenda-ENG.pdf>.

22 UN Security Council, S/PV.6988, 26 June 2013, p. 4.

ANALYZING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN BURKINA FASO: THEORY AND METHOD

During his 2013 visit to Ouagadougou, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Emmerson, noted Burkina Faso's vulnerability to violent extremism. An attack in Burkina Faso, he said, would further destabilize the region, making it "essential that a vulnerable state in such an exposed geographical location has the tools at its disposal to ensure the security of its borders, maintain the security of inward investment that is essential to its development, and address the economic, social, political and human rights concerns that can so easily become conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism."²³ There is now a firm consensus that a necessary first step in responding to the threat of violent extremism is to understand its origins. In this regard, Good Practice 1 of the GCTF's *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* states that "[e]ach state initially needs to understand the nature of violent extremism. States should identify the drivers of violent extremism and assess their own needs, objectives and capabilities prior to developing and/or tailoring any CVE-relevant program."²⁴

In this study, we define "violent extremism" as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives."²⁵ Defined as such, violent extremism is a broader concept than terrorism, which it subsumes along with other forms of ideologically motivated violence. As this definition makes clear, our inquiry is not limited to a particular set of extremist ideas. Although we draw on sources that focus on what is sometimes called "violent Islamist extremism," our empirical research was not limited in this way. Rather, we proceeded on the basis that "exploitations of religious imagery and traditions" may arise out of different cultures and faiths.²⁶

The response to violent extremism is captured in the term "countering violent extremism." This is the "potentially unlimited" suite of measures that governments and others deploy to prevent radicalization,²⁷ which generally includes messaging (speeches, television programs, leaflets, social media); engagement and outreach (town halls, roundtables, advisory councils); capacity building (youth and women's leadership initiatives, community development, community safety and protection

23 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN Rights Expert Calls for International Support to Ward Off Any Potential Terrorism in Burkina Faso," 12 April 2013, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13228&LangID=E>.

24 GCTF, *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism*, n.d., http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/72352/13Sep19_Ankara+Memorandum.pdf. See Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, "Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming," USAID, October 2009.

25 USAID, "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles Into Practice," September 2011, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacs400.pdf.

26 Denoeux and Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism," p. ii, fn. 1.

27 Radicalization is the process by which an individual adopts violent extremist views and commits to using violence.

programs); and education and training (community leaders, public employees, law enforcement).²⁸ The addition of the CVE concept to the counterterrorism repertoire is a recent development. As others have noted, this concept is so broad that it shares much in common with prevailing efforts to address the structural causes of conflict.²⁹ In this regard, a principal value-added of the CVE idea is that it makes clear that responding to ideologically motivated violence requires an integrated, whole-of-government approach. In contrast, the concept of counterterrorism is often understood in government and among the general public in relatively narrow terms

to involve mostly kinetic, “hard power” measures, such as law enforcement, intelligence services, and the use of special forces. So, just as the concept of violent extremism is broader than that of terrorism, countering violent extremism implies a broader range of responses than the traditional understanding of counterterrorism.

Surveying the Drivers of Violent Extremism

What drives violent extremism? In gathering and analyzing data, we utilized an established framework (box 1).³⁰

BOX 1. Summary of the Drivers of Violent Extremism

SOCIOECONOMIC DRIVERS	
1. PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALITY	This perception may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban and slum youth and in environments where family structures have eroded, normal social controls no longer check behavior, and youth have too much time on their hands. A sense of anomie and isolation may result. Violent extremist groups may exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose, and inclusion in a collective movement.
2. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND GROUP DYNAMICS	Social networks are an important factor in radicalization and recruitment. Individuals may drift into violent extremist groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbors, or a charismatic local preacher.
3. SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION	Real or perceived discrimination toward an individual, community, or both in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. In places where Muslims are a small minority, socioeconomic and political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization.
4. FRUSTRATED EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION	Frustrated expectations and relative depravation are powerful drivers of violent extremist activity among youth, given improvements in education, especially at the secondary and university levels. Youth with greater amounts of education are likely to feel that they deserve better life outcomes than their societies can deliver. They generally cannot obtain the type of jobs they feel they deserve; they recognize the nepotism that impedes access to jobs. Young males may lack the economic resources to marry and are generally denied a voice in traditional societies.
5. UNMET SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS	Deprivation of socioeconomic needs, especially when combined with factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice, may be a factor exploited by violent extremist groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty but acute social exclusion by the government and society that elicits support for violent extremism.

28 National Security Preparedness Group, “Preventing Violent Radicalization in America,” Bipartisan Policy Center, June 2011, p. 18, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/sites/default/files/NSPG.pdf>.

29 Naureen Chowdhury Fink, “Something Old, Something New: The Emergence and Evolution of CVE Effort,” *Insights*, no. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 5–8, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Insights-Spring-2014.pdf>.

30 Denoeux and Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism.” See Denoeux and Carter, “Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism.”

BOX 1. Summary of the Drivers of Violent Extremism (continued)**6. GREED OR THE PROLIFERATION OF ILLEGAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

Violent extremist organizations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating violent extremist and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship, providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimize illegal behavior. Prisons are a popular venue for violent extremist recruitment.

POLITICAL DRIVERS**1. DENIAL OF POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

The lack of political rights and civil liberties and closed, unresponsive political systems can instill a belief that violence is the only means for political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may represent a critical but not representative link between economic development and vulnerability to violent extremism.

2. HARSH GOVERNMENTAL REPRESSION AND GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Justice is a critical value in Islam. Cruel, degrading treatment, including torture of an individual at the hands of the police or security forces can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the brutality, the greater the spur to violent extremist activities and the more support violent extremists may garner from local communities.

3. FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Countries subject to foreign military occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for violent extremist activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community.

4. POLITICAL AND MILITARY ENCROACHMENT

Large-scale political and military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to redeem individual and collective honor. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, strong resistance is likely.

5. ENDEMIC CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY FOR WELL-CONNECTED ELITES

This driver prompts civic disengagement and political apathy and can foster a profound sense of moral outrage, as in Afghanistan. The more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for violent extremist groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.

6. POORLY GOVERNED OR UNGOVERNED AREAS

These areas are isolated, low-population density regions that constitute safe havens where violent extremist organizations can establish themselves with little hindrance and even garner support from communities ignored by the government. Violent extremist groups might gravitate toward "states of limited strength," as opposed to failed or even failing states, where they can have the infrastructure necessary to develop their network and carry out operations.

7. LOCAL CONFLICTS

Local conflicts of sufficient scale can create chaos, incapacitate governmental institutions, and result in a power vacuum to be exploited by violent extremist organizations. These groups will try to co-opt one side in a conflict and will try to impose their transnational agenda on purely local dynamics. In one recent example, the Afghan Taliban, whose agenda had been local, now call for the establishment of a caliphate.

8. STATE SUPPORT

Host governments and foreign states or groups and individuals within them have often supported violent extremist movements, only to later lose control over them. Examples include the Egyptian government supporting radical Islamists against the Nasserites and Pakistani governments supporting various Islamist groups against India and Afghanistan.

BOX 1. Summary of the Drivers of Violent Extremism (continued)

9. DISCREDITED GOVERNMENTS AND MISSING OR CO-OPTED LEGAL OPPOSITIONS
When a regime is entirely discredited and there is no viable opposition, those who wish to oppose the government and bring about reform will be pushed outside normal political channels and may support violent extremist groups.
10. INTIMIDATION OR COERCION BY VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS
Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, violent extremist groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.
11. PERCEPTION THAT THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR AND HOSTILE TO MUSLIM SOCIETIES AND PEOPLES
Populations may accept violent extremist propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.
CULTURAL DRIVERS
1. ISLAM UNDER SIEGE
A strong correlation exists between violent extremist success and the perception that the West is attacking Islam and Muslims. Individuals who experience repression and humiliation in their daily life may be more susceptible to highly politicized and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries. This overlaps and reinforces political driver number 11.
2. BROADER CULTURAL THREATS
The population may perceive a broader cultural threat to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective and individual honor and dignity.
3. PROACTIVE RELIGIOUS AGENDAS
Groups promoting these agendas will try to impose their version of Islam, jihad, and similar themes on the local population, weakening traditional and more-moderate and -tolerant religious structures and practices. This may set the stage for violent extremism.

Source: Denoeux and Carter, "Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism," pp. ii–v.

In drawing on this material, we considered three points. First, this approach identifies a range of relevant factors to consider in assessing the drivers of violent extremism but makes clear that it is not a general theory of violent extremism, which is highly contextual and varies across time and place.³¹ Rather, it urges analysts to be alert to the ways in which the different drivers combine to yield extremist outcomes.

Second, it disaggregates levels of analysis and introduces a basic distinction between push and pull fac-

tors.³² Push factors are structural conditions that affect a broad population and are permissive or facilitative of violent extremism. They are sometimes referenced as the underlying conditions or root causes of violence, such as "poverty, demographic factors, social inequality and exclusion, dispossession, and political grievances."³³ Research suggests that such factors are at best "necessary but not sufficient" conditions and are, of themselves, indeterminate.³⁴ Rather, push factors combine with pull factors at the individual or group level to yield violent extremism. As this suggests, violent

31 Denoeux and Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism," p. x.

32 Ibid. See Denoeux and Carter, "Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism."

33 Edward Newman, "Exploring the 'Root Causes' of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 8 (December 2006): 750.

34 Ibid., p. 770; Denoeux and Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism."

extremism is causally complex, and radicalization is uniformly described as a multistep process.³⁵

Disaggregating levels of analysis in this way has an antecedent in earlier debates about the causes of terrorism. Among the initial arguments offered in this regard, one identified three such levels: the “setting” for terrorism, i.e., situational variables; terrorist organizations; and individual participation.³⁶ More recently, a principal innovation in the post-9/11 understanding of the emergence of violent extremism has been a better grasp on the role of human agency, i.e., the ways in which individuals alone or in groups interpret structural conditions, which had been underestimated in the past.³⁷ Evidence from post-9/11 terrorism plots confirms the importance of the individual and group level in the development of terrorist networks today, such that contemporary violent extremism is sometimes described as a bottom-up rather than a top-down phenomenon. Violent extremism emerges when “small groups of action-oriented friends” self-mobilize and adopt an interpretive frame for viewing society that emphasizes the impurity and injustice of the world, sometimes experienced vicariously through observing the suffering of others, and requires violence in response.

A third point focuses on the role of religion in producing violent extremism. Religion may be relevant to socioeconomic, political, and cultural drivers across levels of analysis. For example, as a push factor, members of a particular community may perceive discrimination (socioeconomic driver no. 2). As a pull factor, recent research suggests that extremists often self-select, especially as they are “born again” and perceive

themselves to be genuine or true believers.³⁸ In this regard, “[T]raditional religious education is generally a negative predictor of supporting or involvement with violent extremism, whereas a more fundamentalist education among ‘born again’ youth with little traditional religious training is a positive predictor.”³⁹ Extremists may consider themselves as devotees, but they utilize religious referents as a means for interpreting a wider range of grievances, such that “the ideology that motivates people will not be found in fixed texts, like the Bible or Koran, but framed and interpreted by the issues of the day.”⁴⁰

About Our Research

In gathering and analyzing our data, we looked for combinations of socioeconomic, political, and cultural drivers (box 1) sufficient to push Burkinabes to the point of being vulnerable to violent extremism and then pull them into extremist beliefs and actions. We found that push factors are prevalent, but pull factors are scarce. To arrive at this conclusion, we undertook extensive desk research, including gathering and analyzing a wide range of primary and secondary documents. In accordance with the recent emphasis in the literature on violent extremism,⁴¹ we privileged field-based research, which we undertook in five sites across Burkina Faso—Ouagadougou, Dori, Ouahigouya, Bobo-Dioulasso, and Fada N’Gourma—chosen to capture regional diversity. We conducted some 40 interviews and convened focus groups, engaging in in-depth discussions with more than 130 people. Our interlocutors were drawn from different parts of Burkinabe society and included government officials and civil society and religious leaders, as well as students.

