**CENTRE NATIONAL D'ETUDES STRATEGIQUES ET DE SECURITE**
**CNESS-NIGER**

# IN-DEPTH STUDY ON RADICALIZATION FACTORS IN RURAL, URBAN, UNIVERSITY AND DETENTION ENVIRONMENTS IN FIVE REGIONS OF NIGER

## English Translation of Key Sections

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*This document is an English translation of key sections of the report on an "In-Depth Study on Radicalization Factors in Rural, Urban, University and Detention Environments in Five Regions of Niger." The study was conducted by Niger's National Center for Strategic and Security Studies (NCSSS)[1] with funding from the Governments of Denmark and Norway through the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)[2] under the program "Strengthening Democratic Control and Oversight of the Security Sector" in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. This document includes a translation of the study's executive summary, conclusion and recommendations.[3]*

**Executive Summary**

This study, on the radicalization factors of young people in rural, urban, university and prison environments,[4] was conducted by the National Center for Strategic and Security Studies with the support of the National Democratic Institute. It aims to identify specific determining factors in the process of radicalization of young people in these different environments.

The study involved 70 villages, five regional capitals, five public universities of classical education, two private universities of Arabic education, an internationally renowned Islamic university and several penitentiary centers. A total of 2,376 young people between the ages of 18 and 40 were interviewed through individual fact sheets and 250 people, including religious and traditional leaders and experts, were interviewed during the course of 25 focus groups and informal interviews. This process collected qualitative and quantitative data used for this report.

The results showed that the vulnerability factors of young people [to being radicalized] sometimes vary according to the environment in which they live. While the study found a degree of similarity between urban and rural areas, there is a clear difference in the degree of vulnerability. Subject to the same factors, young people in rural areas are more vulnerable than their peers living in the city. The following table gives the proportion of youth vulnerability according to factors and environment.

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[1] More information on the NCSSS may be found at: www.facebook.com/dircness

[2] More information on NDI is available at: www.ndi.org

[3] In the full French study, the executive summary may be found on pages 5-7; the conclusion on pages 94-96 and recommendations on pages 96-101.

[4] In the regions of Diffa, Niamey, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder

**Table 1: Vulnerability Factors in Rural and Urban Areas**

| Vulnerability Factors | Percentage of Vulnerable Youth in Rural Areas | Percentage of Vulnerable Youth in Urban Areas |
|---|---|---|
| Ignorance or misreading of national laws[5] | 95 | 76 |
| Lack of in-depth understanding of the Quran among those who studied it by region[6] | 93 to 96 | 80 to 97 |
| Unemployment and lack of job prospects by region[7] | 48 to 72 | 12 to 45 |
| Illiteracy and low education level by region[8] | 58 to 63 | 25 to 46 |

Source: NCSSS Survey 2018

The analysis of push factors in these environments reveals two sentiments among young people: injustice and poor governance of public resources. In villages, around 65.25 percent of young people surveyed noted experiencing this feeling of injustice, in contrast to 65.5 percent in the city. Concerning poor governance, the study found the feeling to be 34 percent in villages versus 55.6 percent among people surveyed in large cities. Knowing that extremists generally base their arguments on young people's perceptions, one can conclude that these figures above 50 percent create a propitious breeding ground for extremists.

In universities, the analysis of vulnerability factors revealed other factors different from those of cities and villages. In Francophone universities, the results show that the vulnerability factors of young students are essentially the dependence of students on government benefits (80 percent of students depend on them) and whether or not they have a cumulative, thorough knowledge of both the Quran and "modern" knowledge. University students with this profile [having a deep understanding of the Quran and having a "modern" education] range from two to eight percent of students depending on the university. Also, the sentiment of injustice was expressed by more than 56 percent of the students surveyed, while a perception of poor governance was expressed by more than 58 percent of the students surveyed.