35 For example, see ARTIS, “Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization,” August 2009, http://www.artisresearch.com/articles/ARTIS_Theoretical_Frames_August_2009.pdf; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

36 Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1981): 379–399.

37 Denoeux and Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” p. iii.

38 ARTIS, “Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization,” p. 5.

39 Scott Atran, briefing to the U.S. Defense Science Board (DSB) on countering violent extremism, 13 February 2014, <http://artisresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ATRAN-2014-DSB-CVE-Briefing.pdf>.

40 ARTIS, “Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization,” p. 7.

41 Atran, briefing to the U.S. DSB on countering violent extremism.

We also met with representatives of foreign governments and international organizations stationed in Ouagadougou. We conducted focus group discussions in a refugee camp, where we met with several groups of Tuaregs displaced from Mali by the recent conflict. We identified an initial range of interviewees on the basis of existing contacts and used a “snowball” method to reach out to additional interlocutors and increase the representativeness of our sample. In order to ensure

an open discussion, we conducted our research on a not-for-attribution basis. This study is not a formal perceptions survey, but our interview questions were designed to have our interviewees reflect on community perceptions about the existence and potential for violent extremism in Burkina Faso. By triangulating our interview data with secondary sources, we advance claims about Burkinabe perceptions of violent extremism that are necessarily limited but empirically based.

PUSH FACTORS

In his December 2013 speech commemorating Burkina Faso's 53rd Independence Day, President Compaoré observed that "[t]he Burkinabe nation is first and foremost a community of destiny, a network of intelligences and initiatives, a sum of conscious desires driven by a precise vision of the future."⁴² The process of building the Burkinabe nation began tumultuously. The period after Upper Volta achieved independence was characterized by instability, including five military coups between 1960 and 1983.⁴³ The ascendance of Compaoré in a subsequent coup on 15 October 1987 was particularly bloody, involving the murder of head of state and Compaoré's brother-in-arms Captain Thomas Sankara and 13 others. President Compaoré's conversion to civilian rule through the adoption of the June 1991 constitution was similarly accompanied by accusations surrounding the assassination of opposition leaders. In contrast, the period since then has been comparatively calm. Burkina Faso's relative peace and stability, however, has not consistently yielded good governance and prosperity, and the country faces many complex challenges today.

In this section, we give an overview of the broad, structural factors that provide the backdrop for our assessment of the presence and likelihood of violent extremism in Burkina Faso. As with the discussion in the prior section and building on the summary of the drivers of violent extremism (box 1), we set out politi-

cal, socioeconomic, and cultural drivers in turn. Principally, there is an abundance of push factors. Indeed, if structural factors alone caused violence, Burkina Faso would not have a reputation for relative peace and stability—quite the opposite, we suspect. Our interviewees were consistent in describing social, economic, and political conditions in Burkina Faso today that, in their view, increase the country's vulnerability to violent extremism. Many of them stated that the root causes of terrorism are present in Burkina Faso. In the next section, we contrast the apparent prevalence of push factors with the relative absence of pull factors. In our view, this explains why Burkina Faso has not been the victim of violent extremism.

Political Drivers

Burkina Faso is currently at a turning point in its political development. The current sense of crisis manifests many specific concerns about the political situation that are held among Burkinabes, including corruption and impunity, *incivisme* (incivility), and civil-military relations. In general, our interviewees perceive the quality of political governance in Burkina Faso to be poor, which may encourage violence and instability.

CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY

When asked about political grievances in Burkina Faso, among the first concerns raised by our interviewees was corruption. For more than two decades,

42 Dieudonné Lankoandé, "53e fête de l'Indépendance: l'intégralité du discours du Président du Faso," *Burkina24*, 11 December 2013.

43 Upper Volta was renamed Burkina Faso on 4 August 1984. The name combines two of the country's main languages to mean "land of honest men." "Burkina" is the Mooré term for "honesty" or "honor," while "Faso" is the Dioula term for "land" or "homeland." See ICG, "Burkina Faso," p. 5.

levels of corruption have been rising, as documented in reports from a range of governmental bodies. For example, as the 2011 report from the Réseau National de Lutte Anti-Corruption (REN-LAC) (National Anti-Corruption Network) points out, “[T]he growing corruption, and more generally the feeling of impunity for economic and violent crimes that stirs up the people, are not extraneous to the noisy protests that Burkina Faso knew during the first half of 2011.”⁴⁴ Senior figures in the government, including the prime minister, have repeatedly acknowledged the problem and indicated a willingness to address it.⁴⁵ Yet, the governmental response is perceived to be weak, and the absence of robust legislative or judicial action speaks to a gap between Burkinabe expectations and current standards of governance.

Our interviewees further noted that those suspected of corruption are often unconcerned about the prospect of being brought before the courts because judicial sanctions are weak and impunity tends to prevail.⁴⁶ The Burkinabe justice system appears to many to lack the capacity and the will to become an effective mechanism for accountability. On the one hand, it appears “immobile, voiceless and unjust”⁴⁷ regarding cases that are or should be brought before it. On the other hand, it too is plagued by corruption and seems little concerned to clean house internally. Civil society groups have been prompted to act to address this problem but have been rebuffed. For example, the Centre pour l’éthique judiciaire (Center for Judicial Ethics) recently initiated proceedings that then were dismissed by the courts, thereby avoiding debate on the merits of the question.⁴⁸

Efforts to address corruption hint at a more general perception of malaise within the judicial system.

Several interviewees related that judgments are often viewed as unjust, cases are processed very slowly or left undecided, and corruption prevails among members of the judiciary. As we heard on many occasions, many people have lost confidence in the justice system; as a result, they are more likely to take justice into their own hands. The emergence of “mob justice” correlates with a rise in incivisme, a term now heard commonly in Burkina Faso, reflecting the more frequent occurrence of ad hoc protests and other instances of civil disobedience that are increasingly likely to turn violent.

Incivisme

Almost all interviewees perceived a change in Burkina Faso in the last decade or so in which Burkinabes increasingly question the regulatory capacity and authority of the government and are increasingly willing to act in defiance of it. Some perceive the state to be incapable or unwilling to act in certain situations, leaving protest as the only option.⁴⁹ The absence of communication between public authorities and citizens is another factor that increases tensions, especially when major decisions are made without consultation or communication with those affected. Where misunderstanding about governmental action prevails, rumors and misinformation can serve to compound the problem. Court decisions and the requirements of the rule of law are not widely understood among Burkinabes, pointing to a need for civic education. Partisanship in the dissemination of information about governmental actions and bias in the state media were highlighted by our interviewees, who suggested that many Burkinabes lack confidence in what they hear from the state.

Beneath these complaints, according to some interviewees, increasing levels of incivisme and related violence

44 REN-LAC, “Rapport 2011 sur l’état de la corruption au Burkina Faso,” July 2012, p. 76. The Autorité supérieure du contrôle d’Etat (Higher Authority of State Control) and the Cour des comptes (Court of Auditors) have also reported along these lines.

45 “Lutte contre la corruption au Burkina Faso: Le REN-LAC réclame des assises nationales,” Lefaso.net, 22 June 2012.

46 For example, in its report on the state of corruption in 2011 in Burkina Faso, REN-LAC cited the emblematic case of Ousmane Guiro, the former director-general of customs. He was released on bail due to illness on one set of charges, then committed another crime. REN-LAC, “Rapport 2011 sur l’état de la corruption au Burkina Faso,” pp. 67, 76.

47 “Voeux 2014 du REN-LAC: Que la loi portant prévention et répression de la corruption, soit adoptée,” Lefaso.net, 22 January 2014.

48 Germain B. Nama, “Plainte du Centre pour l’Ethique judiciaire: Opération de salubrité ou guéguerre de syndicats?” L’Événement, 2 August 2013.

49 See Ibrahima Traore, “Incivisme au Burkina Faso: des citoyens situent les responsabilités,” Lefaso.net, 27 November 2013.

manifest a core grievance regarding the dominance of the political system by the same ruling elites for almost three decades and their failure to govern in the interests of the people. These sentiments are widely held.⁵⁰ Burkinabe democracy is perceived to be dysfunctional because the rules of the game, including the constitution, are prone to manipulation in the interests of those in power. The proposed revision of article 37 of the constitution and the establishment of the Senate are seen by many in this light. On this particular issue, the country is now divided into two camps, raising the risk of conflict, especially when opponents engage in identity politics. To the extent that political change cannot be accomplished in a lawful and peaceful fashion, violent solutions may become more appealing for some.

Our interviewees affirmed that, for many Burkinabes, incivisme reflects a broad and deep frustration with elites and institutions. In this regard, despite the elaboration of laws and procedures nominally based on principles such as impartiality and transparency, there is a general perception that the public and private sectors and, in some cases, civil society function politically. Access and benefits flow with political connections according to an entrenched system of patronage and clientelism. For example, as an interviewee in Fada N’Gourma described, the taxation system works differently for different people. Small and medium-sized traders operating in the formal economy must pay their taxes, but those with connections in the parallel economy are able to avoid tax obligations.

In sum, incivisme was explained as a reaction to the poor quality of governance. Our interviewees acknowledged that the government has ventured several responses to this trend, ranging from better traffic regulation (accidents sometimes elicit a violent reaction

from victims and bystanders) to renewed efforts at nation building.⁵¹ Yet, we detected a gap between the government’s performance and the people’s expectations. Governmental efforts to seek compromise at times with protestors in an effort to maintain peace send mixed signals in this regard, creating an incentive for incivisme. A similar range of concerns was recently acknowledged by the Conseil Économique et Social du Burkina Faso (CES) (Economic and Social Council of Burkina Faso), which devoted its 2013 report to the theme “Citizens’ distrust regarding public authority: what are the solutions for sustained peace for society?” The CES president subsequently observed that

[a] lot of efforts have been made by the State and the different classes of society in order to strengthen and preserve gains in solidarity, peace and social stability. But despite these many achievements, the country lives under a thinly veiled threat that severely tests stability and social cohesion. This situation is none other than the citizens’ distrust regarding public authority, which not only calls into question achievements in matters of human rights, but is also a growing danger for both the balance and development of society.⁵²

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Since Burkina Faso’s first coup on 3 January 1966, the Burkinabe army has been omnipresent in politics.⁵³ Our interviewees described several incidents in which the military has been involved in unrest, including as part of the demonstrations following the 1998 Zongo murder.⁵⁴ In December 2006, prior to the summit of ECOWAS heads of state in the capital, clashes between the police and military broke out and spread to other areas. The unprecedented mutinies during the protests

50 Ibid.

51 For example, National Citizenship Week, which is organized by the Ministry of Promotion of Human Rights, was recently held for the 10th time during 22–29 November 2013. The theme was “Culture du civisme pour la paix et l’enracinement de la démocratie.” This theme was chosen in response to the disturbances that Burkina Faso endured during the first half of 2011.

52 “Rapport de synthèse des travaux de la session de validation du Rapport public 2013 du Conseil Economique et Social sur le thème «Défiance des citoyens vis-à-vis de l’autorité publique: quelles solutions pour une société de paix soutenue?»” 10 March 2014.

53 On the role of the military in politics, see ICG, “Burkina Faso,” pp. 11–18.

54 The Colleges des sages (Council of Wisemen) created by President Compaoré as part of his response to this incident has identified almost 100 violent crimes committed by members of the military at that time.

in 2011 shook the whole country as enlisted soldiers committed abuses against innocents and plundered public and private property. Alarming signals have been even more frequent in recent years, and more isolated incidents reflect the difficult cohabitation between civilians and the military.

In our interviews, we heard the perception that those in uniform tend to maintain a superiority complex vis-à-vis civilians. Although conflicts may emerge among civilian and military individuals for personal reasons, they are prone to escalation. As a result, mutual trust between the security forces and citizens has been strained, especially regarding the municipal police, where tensions are often fueled by corruption charges and by the rise of incivisme.

Efforts are now being made to promote trust. The national armed forces recently celebrated their 52nd anniversary under the theme “Strengthening ties between Army and Nation.” By choosing this theme, President Compaoré, who is also the minister in charge of defense, sought closure following the crisis of 2011. Also, in a recent speech the minister of territorial administration, decentralization, and security reaffirmed that “the armed forces are assigned with defending the integrity of the territory, and ensuring the safety of its people.”⁵⁵ This role, however, can only be effective if measures are taken to build public trust.

Socioeconomic Drivers

Burkina Faso is a poor, unequal country with a rapidly growing population, about 90 percent of whom

engage in subsistence agriculture while almost half live below the poverty line (box 2).⁵⁶ Burkina Faso’s main exports—cattle, cotton, and gold—have changed little over time and leave the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in rainfall and commodity prices. Still, partly driven by the mining sector, which was liberalized in the 1990s,⁵⁷ Burkina Faso has succeeded in recording long-term growth rates that are among the strongest in West Africa, with an average gross domestic product increase of 1.6 percent annually since independence. Yet, this is “growth without [a] trickle down effect,” as wealth is unequally distributed across Burkinabe society; the top 10 percent of households earn and consume more than 30 percent of the wealth. Some estimates suggest that about 80 percent of public expenditures in Burkina Faso are sourced from international development aid funds while recent research finds that, through corruption and in other ways, government elites are able to manipulate relations with donors to their advantage.⁵⁸ The rate of unemployment in Burkina Faso is among the highest in the world, as are the population growth rate and birth rate, giving rise to a demographic bulge such that nearly half of the population is under 14 years old. Literacy, education, and public health data confirm that the Burkinabe state struggles to meet the basic needs of the population and of Burkinabe women in particular.⁵⁹

RURAL POVERTY, THE HIGH COST OF LIVING, AND UNEMPLOYMENT

These data alone attest to the kinds of exclusion and marginality, relative deprivation, and unmet economic needs that have been identified as possible drivers of violent extremism. Moreover, regional disparities across

55 “52ème anniversaire des forces armées: Retrouver la confiance des populations,” Les Editions Faso Actu, November 2012.

56 Koussoubé et al., “Political Economy of Growth and Poverty in Burkina Faso,” pp. 4–9.

57 Sabine Luning, “Liberalisation of the Gold Mining Sector in Burkina Faso,” *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 117 (2008): 25–39.

58 For the claim regarding aid and public expenditures, see ICG, “Burkina Faso,” p. 25. For the latter claim, see Koussoubé et al., “Political Economy of Growth and Poverty in Burkina Faso,” pp. 19–22.

59 “School life expectancy,” or the number of years of education that a Burkinabe child can expect to receive, is eight for boys and seven for girls. Levels of literacy are also lower for women. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Burkina Faso,” *World Factbook*, 11 April 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>. Although the government has opposed the practice of female genital cutting since the 1983 coup, some estimates suggest that up to 77 percent of Burkinabe women ages 15–49 have been victims of this practice. Sarah R. Hayford and Jenny Trinitapoli, “Religious Differences in Female Genital Cutting: A Case Study From Burkina Faso,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 2 (June 2011): 252–271.

BOX 2. Statistical Overview of Burkina Faso

POPULATION	18,365,123 (2014 est.) (Ouagadougou—2.05 million)
POPULATION GROWTH RATE	3.05% (2014 est.)
AGE STRUCTURE	45.4% of the population are 0–14 years old
FERTILITY RATE	5.93 children born per woman (2014 est.)
MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE	0.3% (2010)
INFANT MORTALITY RATE	7.7%
INCOME INEQUALITY	Gini index: 39.79 (2009); the top 10% of households earn and consume 32.2% of wealth, whereas the lowest 10% of households earn and consume 2.9%
UNEMPLOYMENT	77% (2004)
POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LINE	46.7% (2009 est.)
LITERACY	28.7% (of the population 15 years or older)
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)	\$26.51 billion (growth rate - 6.51%) (2013 est.)
GDP COMPOSITION BY END USE	household consumption—5.2%; governmental consumption—16.9%; investment in fixed capital—18.3%; investment in inventories—0.2%; exports of goods and services—34.4%; imports of goods and services—25% (2013 est.)
GDP COMPOSITION BY SECTOR OF ORIGIN	agriculture—33.6%; industry—23.6%; services—42.8% (2013 est.)
ETHNIC COMPOSITION	Mossi (> 40%); other, including Gurunsi, Senufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Fulani (approx. 60%)
RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION	Muslim 60.5%, Catholic 19%, animist 15.3%, Protestant 4.2%, other 0.6%, none 0.4%

Sources: CIA World Factbook, World Bank, PovcalNet.

Burkina Faso are significant and confirm that poverty is rural.⁶⁰ In the two poorest regions in Burkina Faso—the north and east—we heard of a general sense of abandonment and a frustration at the failure of the state to provide basic public goods. In Dori, this feeling persists in spite of the apparent infusion of development and infrastructure funding as a result of hosting the 53rd anniversary Independence Day celebration in

December 2013. In the east, we heard of an upsurge in banditry and insecurity, in particular, theft, home burglary, and armed attacks on highways and roads. In response, we heard again that people may be more inclined to take justice into their own hands. Some interviewees in Fada N’Gourma noted that security forces seek the cooperation of citizens to prosecute suspects but do not protect witnesses and informants and

60 According to the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development, the central region, which includes Ouagadougou, is the least poor, with an incidence of poverty estimated at 17.3 percent. In contrast, poverty is most severe in the north (68.1 percent) and east (62.2 percent) and in Mouhoun (56 percent). Burkina Faso, “Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Développement Durable (SCADD) - 2011–2015,” http://www.unpei.org/sites/default/files/PDF/Burkina_Faso_PRSP_2011.pdf.

secure convictions against offenders. People in these regions, it seems, perceive a kind of double handicap.

Our interviewees consistently noted that the high cost of living is a growing source of social tension in Burkina Faso. Among the examples they gave is the food crisis of 2008, which led to riots in cities across the country.⁶¹ Although the government had tried to anticipate the shortages, they eventually provided a point of mobilization for a wide range of organized interests. Subsequent efforts by the government to make life more affordable, including recent increased budget allocations for social measures, are greeted with skepticism by some who note that the poor do not always benefit from increased spending and that the high cost of living is impacted by endogenous and exogenous factors beyond the control of the Burkinabe government.⁶²

Similarly, unemployment and underemployment were pervasive concerns among our interviewees.⁶³ They frequently raised the issue of widespread youth unemployment as a potential source of social tension. Especially in cities, unemployed youth are idle and tend to spend a great amount of time hanging out in tea shops, which makes them prey for recruitment into criminal groups.⁶⁴ We heard that, for economic reasons, some young Burkinabes in the northern region accepted offers of cash from extremist groups to join the fight in Mali, although the extent of this phenomenon is difficult to assess. Many interviewees described endemic youth unemployment by drawing an analogy to a time bomb that could explode at any time if structural remedies are not taken.

The Malian refugees we interviewed cited many of these factors among the causes of conflict in their country, including “inequality, injustice, unemployment, discrimination, poverty; corruption that only gives voice to the rich; an education system in crisis and its consequences, such as difficulty gaining access to education, deterioration in the quality of education, and for those who are lucky enough to get it, in the end, the lack of prospects for jobs.” Others drew a direct link between the misery and poverty of the population and the emergence of the rebellion. One interviewee commented that “[w]hen you are poor, without work or resources and they offer you work in criminal activities (drugs, trafficking, mercenarism, terrorism, etc.), it is hard to resist; you fall prey to the recruiters of the armed criminal groups.” Overall, they made clear that if unemployment is not a direct cause of violence, it creates fertile ground on which extremists can thrive. Burkina Faso would do well to avoid these maladies, they counseled.

TENSIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: THE GOVERNANCE OF LAND RESOURCES AND MINING

Due to the limits of family farming, which has proven difficult to modernize, the government has promoted agribusiness for more than a decade. The Groupe de Recherche et d’Action sur le Foncier (Group for Research and Action on Land) has recently observed that, “in the span of a decade, the virtual disappearance of family homesteads is consequently reducing the possibility for action by new rural communes insofar as land development is concerned. On the family level, the issue of the young generations’ future is already set,

61. Augustin Loada, “Burkina Faso: petites manœuvres et grandes résolutions face aux mobilisations,” in *Etat des résistances dans le Sud. Face à la crise alimentaire* —2009, Publication annuelle du Centre tricontinental, Louvain-La-Neuve.

62. On 11 September 2013, the government adopted an increased budget allocation for social measures, totaling 65 billion CFA francs. Once consolidated with related measures undertaken by the Extraordinary Council of Ministers, announced on 24 March 2014, there should be an additional 110 billion CFA francs to address grievances related to the high cost of living. Valéry Ridde, *Présentation de l’ouvrage*, in *Les indigents et les politiques de santé en Afrique. Expériences et enjeux conceptuels*, Valéry Ridde et Jean-Pierre Jacob (dir.), Bruxelles: Academia-L’Harmattan, 2013, p. 12, cité par Kassem Salam Sourwéma, *Assistance publique et dynamique de construction de l’Etat au Burkina Faso. Etude à partir des services sociaux à Koudougou* (Centre-Ouest du Burkina Faso), Thèse de doctorat science politique, Université Ouaga 2, 2014.

63. According to 2012 Afrobarometer data, based on a nationally representative sample of 1,200 households, Burkinabes perceive significant underachievement by the government on reducing the gap between rich and poor and price stability (76 percent), job creation (71 percent), and improving the living conditions of the poor and food security for all (70 percent).

64. Julien Kieffer, “Les jeunes des «grins» de thé et la campagne électorale à Ouagadougou,” *Politique africaine*, no. 101 (2006), pp. 63–82.

especially in a context where agriculture remains the only possibility of work for rural people.”⁶⁵ Even those that have apparently benefited in the short term from the sale of their indigenous land denounce this change, which, they perceive, gives rise to monopolization and increases tension. Thus, one hears of “the increasingly regular outbreak of intrafamilial conflicts, the questioning of traditional real estate transactions (particularly withdrawals, the decrease in surface area, etc.), the proliferation of conflicts between natives and ‘traditional’ migrants who refuse to flee, and with the livestock farmers, because of the occupation of the cattle trails, riverbanks, the disappearance of pasturelands, etc.”⁶⁶

We heard a great deal about the existing tension between farmers and herders. Several specific points of grievance arise from the different uses of land by these groups, which seek access to the same fields and water whether to raise crops or to graze livestock. These are long-standing tensions, wherein farmers sometimes perceive herders to be “landless” and argue that priority in access to land should go to people rather than animals. The government’s efforts to intervene in such disputes, in terms of resource management and conflict resolution, have often been deficient. There has been a general lack of consultation and dialogue among the parties, as well as noncompliance with established good practices and the infringement or misapplication of the law, whether through ignorance or malfeasance. All of these things, we were told, can promote the use of violence.

Some interlocutors noted this tension but countered that there is a tendency in Burkina Faso to obscure the nature of farmer-herder conflict, which is actually identity based and places the Fulani ethnic group in oppo-

sition to non-Fulanis. Indeed, rightly or wrongly, many Fulanis appear to view this matter in this way and feel as if they are not adequately protected by the state. In our focus group in Ouahigouya, we were presented with evidence of organizing among Fulanis, underscoring the fundamental ethnic basis of this conflict.⁶⁷

In urban municipalities, land speculation and the mismanagement of residential plots were described as potential sources of violence. Under Sankara, extensive reforms were carried out, and the state assumed control of large tracts of land. Massive developments took place in several cities on the basis of the slogan “one household, one plot,” but “informal settlements” have persisted. With the subsequent process of decentralization, accountability for subdivision development was transferred to communes, and local elected officials have overseen the subdivision process. As a result, Ouagadougou is experiencing a number of problems related to urbanization and rapid growth. In recent years, villages and farmland have been “swallowed” by the city in a manner that does not actually reflect the population’s needs. Rather, local elected officials perceive an opportunity for clientelism and self-enrichment, and protest movements have emerged in many municipalities.⁶⁸

We also heard about social tensions surrounding mining operations. Burkina Faso has experienced a mining boom in recent years. With the rise of gold prices, mining companies have taken advantage of a legal framework favorable to investment. Today, eight industrial mines are operating, and many research permits have been granted. Since 2009, gold has been Burkina Faso’s main export, and mining taxes are an increasingly important source of state revenue.⁶⁹ The mining boom has had several negative impacts, especially

65 Groupe de Recherche et d’Action sur le Foncier, “Agrobusiness au Burkina Faso: Quels effets sur le foncier et la modernisation agricole?” January 2011, p. 67, http://www.graf-bf.org/IMG/pdf/Edition_Agrobusiness_Burkina_GRAF.pdf.

66 Ibid.

67 “Conflits Agriculteurs-Eleveurs: Vers un génocide des Peuls?” Lefaso.net, 31 May 2012.

68 In light of these abuses, the government decided on 18 May 2011 to temporarily suspend the practice of subdivision development across the country to take stock of the situation and propose appropriate measures in response. In October 2013, the States-General proposed that subdivision measures include the computerization of management plots, a halt to the allocation of plots for Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso and the settlement of liabilities, measures against informal settlements, and incentives for people to opt for vertical construction. The implementation of these measures, however, requires caution, given the entrenchment of current practices.

69 “Environnement et production minière au Burkina Faso: Les mesures de sauvegarde de l’environnement sont prises,” Lefaso.net, 28 January 2014.

at the local level, where human rights concerns have emerged. These include problems relating to access to food, water, and housing for communities near the mines; the state of the environment; and opportunities for education, training, and employment. “Artisanal,” or informal, miners have been displaced in favor of the mining companies, and there are widespread frustrations born of unmet demands or expectations among local populations. We heard of several examples of protest as a result of these tensions.⁷⁰

EDUCATION

The educational system in Burkina Faso is characterized by a distinction between formal and informal institutions. Despite progress in universalizing basic education, we heard that the Burkinabe educational system is in crisis and may be a source of grievances regarding access and outcomes. Specific complaints concern the quality of teaching, poor infrastructure, and inadequate geographic distribution of schools (82 percent of the school-age population is located in rural areas, but a disproportionate number of schools are in urban districts). Burkinabe schools tend to reproduce the existing social order because those from affluent families are more likely to succeed than disadvantaged students and the declining availability of scholarships primarily impacts the rural poor. Added to this are concerns about the adequacy of the curricula in relation to the job market in Burkina Faso. These shortcomings do little to encourage poor families to educate their children. Thus, we heard sentiments that

if the Fulani of Dori prefer to send their sons to tend the cattle or go to Koranic school, it's because the nation does not offer him a real alternative or possible compromise. If the Gurma of Matiacouali “consult the sand” before sending their sons, and especially their daughters, to school, it is because the nation

did not tell them that these children must also read a book for their own sake and that of the entire nation, or . . . the nation did not give him the means for that.⁷¹

There is a growing sense of malaise regarding higher education. Lack of infrastructure, overlapping academic years, a shortage of teachers, the impoverishment of students, inadequate social services, strikes, and, critically, the difficulty that graduates face in securing employment were cited as problems. For many stakeholders, the issue of youth unemployment is a “social and political ticking bomb.” This crisis not only reflects the economy and the high rate of population growth, which is 3.05 percent, but also the educational system. Especially in higher education, general rather than technical education is the norm; graduates are perceived to lack entrepreneurial skills, giving rise to a mismatch between educational outcomes and the needs of the labor market. Not surprisingly, we heard of significant levels of unemployment among graduates of higher education institutions. Approximately 140,000 people arrive each year in the labor market, but job creation is around 20,000.⁷² In recent years, the Ministry for Public Service has received about a half-million applications from new and recent graduates, often applying on multiple occasions, for 10,000 jobs in the public sector.

Faced with the near bankruptcy of higher education in Burkina Faso, the prime minister has again committed additional resources. As some researchers argue, however, “[M]ore than under-schooled, Burkina Faso is poorly schooled, with an expensive and grossly underperforming education system; beyond the issue of its cost, the problem is one of inability (unwillingness?) to truly establish the school [as an institution]. So, more than ever, it is really the purpose of education that is at stake: what schools, for what development, for what

70 “Saccage de la mine de Pelegtanga: 18 personnes arrêtées,” Police Nationale Burkina Faso, 26 September 2011.

71 Marc Pilon and Madeleine Wayack, “La démocratisation de l’enseignement au Burkina Faso: que peut-on en dire aujourd’hui?” *Cahiers d’études africaines*, nos. 169–170 (2003), p. 84.

72 Pierre J. Kamano et al., “Les défis du système éducatif Burkinabè en appui à la croissance économique,” *Document de Travail de la Banque Mondiale*, no. 196 (2010), http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2010/07/23/000020953_20100723160658/Rendered/PDF/558450FR0Les0defis0du0systeme.pdf.

society?”⁷³ Some blame the crisis on the government, which has allowed the situation to deteriorate without taking adequate measures. Indeed, although the university is perceived as a site for political contestation, the children of the ruling elites are often educated abroad or in better-endowed private schools. Many students feel as though their concerns are not being heard by the government and accuse the authorities of portraying student protestors as “vandals,” such that legitimate grievances are discounted as another example of incivisme. Many interviewees perceived that Burkinabe schools have become something of a tinderbox. Some sense that traditional values, such as respect for elders and teachers, have disappeared and point out that cheating in exams has become commonplace.

In reality, the Burkinabe university is a mirror of Burkina Faso’s changing society. Students are generally better educated and much more aware of what is happening in the world as a result of their studies, as well as exposure to information technology. If they are increasingly inclined to express themselves through violence, it is most likely because they have grievances that are not being met. Access to a socially selective higher education system gives students the feeling of being part of a social elite and increases aspirations for a better life, but many are faced with problems of survival and do not have the means to live decently. The gap between their aspirations and the harsh reality of their situation increases the risk of confrontation. Their grievances are not directed at law enforcement but at the public authorities that can listen and engage in dialogue. It is incumbent on those authorities to give them a good faith hearing in the interests of avoiding conflict and reducing tension.

Cultural Drivers

Burkina Faso is a multiethnic and multireligious state (box 2), but identity-based conflict has been far less prevalent in Burkina Faso than in neighboring states that share this characteristic. Yet, social groups do not coexist harmoniously. In the next section, we describe

the recent evolution of religious practices in Burkina Faso in the context of pull factors. Here, we focus on developments that are more aptly described as structural factors as they pertain to broad concerns about societal discrimination.

Many interviewees expressed concern about the ability of the state to exercise appropriate oversight regarding religious groups. The government on some occasions apparently wishes to avoid angering religious leaders and congregants, preferring not to act when freedom of religious practice violates the rights of other citizens (e.g., with regard to noise). When intervention has occurred, the excessive use of force or of public power (e.g., closure of religious buildings) may cause violent reactions. In Bobo Dioulasso, we heard of cases where money has been collected and sent to foreign religious leaders and that such funds have been incoming. In the western region in particular, religious leaders have emerged with substantial resources and sometimes incendiary sermons. Religious leaders generally espouse tolerance, but we heard of instances where some religious leaders have denigrated other religious communities or other leaders within the same community.

The government clearly is aware of this problem, and we heard of efforts to initiate interreligious dialogue. Some interlocutors perceive this as rather superficial and “elitist” because it involves those in positions of authority and not the flock. Overall, we gained the impression that religious institutions are growing haphazardly. In addition, there is apparently an information gap here because we know of no study or database on the public record that compiles basic data about churches, mosques, and other places of worship in Burkina Faso.

Relatedly, religious schools appear to have complete autonomy regarding the content of their teaching. Efforts to harmonize the curricula of these schools with those of the public or private, formal secular schools are not sufficient. As a result, many graduates from religious schools have difficulty integrating into

73 Pilon and Wayack, “La démocratisation de l’enseignement au Burkina Faso,” p. 84.

professional life. Faced with limited options, graduates of Islamic schools often elect to pursue additional studies in the Persian Gulf region, which does little to improve their employment chances in Burkina Faso. For many interviewees, the nonintegration of Islamic schools is a potential source of separation, giving rise to an identity-based grievance, i.e., a grievance that Muslims perceive as Muslims.

Within secular public schools, we discerned emerging tension regarding the wearing of religious symbols. Interviewees noted that women who wear a veil are prone to exclusion although there is tolerance for clothing that many see as indecent (e.g., miniskirts). This apparent disparity can create a sense of injustice and frustration, which may be exploited. Some Muslims perceive that the laws governing schools do not authorize a principal to ban students wearing religious symbols. According to them, such bans only emerge as a result of religious zeal and “Islamophobia.” There are potential consequences for intercommunal relations if the state does not give clear guidance to school leaders in dealing with such situations while clarifying the power of principals in a way that is accepted by parents and respected by all.⁷⁴

Some interviewees perceived breaches of official secularism by the public authorities themselves as sources of frustration. This includes the display of Christmas trees, prayers in public services, advent calendars in public media, and subsidies for pilgrimages. In addition, issues involving the Senate have sometimes divided religious communities, especially concerning the proposal that the makeup of the Senate be based on religious grounds, such that Muslims would comprise a majority. Some observers question whether the involvement of religious communities in parliamentary work is consistent with the principle of secularism. They note that minorities also have the right to representation. For others, integrating religion into politics in this way is seen as a welcome development. During

our interviews, a religious leader argued that the establishment of the Senate along these lines would enable Muslims to ensure that the laws take into account the interests of their community. Informing this view is the broad perception that lawmaking at present is grounded in Christianity. We see in these debates a test for prevailing levels of tolerance and cohesion in which ethnic or religious identities are rarely used as a formal basis for political choice in Burkina Faso. Many people fear that any change to existing norms will impact already fragile Burkinabe unity.

The globalization of religion is another potential source of tension. Not only does globalization increase awareness about what is happening on the other side of the world, it entails the distribution or promotion of values that may be at odds with local practices. For example, the publication in a Danish newspaper of a cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad elicited a strong reaction among Burkinabe Muslims.⁷⁵ In this regard too, the role of preachers from abroad has attracted the government’s attention. It has taken steps to prohibit entry to Burkina Faso of preachers considered to be of concern and has engaged religious communities in advancing these measures. To broaden this point, our interlocutors consider cooperation between Burkina Faso and some Gulf countries to be a double-edged sword. The development of cooperative relations with these countries is a source of funds for Burkina Faso, but some religious communities and some citizens express concern that the dissemination of conservative religious practices may follow, contrary to existing tolerant practices among Burkinabes.

The impartiality of the secular state of Burkina Faso is questioned regarding its relation to traditional leaders too. Our interviewees foresee that the traditional power base is crucial for individual politicians and political parties. In this regard, some interviewees alleged the exclusion of certain groups from official positions (“Why is a particular strategic position in the state

74 For a recent example regarding the controversy surrounding wearing a veil in a public school, see “Des mesures contre le port du voile au CEG de Bieha,” *L’Événement*, 1 May 2013.

75 Alain Dabilougou, “Caricatures sur le prophète Mahomet: Les musulmans du Burkina Faso protestant,” *Le Pays*, 9 February 2006.

not occupied by one of us?”). Similarly, the perception that civil society groups are sometimes manipulated for political purposes can increase tension. Many in Burkina Faso, particularly among the illiterate, do not have a touchstone for “normal” political behavior and consider politics to be a fight to the death with political opponents seen as enemies. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of leadership on this issue to dissuade people from viewing their grievances in conflictual terms.

Our objective in this section has been to demonstrate that the drivers of violent extremism at the structural level—push factors—are prevalent in Burkina Faso. Our discussion furnishes evidence of numerous socioeconomic drivers (perceptions of social exclusion and marginality, societal discrimination, frustrated

expectations and relative deprivation, and unmet social and economic needs); political drivers (denial of political rights and civil liberties, political and military encroachment, endemic corruption for well-connected elites, local conflicts, and perceptions of unfairness toward Muslim societies and peoples); and cultural drivers (broader cultural threats and proactive religious agendas) (box 1). Our interviewees clearly perceived that a large number of the underlying conditions of extremism are present in Burkina Faso and expressed concern, but none of them have given rise to sustained conflict or violent extremism. Therefore, we discern a broad vulnerability to violent extremism on the basis of these structural factors, but we do not identify an imminent threat, as explained in the discussion of pull factors and sources of resilience.

PULL FACTORS

In the previous section, we advanced the claim that Burkina Faso is vulnerable to violent extremism because of a prevalence of push factors. Push factors alone, however, are indeterminate and do not themselves produce violent extremism. If they did, we would expect to see violent extremism on a large scale in Burkina Faso and elsewhere. Instead, in line with the analytical framework set out earlier, violent extremist outcomes occur when factors across different levels of analysis combine. This has happened in Burkina Faso's neighbors, most notably in Mali and nearby northern Nigeria. In those countries, we find evidence of pull factors—developments at the individual or group level that are a necessary condition for the emergence of violent extremism.

In contrast to other states in the region, our principal finding pertaining to pull factors in Burkina Faso is that they are almost absent. Burkina Faso has not been the victim of a terrorist attack.⁷⁶ We gathered a little evidence attesting to Burkinabe involvement in regional extremist conflicts, and we found no clear link between increasingly conservative religious practices in Burkina Faso and the situation in Mali and no firm evidence of radicalization within the country. We similarly heard only a few accounts of the presence of foreign extremists in Burkina Faso. Our data is not comprehensive, but interviewees consistently related

their perception that violent extremism is a peripheral part of the Burkinabe landscape. For all of the grievances that roil the Burkinabe populace, they tend not to utilize extremist narratives to interpret their disaffection and formulate responses. Indeed, several interviewees expressed surprise that we were asking questions about a problem that only barely exists, noting that Mali, Niger, and Nigeria would be more obvious cases to study.

We suggest that Burkina Faso represents a critical case for the prevention of violent extremism, which ought to be the primary objective for stakeholders in Burkina Faso. To this end, we describe the few examples of violent extremism that we found and, in doing so, assess possible sources of violent extremism in Burkina Faso in the future. We deduced a typology in which violent extremism may emerge in Burkina Faso: as a spillover effect from regional extremist activities, as a result of radicalization among individuals or groups domestically, or through the influence of foreign extremists. In gathering evidence, we looked for pull factors related to each of these possibilities and endeavored to identify the presence and extent of violent extremist ideas in Burkina Faso. The few data points on extremism in Burkina Faso hint that the main pull factor is organized recruitment by regional extremist groups, likely in response to an offer of cash

76 The University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database lists three incidents as having occurred in Burkina Faso. These occurred in 1984 and 1991 (two in December that year) and yielded two fatalities, both government officials. The database does not list sources for these incidents. None of our interlocutors referred to them. See National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, "Global Terrorism Database," December 2013, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

from known regional groups. In those cases, structural conditions are permissive, and the move to extremism reflects an economic calculation rather than religious zeal. The method of radicalization is distinct from the bottom-up process that has been observed elsewhere.

Regional Extremism and Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso resides in an unstable region. The region's vulnerability to terrorism and terrorism financing in particular was recently underscored by the Financial Action Task Force and the Inter Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa. They noted that "political instability, ethnic and communal violence, pervasive corruption, widespread poverty, and high rates of unemployment and underemployment" may be exploited by terrorists, especially with regard to young people.⁷⁷

The succession of events that led to the crisis in Mali from 2012 and the complex constellation of actors involved are described in depth elsewhere.⁷⁸ Similarly, comprehensive treatments of developments in Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Nigeria are available.⁷⁹ The presence of active extremists nearby necessarily impacts Burkina Faso. Interviewees consistently identified regional instability, in particular as a spillover from the Mali crisis, as a possible method through which violent extremism might enter Burkina Faso.

Especially in our Ouagadougou interviews, we heard three main arguments as to how regional instability

gives rise to a heightened sense of vulnerability for Burkina Faso. First, Burkina Faso's involvement in the Malian crisis makes it more likely that it will be a target for combatants active in Mali. The Burkinabe government has responded to the Malian crisis in several ways. Most prominently, 650 Burkinabe soldiers were deployed as part of ECOWAS's initial African-led International Support Mission for Mali, which has subsequently been absorbed into the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (La Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali) (MINUSMA). As of the time of writing, we understand that approximately 1,500 Burkinabe troops are in Mali as part of the MINUSMA force, with an additional 160 gendarmes as part of a police unit and some civilian staff members. Beginning in early 2013, Burkina Faso began deploying a 1,000-strong force internally. Using the northern town of Kaya as a command center, these troops received some training from Western donors and are now active in the regions that straddle the Malian and Nigerien borders. Similarly, Burkina Faso has permitted French combat helicopters and special operations forces to be based in the country in connection with Operation Serval in Mali, and the United States is reportedly utilizing an airbase in Ouagadougou in support of counterterrorism efforts across the region.⁸⁰

The Burkinabe government has endeavored to respond to the Malian crisis through nonkinetic counterterrorism measures too. For example, we heard that an

77 Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Le Groupe Intergouvernemental d'Action contre le Blanchiment d'Argent en Afrique de l'Ouest (GIABA) [Inter Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa], *Terrorist Financing in West Africa*, October 2013, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/TF-in-West-Africa.pdf>.

78 ICG, "Mali: Reform or Relapse," *Africa Report*, no. 210 (10 January 2014), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/210-mali-reform-or-relapse-english.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/210-mali-reform-or-relapse-english.pdf); Peter Tinti et al., "Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali: Past, Present and Future," Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2014, <http://www.globalinitiative.net/download/global-initiative/Global%20Initiative%20-%20Organized%20Crime%20and%20Illicit%20Trafficking%20in%20Mali%20-%20Jan%202014.pdf>; Alexander Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, "A Handbook on Mali's 2012–2013 Crisis," *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa Working Paper Series*, no. 13-001 (2 September 2013), <http://www.bcics.northwestern.edu/documents/workingpapers/ISITA-13-001-Thurston-Lebovich.pdf>; Ilaria Allegrozzi and Elise Ford, "Piecing Together the Jigsaw: Prospects for Improved Social Relations After the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali," *Oxfam Research Report*, October 2013, <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-piecing-together-jigsaw-mali-conflict-101013-en.pdf>.

79 For links to relevant reports by major international and nongovernmental organizations, as well as current reporting and analysis, on the country pages for Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Nigeria, see <http://www.reliefweb.int>.

80 ICG, "Burkina Faso," pp. 25–26, 35–36; Claude Moniquet, "The Involvement of Salafism/Wahhabism in the Support and Supply of Arms to Rebel Groups Around the World," Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2013, p. 23, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457137/EXPO-AFET_ET\(2013\)457137_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457137/EXPO-AFET_ET(2013)457137_EN.pdf).

effort to disseminate messages of tolerance and peace has been initiated and includes outreach to mosques and churches. Relevant governmental services in the northern parts of the country gather information and bring matters of concern to the attention of local authorities. We heard that media, including television, are monitored for extremist content. These types of measures might be identified as CVE actions although the Burkinabe government has not labeled them as such. Indeed, Burkina Faso has a formal internal security strategy that makes several references to terrorism, but that strategy covers the 2010–2020 period and does not reflect the range of measures taken in response to the conflict in Mali. Perhaps for this reason, few interviewees outside of government were aware of its existence, and they tended to see the more visible military response to the crisis as giving rise to heightened vulnerability.

Second, a key aspect of Burkina Faso's response has been President Compaoré's high-profile role as a mediator between the armed groups and the Malian government, leading to the June 2013 preliminary agreement signed in Ouagadougou. The President has a long history of active geostrategic engagement in regional conflicts, including direct involvement in crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali over the past two decades.⁸¹ If some of these past cases brought him into close relationships with unsavory figures, including, for example, by facilitating the link between late Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi and former Liberian President and warlord Charles Taylor, he has endeavored to build a reputation as a regional statesman and peacemaker in recent years.⁸² Our interviewees had mixed views on President Compaoré's role in this regard. Many acknowledge that it brings prestige and often resources to Burkina

Faso, but others believe that he has become too focused on regional politicking and inadequately engaged in domestic affairs.

Some interviewees elaborated a more cynical version of the latter argument, drawing attention to the President's historically close ties to Tuareg rebels in Mali and Niger, who also benefited from Qadhafi's largesse. Without indulging conspiracy theories, we heard from a few interviewees that the President's apparent comfort in hosting leaders of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) reflects something of an appeasement strategy regarding regional extremist groups. Whereas the presence of those leaders in Ouagadougou is justified in terms of ongoing negotiations, some see in the President's hospitality a strategy to ensure that armed groups in Mali refrain from bringing the fight to Burkina Faso. Those advancing this view point to other apparent, close ties between him and Malian combatants. For example, Djibrill Bassolé, Burkina Faso's foreign minister, was able to meet with Islamist groups Ansar Dine and MUJAO to request that they cut ties with al-Qaida. Also, a presidential advisor, Mauritanian national Moustafa Limam Chafi, has played a prominent role in securing the release of Western hostages in Mali, which carries the implication that a cut of the ransom may be involved.⁸³ Such access has made some people wonder whether these relationships might be too close for comfort.

We cannot offer any original primary evidence to confirm or deny the veracity of these matters, but we can relate what we heard in interviews regarding the kinds of pull factors that may emerge in Burkina Faso. Among some interlocutors, there is a perception that President Compaoré's prominence as a regional peace-

81 ICG, "Burkina Faso," p. 19 (citing ICG, "Mali: Avoiding Escalation," *Africa Report*, no. 189 [18 July 2012], <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation.aspx>).

82 Peter Chilson, "Burkina Faso: A Small West African Country Struggles to Bring Peace to Mali," Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, 14 August 2012, <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/burkina-faso-mali-border-control-political-corruption-ethnic-conflict-drought-refugee-crisis>; ICG, "Burkina Faso," pp. 25–26.

83 Tinti, "Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali," p. 13; Wolfram Lacher, "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel," *West Africa Commission on Drugs Background Paper*, no. 4 (2013), p. 8, <http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Challenging-the-Myth-of-the-Drug-Terror-Nexus-in-the-Sahel-2013-08-19.pdf>.

maker and his related associations with the warring parties create the possibility that his approach will backfire to the detriment of stability in Burkina Faso. Following this viewpoint, stability is contingent on armed groups continuing to view the country as a sanctuary.

Third, our interviewees raised concerns about Burkina Faso's decision to host Tuareg refugees displaced by the fighting in Mali. At the time of writing, Burkina Faso was hosting nearly 50,000 refugees in three camps.⁸⁴ More refugees reside in the community in several locations. Our interviewees clearly considered the decision to host refugees to be an appropriate and humanitarian response but noted that it entails a heightened risk of extremist infiltration.⁸⁵

These three concerns reflect perceptions about the spillover of violent extremism from Mali into Burkina Faso.⁸⁶ What is the evidence that this has actually occurred? Despite concerns about heightened vulnerability, we found only scant evidence that violent extremism has actually crossed the border sufficient to pull Burkinabes into extremism in significant numbers.

We found a few examples of Burkinabe participation in regional extremist groups reported in the media, and there is some evidence of Boko Haram attempting to fund-raise and acquire weapons in Burkina Faso.⁸⁷ We heard of a few other cases in which Burkinabes were apprehended by French forces in Mali. In terms of the specific pull factors that are likely to be present, our field work in Ouahigouya provides the clearest example, although other interviewees had heard of stories similar to the account we were given. One interviewee knew of MUJAO recruitment activities in which 300,000 CFA francs were offered in exchange for committing to the

fight. The individual accepted that offer for economic reasons. Indeed, we were informed that he successfully completed his tour, returned to his village, and used the money to open a small business. At no stage was it suggested that this individual or others approached in this way were ideologically motivated. Those familiar with this pathway into extremism underscored that poor and desperate people who have lost faith in the ability of the state to improve their situation or deliver justice have little to lose by accepting payment to engage in conflict, even if they are ambivalent about the cause for which they are ostensibly fighting.

Our fieldwork in Dori, which included a day of convening research panels in a nearby refugee camp, revealed that extremists are more likely to prefer residing in the community. Although life in a camp setting comes with numerous material and other benefits, camp populations are required to submit to a level of administration and oversight that may deter extremists seeking to conceal their presence. For example, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees uses biometrics for the purposes of registration. Our interlocutors in the camp were familiar with regional extremist groups, knew them by name and had often interacted with them while fleeing Mali. They provided an account of those groups that is consistent with existing sources, particularly in terms of the evolution of violence, the pattern of recruitment, and the national makeup of those groups.⁸⁸ Regarding the latter, we heard that the Islamist groups in Mali are quite diverse, with fighters from a range of nationalities across the region and, in some cases, beyond it. We asked about the presence of Burkinabes among them, and in no case did any interlocutors confirm that Burkinabes were involved, although they acknowledged that

84 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Fact Sheet: UNHCR Operation in Burkina Faso," 30 September 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/4d919f369.pdf>.

85 ICG, "Burkina Faso," p. 36.

86 Few interviewees linked the threat of violent extremism with the enduring problem of transnational organized crime in the region. Although some extremist groups in Mali have been more involved than others in drug trafficking, refuting the straightforward view of a drug-terrorism nexus, smugglers tended to position themselves on all sides of the conflict. See Lacher, "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel." We came across no evidence to suggest that patterns of criminal activity throughout the Malian crisis had a discernible impact on Burkinabe security.

87 Senator Iroegbu, "Nigeria: Insurgency – Foreign Mercenary With Dual Chad, Burkina Faso Nationality Captured," *This Day*, 28 March 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201403280856.html>; FATF and GIABA, *Terrorist Financing in West Africa*, pp. 17, 24.

88 Andrew Lebovich, "The Local face of Jihadism in Northern Mali," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 6 (June 2013): 6–10.

possibility. Interestingly, similar to the story we heard about extremist recruitment efforts in Burkina Faso, the refugees related the same recruitment mechanism (a knock on the door from MUJAO and an offer of cash for participation) and the same sum of money (300,000 CFA francs) in Mali. They offered no evidence of an extremist presence in the camps. In contrast, we found some evidence of an extremist presence outside of the camp setting. We heard from several sources outside of the camp that following the escalation of conflict in Mali, a few well-resourced Tuaregs began to appear in towns such as Dori and gained some local attention on account of their extremely conservative religious views. They came to the attention of local religious leaders, who utilized their networks to initiate a dialogue with the newcomers. Their presence apparently did not act as a pull factor, prompting locals to radicalize.

We asked our interviewees in the refugee camp and elsewhere for their views on what happened to combatants in Mali as the French successfully reclaimed territory previously lost to armed groups. Is there any reason to believe those groups might have fled into Burkina Faso? In response, we consistently heard that extremists were far more likely to retreat to Algeria, where they had an established safe haven. Among Burkinabes that committed to join armed groups after accepting offers of cash, we heard that some possibly moved on to Libya, although we do not know their motivations at that stage, i.e., whether they acquired some kind of religious fervor, were offered additional money, or had other motivations entirely.

Evidence that attests to the passage of violent extremism into Burkina Faso as a result of regional conflict is weak. Where it exists, the relevant pull factor likely was a recruitment pitch from a well-resourced extremist group in the region. In addition, patterns of recruitment in Mali and Burkina Faso have some similarities.

Our impression about the prevalence of this phenomenon in Burkina Faso is that these cases were few and far between. Even though there is a general perception about vulnerability and push factors abound, pull factors pertaining to the cross-border spillover of extremism from Mali or elsewhere are scarce.

Other Possible Paths to Extremism

Because spillovers from regional conflicts involving extremists have not yielded a demonstrable increase in radicalization among Burkinabes, we looked for other possible ways in which violent extremism may emerge in Burkina Faso. Radicalization in Burkina Faso may occur as it has elsewhere, such that small groups of action-oriented friends self-mobilize and adopt an extremist frame for interpreting their grievances and determining responses. We looked for any evidence of bottom-up radicalization, especially the presence of violent extremist ideas and rhetoric. Another possible pull factor might result from the presence of foreign extremists who may be well placed to import extremist ideas and disseminate them to vulnerable individuals and groups through proselytization.

We found no direct evidence of violent extremism as a result of bottom-up, self-radicalized individuals or groups or of the presence of foreign extremists. Both of these possible pathways should be viewed in the context of evolving religious practices in Burkina Faso, a topic we spent considerable time with our interviewees discussing. Their responses, which were broadly consistent with the growing scholarly literature on the topic,⁸⁹ clustered around three points, which underscore the complexity of these issues but also affirm the overwhelmingly peaceful nature of religious observation in Burkina Faso.

First, our interviewees were eager to relate the fundamentally tolerant nature of interfaith relations in

89 For example, see Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms* (Boston: Brill, 2012); Mara Vitale, "Trajectoires d'évolution de l'islam au Burkina Faso," *Cahiers d'étude africaines* 52, nos. 2–3 (2012): 367–387; Ousman Kobo, "The Development of Wahhabi Reforms in Ghana and Burkina Faso, 1960–1990: Elective Affinities Between Western-Educated Muslims and Islamic Scholars," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 3 (2009): 502–532.

Burkina Faso, which has several sources.⁹⁰ For example, although Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions, attracting approximately 60 percent and 20 percent of the population, respectively, many Burkinabes retain some animist practices, such that faith is often syncretic. Just as families are often ethnically mixed, they are religiously mixed; and several interviewees described this as a bulwark against interfaith conflict, as one always has a relative that is Muslim, Christian, and so on. Religious leaders have historically set a moderate tone and developed practices to acknowledge each other's holidays and demonstrate mutual respect. Indeed, although we argue for a stronger articulation of *laïcité* (secularity) in the Burkinabe context, the state designates Muslim and Christian holidays as official, and there is no state religion. This tolerance is highly valued in Burkina Faso, and experience demonstrates that religious tension is more likely to be intra- rather than interfaith,⁹¹ especially within the Muslim community, where the principal cleavage is between the Tijaniyya Sufi order and Wahhabi-inclined Sunnites.

Second, our interviewees described a trend toward increasingly conservative religious practices among people of all faiths, running counter to historical tolerance in Burkina Faso. In particular, young Muslim men are growing beards and electing to wear their trousers short in the style of the Prophet Muhammad. One Christian interviewee described her surprise that her family's long-serving maid, a Muslim, began to wear a veil, asked for prayer times, and refused to purchase pork and alcohol for the family. These incremental changes reportedly are unprecedented but are becoming increasingly common. We noted a tendency among our interviewees to conflate this development with the internal debate about incivisme in Burkina Faso. There have been a few incidents of tension between young Muslims and established community leaders,⁹² suggesting an intergenerational gap within the Muslim community and an emergent cadre of younger leaders.

Given the politicization of senior religious leaders in the context of the debate over the Senate, it is unsurprising that some young people take umbrage at some of their actions. On the whole, many Burkinabes perceive that, contrary to the past, religious identity may be a growing cleavage rather than a source of cohesion.

Third, our interviewees observed increasing levels of interconnectedness between religious practices in Burkina Faso and those elsewhere. Beyond merely noting the ways in which globalization has affected faith groups, we gained the impression that Burkinabe Muslims in particular are connected to Muslims elsewhere in specific ways. For example, Burkina Faso has been the beneficiary of a Saudi-funded mosque-building program, with new mosques in Ouahigouya, Tougan, and Ziniare. (We heard that this has been a source of intrafaith tension for Muslims in Ouahigouya, where Sunnites have come to dominate a space that was intended for the entire Muslim community.) We heard of other foreign-funded mosques elsewhere, with money coming from the Gulf states and Iran. It is common for Burkinabe graduates of Islamic schools, whose employment chances are low, to travel to the Gulf for their university-level education. This is a two-way street, as we heard that foreign preachers sometimes visit Burkina Faso. Indeed, given that oversight of religious institutions is weak, it is difficult to estimate how many foreign-funded mosques or foreign preachers are present in Burkina Faso today. Although we accept the view that Islamic reforms in the direction of Wahhabism in Burkina Faso and the region have fundamentally local origins, they were and are part of a global movement.⁹³

Several interviewees interpreted the trajectory described here, especially the apparent departure from historical tolerance, as a possible precursor for violent extremism in Burkina Faso. There is always the possibility that violent extremism may arise in Burkina Faso in

90 Canavera, "Spirit of Forgiveness," pp. 14–16.

91 Ibid., p. 15.

92 For example, "Manifestation des jeunes musulmans : L'imam Sana pris dans ses propres contradictions," *Journal Mutations Burkina Faso*, 22 March 2013.

93 Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*.

the future through bottom-up radicalization or as a result of the influence exercised by foreign extremists. Yet, we found very little evidence of violent extremism related to these trends. We found a few examples of young Muslims self-mobilizing and using or seeking to engage in violence. We heard of a small group of young Burkinabe Muslims intercepted in Bamako with the intention of traveling to northern Mali for the purpose of receiving religious education at a time when armed Islamist groups held significant territory. These are isolated incidents, however, and we cannot confirm that they were on a path to radicalization.

Similarly, we heard of a few examples of foreigners in the country upbraiding locals for not practicing Islam more strictly. For example, our interviewees in Ouahigouya related an incident where men with British accents interrupted a street-side card game and heckled the participants who they said should be working or praying. In Bobo-Dioulasso, the presence of “charismatic” Malian preachers was mentioned, as was their fund-raising activities. Yet, we saw no evidence that these men succeeded in radicalizing Burkinabes. Several interviewees offered that increasingly conservative religious practices and deeper connections with fellow believers abroad may simply reflect the volitional exercise of an individual’s right to freedom of religion and that conservatism should not be equated with extremism. Especially if presented with an acknowledgment of the importance of inter- and intrafaith tolerance, such rights-based language may provide an antidote to the emergence of pull factors. Although some voices in the Burkinabe religious landscape are more tolerant than others, extremist arguments seem to have little resonance at the present time.

Many interviewees clearly perceive that such pull factors are more likely to emerge in the future, especially

as a result of people and ideas from abroad. It is difficult to make an empirically grounded forecast in this regard, but we emphasize preserving tolerance and social cohesion in our recommendations. As the government is sensitive to these matters, it is undertaking measures to advance interreligious dialogue⁹⁴ and to be more cautious in exercising visa controls in certain countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan, in order to minimize the likelihood of admitting extremist preachers, with the understanding that the government lacks the capacity to monitor them once in Burkina Faso.

Recent research on Burkina Faso has raised the specter of violent extremism but generally found that the threat is remote. For example, one study noted that “[t]he activity of Islamist groups in Mali and Niger is starting to have an impact in Burkina Faso . . . but [they] are still quite marginal.”⁹⁵ Another found that it is “unlikely that the emergence of . . . religious extremist movements will pose a serious security threat in the near future.”⁹⁶ Similarly, “[r]eports that a few intolerant practitioners of Islam may have some presence or engagement in Burkina Faso were among the weak signs that Burkina Faso was being exposed to Islamic fundamentalism.”⁹⁷ Beyond simply reiterating these claims, our research deepens the evidence base, enabling a more precise understanding of the threat to Burkina Faso by clarifying that, despite the prevalence of push factors, pull factors are largely absent. Our approach also highlights possible sources of violent extremism in the future, especially regarding perceptions of increasing religious intolerance and the influence of people and ideas from abroad. Our main finding—abundant push factors, scarce pull factors—provides a clear mandate and guidance for stakeholders to take measures to prevent violent extremism in Burkina Faso.

94 Kader Patrick Karantao, “Pour rapports apaisés entre croyants: Dialogue interreligieux,” *Sidwaya*, 14 November 2013; Katrin Langewiesche, “Le dialogue interreligieux au service du développement,” *Bulletin de l’APAD*, no. 33 (2011).

95 Bertrand, Sindayigaya, and Deceukelier, “Identifying Opportunities for Civil Society–Led Conflict Resolution in Burkina Faso,” p. 13.

96 ICG, “Burkina Faso,” p. 35.

97 Miles, “Deploying Development to Counter Terrorism,” p. 41.

SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

Despite the prevalence of push factors, the near absence of pull factors means that Burkina Faso has not been the victim of violent extremism. Preserving peace and stability requires taking preventive steps to reduce vulnerability at the structural level while advancing measures to ensure that pull factors remain scarce. We endeavored to document sources of resilience within Burkina Faso that contribute to these objectives, identifying formal and informal sources derived from the state and civil society. The presence of such sources of resilience in Burkina Faso is no small achievement. As part of the descent into conflict in neighboring states, mechanisms that enhance tolerance and social cohesion and enable conflict prevention and resolution were overwhelmed. In those countries, resilience will be difficult to rebuild, if it can be reconstructed at all. In drawing attention to Burkina Faso's diverse sources of resilience, we recommend that stakeholders act to maintain and extend the latent sources of peace and stability in the country.

Sources of Resilience and the Burkinabe State

This examination has been frank in its criticism of the Burkinabe state, which is a direct or indirect source of the political, socioeconomic, and cultural drivers already described. We intend this criticism to be constructive and acknowledge that, far from being viewed solely as a problem, the state is integral to advancing solutions to many of Burkina Faso's challenges pertaining to violent extremism.

The Burkinabe state is an actual and potential source of resilience itself. Despite the weakness of its civil and military apparatus and earlier claims about poor governance, the Burkinabe state remains functional for the most part in its public (civil) roles and in terms of the defense and security forces. Although there is regional variation, it succeeds more or less in providing the primary public good of security. Most Burkinabes enjoy a sense of security even if they acknowledge the existence of social conflict; according to the 2012 Afrobarometer survey of a 12-month period, a majority of respondents indicated that they had felt secure, and more than half of respondents (55 percent) say they or members of their family had not felt unsafe. Two-thirds of respondents had not feared crime in their own home. Seventy-two percent say they had not been the victim of theft in their home, and 96 percent had not been physically assaulted. Although one study confirms that almost all Burkinabes acknowledge the existence of social conflict (95 percent of respondents from a sample of 325 people), these are low-level conflicts only, which is in sharp contrast to the scale of violence elsewhere in the region.⁹⁸

Burkinabes maintain a relatively high level of trust in law enforcement institutions. Although reporting crime to the police remains the exception rather than the rule, more than half of Afrobarometer survey respondents said that if they were victims of crime, they would go first to the police for help. In 2011–2012, the Afrobarometer survey revealed that about two-thirds

98 Bertrand, Sindayigaya, and Deceukelier, "Identifying Opportunities for Civil Society–Led Conflict Resolution in Burkina Faso."

of respondents said that Burkinabes trust the police, as compared to 52 percent on average in Africa for the 2011–2013 period.

When there is conflict, there are official frameworks for dialogue and consultation and formal or informal mediation mechanisms. At the state level, for example, institutions such as the CES and the Médiateur du Faso perform this role, even if their jurisdiction is limited. Although the record is mixed, the government sends delegations to the field to bring peace between communities or within a community when serious conflicts erupt. There is some skepticism attached to the process of interreligious dialogue that the government is currently advancing because it engages elites only and its impact has been unclear. Its mere existence however, is telling, especially in a region where intercommunal strife has been so frequent.

Despite its shortcomings, the democratic system in Burkina Faso is marked by the existence of a constitution, the organization of competitive elections, and decentralization. Fundamentally, it is this system that helps regulate conflicts over access to power and establish political stability. Burkinabe political leaders generally acknowledge this, and the sense of responsibility that they often exhibit can act as a source of resilience. Despite some slippages, especially in times of crisis or during an election period, they observe a duty to dissuade and prevent militants from resorting to violence.

A related point concerns the competence of the Burkinabe government to exercise territorial control. Although its borders are difficult and perhaps impossible to police, there does not appear to be significant territory outside of the control of the state that could be used by criminal groups to settle permanently. In high-crime or potentially dangerous areas, such as on the border with Mali, the government has deployed the Defense and Security Forces and endeavored to prevent criminals from taking root. Even if the coverage and effectiveness of these operations are uneven, measures

to build resilience in Burkina Faso should aim to consolidate gains and address shortcomings.

Although the Burkinabe government does not appear to have an up-to-date counterterrorism or CVE strategy at the national level, it has evolved a range of measures that are apt to be crafted into such a document, kinetic (army, police, and gendarme forces, deployed across the north of the country and abroad) and nonkinetic (community engagement, interreligious dialogue, media monitoring, and visa controls to prevent the entry of extremist preachers from abroad). In several of these endeavors, Burkina Faso has received support from other governments and regional and international organizations, which is important because, at their best, the capacity-building initiatives of external partners involve a transfer of resources, expertise, and good practices that are necessary to build resilience through the state.

The professionalism of Burkinabe journalists and media regulation by the High Council of Communication are another source of resilience. Hate speech has played a significant role in precipitating intercommunal violence in other African countries. In Burkina Faso, despite some breaches of the rules of ethics, the media are generally characterized by their social responsibility. Of course, the balance between the freedom of the press and measures to regulate the media is imperfect.⁹⁹ To avoid reprimands or sanctions from regulators, many reporters choose not to publish or to diffuse messages that could incite violence. Furthermore, the media themselves are organized to promote self-regulation. Despite the shortcomings of these experiments, they constitute good practices to be encouraged.

Nevertheless, regulatory mechanisms remain fragile, and young people are particularly distrustful of efforts to advocate social peace. Many of them lack points of reference for engaging in politics and are less socialized or supervised by conventional institutions, such as the family, school, and political parties. A similar point

99 Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2013: Burkina Faso," n.d., <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burkina-faso#.U2b9m4FdUwI>.

can be made with regard to traditional leaders, who have lost some of their legitimacy on account of their involvement in politics. Yet in distinguishing between poorly functioning institutions and institutional failure, the former preserves the prospect that, for example, chiefs may utilize and build on their legitimacy to nurture Burkinabe resilience against violent extremism.

Beyond institutions alone, a source of resilience lies in the idea of nationhood that the Burkinabe state has been more successful in building than governments in neighboring states. From independence through the renaming of the country and across revolutions and coups, the government has created a range of unique events and celebrations to give substance to the idea of Burkinabe national identity. For example, National Culture Week is staged every two years to “revalorize the traditional culture destroyed by the French”¹⁰⁰ and is a celebration of Burkinabe diversity. Each year, 30 March is the Day of Forgiveness, which began in 2001 as part of President Compaoré’s response to rising tension in the wake of Zongo’s murder. That response entailed the creation in 1999 of a Council of Wisemen to consider options for reducing tensions. Their recommendation led to a national address by the President, seeking forgiveness for the “torture, crimes, injustices, bullying and all other wrongs committed by Burkinabes on Burkinabes in the name of and under the protection of the state, from 1960 to this day.” This address has been broadcast on state television every 31 March since.¹⁰¹ Burkina Faso’s National Day is celebrated every December in a different town around the country and organized to address a specific theme. In 2013 this celebration was held in Dori, and the theme was “Civic engagement and social cohesion: basics for sustainable development.” As others have argued in the past, the cumulative effect of these measures is to give substance to a sense of national identity, which is widely recognized and valued among Burkinabes and is a wellspring for social cohesion.¹⁰²

Despite its significant shortcomings, the Burkinabe state should be seen as a source of institutions and authority that provide a meaningful foundation on which to build resilience. The Burkinabe social contract is in less than perfect health, but it exists and, with the good-faith efforts of domestic stakeholders and the targeted support of external actors, can be nurtured to improve the lives of Burkinabe citizens and prevent violent extremism.

Sources of Resilience in Civil Society

Other sources of resilience lie outside the state, where Burkina Faso can draw on relatively high levels of social cohesion despite social, ethnic, and religious pluralism. The fear of falling into violence like neighboring countries is an initial point of reference in this regard. In their rhetoric, community leaders often draw attention to the brutal conflicts that have ravaged other African countries while urging restraint among Burkinabes. Religious and traditional leaders contribute to the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict even if they are sometimes the cause of other problems. The vast majority of these leaders, despite somewhat weakened credibility, do not hesitate to speak up in support of social peace. All interviewees described Burkinabes as peaceful and tolerant people¹⁰³ and referred to the prevailing level of peace and stability with a sense of national pride, recalling the extent of ethnic and religious mixing. It remains common for Muslim and Christian families to visit each other and share meals and gifts on religious holidays. Some Christians celebrate Tabaski (the religious holiday of Eid al-Adha), and some Muslims celebrate Christmas. Although this sometimes upsets fundamentalists on all sides, they are in the minority for now.

Informal social institutions also tend toward peace. We spent a lot of time talking about “joking relationships” (*la parenté à plaisanterie*) with our interviewees. This

100 Canavera, “Spirit of Forgiveness,” p. 20 (quoting a past director of the event).

101 ICG, “Burkina Faso,” p. 12, fn. 56. See Canavera, “Spirit of Forgiveness,” pp. 13–14.

102 Canavera, “Spirit of Forgiveness.”

103 According to the 2012 Afrobarometer survey, 76 percent of Burkinabes think that violence is never justified.

term refers to a system of known “couplings—across ethnicity, family, village, neighborhood, or social class—in which the two parties concerned both insult each other immensely while understanding that they are strongly linked and responsible for each other’s wellbeing.”¹⁰⁴ Through such public, low-stakes verbal insults, “joking relatives play at war so they don’t make it.”¹⁰⁵ Most interviewees cited this as an obvious, indigenous source of social cohesion. Most acknowledged the limits of joking relationships—there are breaches of the peace in Burkina Faso, such as in 2011, confirming that joking relationships are not a guarantor against conflict—and lamented that this tradition is less well known among young people, especially in the cities, and in danger of receding in importance. At the same time, we heard of measures in several places to create “joking relationships associations,” an effort to institutionalize and preserve an otherwise informal social-cohesion mechanism. We were reminded that joking relationships were common in other West African countries but have been effectively lost as a result of conflict.

The existence of pluralistic civil society associations also has a mediating effect, strengthening resilience against destabilizing conflict. We met with and heard about many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose work explicitly strives to build social cohesion in the sectors related to push factors. For example, we met with an NGO from Dori that has a unique approach to building intercommunal harmony. Not only does this NGO convene interfaith dialogues, but it utilizes an explicitly interfaith methodology in advancing development work and engaging youth. In this way, bonds are built among faith groups through a shared experience and toward the advancement of a common goal. It is an open question whether this experience can be replicated elsewhere (Christians are only 1 percent of the population in Dori and so have an incentive to participate in interreligious initiatives), but this example

highlights this particular approach to building resilience, which is interfaith and activity based.

Other NGOs, many of whom are part of regional NGO networks, are similarly active in critical parts of the country and in sectors that are critical in building resilience against violent extremism. Beyond traditional and vital development work that addresses push factors such as unemployment and relative deprivation, we came across several examples of programming that aims to help young people develop skills related to political engagement. We heard of NGOs active in the media and education sectors to build skills and curricula in a way that enhances social cohesion. Some international partners have supported these measures, an acknowledgment of the importance of civil society in maintaining social cohesion. We detected plenty of demand among local NGOs for this kind of support. As a result of this NGO activity, there is an emerging body of experience that can and should be drawn on in considering future steps to build resilience. Often, this experience is relevant to the objectives of countering violent extremism, even if it is not presented as such.

Religion has a role in building resilience, and certain mechanisms at the community level and among faith leaders facilitate the identification of extremists and enable dialogue with them. There is some skepticism toward interreligious dialogue as a tool for building resilience. Such dialogue should not be undertaken for its own sake, and the role of the state as a facilitator can be problematic because it may lack credibility in the eyes of participants and their congregants. Yet, an important outcome of interreligious dialogue is the creation of networks among religious leaders of different faiths. These networks can provide a line of communication when needed and set the tone for peaceful inter- and intracommunal relations. Structured dialogues also can preserve a space for tolerance and mutual respect, which has an important demonstration effect.

104 Canavera, “Spirit of Forgiveness,” p. 7.

105 Ibid.

Burkina Faso has a reputation for relative peace and stability in the region for a reason. If the state has had a role in the emergence of push factors, it should also be seen as an actual and potential source of resilience against violent extremism going forward. Similarly, Burkinabe civil society comprises a vital source of resilience. Across formal and informal institutions and organizations, there are precedents and partners for building resilience. The actions of these stakeholders do not often align perfectly—an unrealistic expectation given their different interests. Rather, our conclusions and recommendations emphasize that Burkina

Faso possesses multiple assets in preventing violent extremism, which Burkinabes acknowledged. Some were more optimistic than others about the future of the country and its ability to remain free from conflict and violent extremism, but all affirmed the value of Burkina Faso's peace and stability. Burkinabes are far more likely to be reformists than rejectionists in that they would strongly prefer to make existing institutions work better rather than abandon them and start over. This perspective is the opposite of violent extremism and is itself a source of resilience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel is well and truly on the international and regional agenda. Beyond UN-led measures, the European Union and GCTF have advanced initiatives, and ECOWAS has recently elaborated a counter-terrorism strategy.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the leaders of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger recently agreed to create a new organization—the G5 Sahel—to strengthen development and security in the region. In launching it, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz confirmed that “[t]here is no lasting development without security nor enduring security without effective development.”¹⁰⁷

In assessing how regional developments have impacted Burkina Faso, this report addressed three questions. First, what is the extent of violent extremism in Burkina Faso today? We have argued that Burkina Faso is vulnerable to violent extremism as a result of a prevalence of push factors, but the threat is not imminent, and pull factors are almost absent. Second, what are the origins or likely sources of violent extremism in Burkina Faso? Based on limited data, they seem to have arisen in response to the organized recruitment efforts of regional extremist groups. The likely sources of future extremism are difficult to specify empirically, but our interviewees consistently perceived increasing

levels of religious intolerance and the possible import of extremist ideas from abroad as particular points of concern. Third, what are the sources of resilience against violent extremism in Burkina Faso? A range of formal and informal sources of resilience derive from the state and civil society, providing options for stakeholders to build resilience in Burkina Faso.

The primary objective for stakeholders going forward should be to prevent violent extremism through measures addressing structural conditions, while averting the emergence of pull factors. Such a preventive strategy should not detract from measures being undertaken to address underdevelopment and advance human security generally in Burkina Faso; understanding that security and development are linked, it should complement them. Following are recommendations to the government of Burkina Faso, civil society, and Burkina Faso’s international partners. The recommendations set out in the 2013 action agenda that preceded this report are an initial touchstone.¹⁰⁸ This report underscores the timeliness of many of those recommendations but facilitates a more precise elaboration of priorities in the specific context of Burkina Faso.

There are no recommendations specific to the prospect of political transition in 2015, but the gravest threat to

106 Martin A. Ewi, “The New ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Its Implications for West Africa,” *ISS Today*, 13 March 2013, <http://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/the-new-ecowas-counter-terrorism-strategy-and-its-implications-for-west-africa>.

107 Daniel Flynn, “African Nations Form G5 to Work on Sahel Security, Development,” Reuters, 16 February 2014.

108 CGCC, “Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Engagement in West Africa and the Sahel.”

peace and stability in Burkina Faso in the short term comes not from violent extremism but from a failure to manage political transition. Reducing uncertainty surrounding the events in 2015 should be an urgent priority for elites. The best formulated and best resourced measures to prevent violent extremism in Burkina Faso will have limited impact if the country descends into political crisis as many currently fear.

Recommendations for the Government of Burkina Faso

- At the policy level, work toward the formalization of a national counterterrorism strategy that integrates CVE measures and empowers a designated agency or whole-of-government committee to oversee its implementation.
- ▶ Counterterrorism measures in Burkina Faso have advanced in recent years, and the government undertakes a range of activities that might otherwise be labeled as CVE efforts. It would be timely to consolidate these measures into a coherent and balanced strategy that integrates kinetic and nonkinetic measures. That strategy should be balanced and proportional to the threat with an emphasis on human rights and the rule of law, adapting global norms to the Burkinabe context.¹⁰⁹ Such a strategy should form the basis for counterterrorism- and CVE-related requests for capacity-building assistance in the short and medium term.
- ▶ As part of this strategy, introduce curricula in law enforcement, criminal justice, and military training academies that integrates counterterrorism and CVE activities.
- Address political and socioeconomic push factors to affirm the Burkinabe state as a source of resilience against violent extremism and not a driver of it.
- ▶ Rededicate the government to improving standards of governance by updating the National Policy on Good Governance of Burkina Faso and committing to its rigorous implementation.
- ▶ Take additional measures to reduce corruption and improve transparency and accountability. The reports and recommendations of oversight bodies, such as REN-LAC, should be considered and acted on.
- ▶ Judicial reform should be a particular priority to demonstrate the vitality of the rule of law and dissuade Burkinabes against acting outside the justice system.
- ▶ Among socioeconomic drivers, unemployment, especially among youth, looms large. Beyond economic measures to generate employment, consider reforms to the educational system, especially at the university level, to improve the prospects of graduates in the job market. Consult with the private sector in this regard. Work with civil society to create real and virtual fora to enable student grievances to be heard.
- ▶ Partner with civil society to undertake a survey of formal and informal schools. Use this data to develop baseline curricula across different kinds of schools with a view to improving levels of instruction. Set the goal of introducing curricula on tolerance and social cohesion in all schools while advancing civic education.
- ▶ Reform land management practices regarding the conflicting priorities of farmers and herders, mines, and the distribution of land in urban settings.

¹⁰⁹ Although we have not discussed them in this report, for references related to “global norms,” see UN General Assembly, A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006 (the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*); UN Security Council, S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001; UN Security Council, S/RES/1624, 14 September 2005. Burkina Faso’s increased collaboration with the UN on counterterrorism matters is a positive development. See UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/68/841, 14 April 2014.

- ▶ Take steps to strengthen trust among the police, military, and civilians, for example, by engaging civil society in the governance of the security sector.
- Address cultural push factors and prevent the emergence of pull factors by practicing secularism and facilitating the elaboration of a Burkinabe concept of *laïcité*.
- ▶ Preserve space for interreligious dialogue on the basis of tolerance among different groups. Exercise leadership to reinforce these values as part of ongoing nation-building events. Partner with civil society to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of state-led interreligious dialogues.
- ▶ Build the capacities of relevant ministries to exercise appropriate oversight regarding mosques, churches, and religious groups and to regulate transnational flows between Burkina Faso and foreign religious groups. Draw on civil society to develop baseline knowledge regarding religious institutions in Burkina Faso. Work with religious communities to encourage self-regulation among different groups on the basis of a common interest in tolerance, peace, and stability.
- ▶ Document sources of social cohesion and resilience against violent extremism and disseminate a guide that could be referenced by civil society, government, and donor-state officials. Consider utilizing existing networks and institutions, such as the associations for joking relationships.
- Work with media organizations to enhance civil society oversight of governmental action and improve levels of accountability. Further, leverage these partnerships to monitor and evaluate the security situation in Burkina Faso in order to identify the emergence of violent extremism and ensure that voices of moderation are prominent in the national debate.

Recommendations for Burkina Faso's International Partners

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Enhance horizontal networks to facilitate inter- and intracommunal dialogue. Use these networks to share information about the identification of extremists and methods of counseling those particularly vulnerable to extremism. Exercise leadership in the interests of peace to sensitize communities to the dangers of fragmentation.
- Work with government and donors to advance programming that nurtures social cohesion and sources of resilience against violent extremism, especially in critical sectors such as education and political participation and with critical actors, such as youth.
- Support the government of Burkina Faso in elaborating a national counterterrorism strategy that includes CVE measures.
- ▶ Consider a broader range of capacity-building assistance than has been provided to facilitate the implementation of that strategy. Such assistance should complement existing priorities, such as building the capacity of security forces and enhancing border control, with a suite of other counterterrorism measures, such as “traditional” counterterrorism tools, for example, on counterterrorism financing, and CVE-specific initiatives.
- Consider vulnerability to violent extremism in determining geographic priorities and methods of implementation for development programming. As a result of its proximity to conflict in Mali, the north has been more impacted by extremism than other regions. Development assistance that has the secondary goal of enhancing social cohesion (e.g., by engaging locals of diverse faiths and ethnicities in implementation) should be preferred where possible.

- Integrate violent extremism topics into technical assistance and capacity-building measures that engage law enforcement and criminal justice institutions. Sensitization and specific training opportunities are needed in the short term, but a longer-term strategy would involve mainstreaming CVE elements into related capacity-building assistance.
- Support civil society organizations in advancing programming to address intra- and intercommunal tension and reinforce social cohesion. Specific programs have been advanced toward the goal of preserving social cohesion. They should be reviewed and their impact assessed with a view to issuing further solicitations for proposals.
- Convene donor governments and multilateral organizations to evaluate the impact of development assistance on the spread of violent extremism and how programming can be leveraged for this purpose in the future.

The Global Center works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. In collaboration with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional, and global levels.

The Global Center focuses on four thematic areas of programming and engagement:

- multilateral security policy
- countering violent extremism
- criminal justice and the rule of law
- financial integrity and inclusion

Across these areas, the Global Center prioritizes partnerships with national and regional stakeholders and works to ensure respect for human rights and empower those affected by transnational violence and criminality to inform international action.