In Arabic-language universities, students feel discriminated against by the French or English education systems (depending on their country of origin), even before looking for employment. The lack of future opportunities and the feeling that their diplomas are undervalued can push these students to take the path

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[5] Findings for rural areas may be found on page 26 of the full CNESS study; findings for urban areas are on page 53

[6] Findings for rural areas are on pages 33-37 of the full CNESS study; findings for urban areas are on pages 53-57

[7] Findings for rural areas are on pages 29-33 of the full CNESS study; findings for urban areas are on pages 66-70

[8] Findings for rural areas are on pages 27-29 of the full CNESS study; findings for urban areas are on pages 57-59

of extremism as a way of demonstrating their worth and the knowledge they have gained. In this setting, the study found that the Salafist movement dominated in these universities. Fewer than 25 percent of the students align themselves with the "Tidjania" movement, which is considered the liberal Islam practiced by most Nigerien Muslims.

In detention centers, the main radicalization factors are judicial errors and slowness in rendering judgments (extremely slow judgment procedures). This creates a sense of frustration and injustice among detainees. Cohabitation of regular inmates and those detained as jihadists can promote radicalization of primary offenders.

**Conclusion**

The study of youth radicalization factors facilitated understanding of the dynamics of the radicalization in villages, cities, universities and detention centers of Niger. Information gathered from 2,376 young people revealed that radicalization factors and push factors that drive young people to radicalization are the same in villages as in the big cities of Niger. However, it should be noted that young people living in big cities are less vulnerable than those living in villages. The analysis of vulnerability factors shows that more than 95 percent of young people living in villages do not know the laws and regulations of the country, their duties to the nation and their rights with respect to the nation. This misunderstanding leads them unknowingly to incivism, which is a faultline often used by extremists to mobilize youth against authorities. In large cities, the study found that 76 percent of young people are affected by this situation. The vulnerability of young people in terms of [radical] religious teachings results from their low knowledge level of the Quran. It should be noted that over 96 percent of young people between the ages of 18 and 40, whether in rural or urban areas, have studied the Quran in traditional Quranic schools. Of these, 93 to 96 percent in rural areas abandoned their studies before reaching middle or high school, where they would have better understood and interpreted the Quran. We thus find villages where 96 percent of young Muslims have a superficial knowledge of the Quran and are guided in terms of religion by fewer than four percent of Quranic scholars ("marabouts") who are able to read and interpret the Quran. When extremists infiltrate this four percent of scholars, the risk of radicalizing many young people is significantly increased. In cities, between 80 and 97 percent of young people are in the same situation.

Unemployment and the lack of employment prospects for young people emerged as the main factor of radicalization both in villages and cities. An analysis of the results on lack of employment and certification shows that between 48 and 72 percent of young people living in villages have neither work nor technical or vocational skills to qualify for a skilled job. They can only rely on rainfed agriculture, which, moreover, is greatly threatened by climate change. Since villages offer very little manual labor opportunities, these young people find themselves without a job and without hope of getting one. Therefore, they become burdens on society, and are not held in high esteem by their families or the community. When idle or inactive, these young people represent an ideal target for extremists who offer

them social and economic reintegration; in short, fulfillment as combatants against injustice and the democratic system. In the big cities, the rate of young people in this situation is relatively low, and varies from 12 to 45 percent depending on the city.

Finally, illiteracy and dropping out of school are also major vulnerability factors for young people. The survey showed that in the villages included in the study 58 to 63 percent of young people are either illiterate or early dropouts (attained elementary school level education). Their level of education does not allow them to analyze and understand the country's democracy and political landscape. They are often unknowingly used by political and religious leaders to generate violence. In large cities, the proportion is lower (18 to 30 percent) but the problem is not less acute since these young people are easily mobilized by political leaders.

The analysis of push factors, which are essentially the opinions of young people about their situation, reveals two sentiments among them: the feeling of injustice and the perception of poor governance of public resources. In the villages, around 65.25 percent of young people surveyed live with this feeling of injustice versus 65.5 percent in the cities. As for poor governance, we find 34 percent of youth in the villages having this perception, and 55.6 percent in the big cities.

The analysis of vulnerability factors in universities revealed other factors, different from those of cities and villages. In Francophone universities, the results show that the vulnerability factors of young students are essentially the dependence of students on government benefits (80 percent of students depend on them) and whether or not students have a cumulative, thorough knowledge of the Quran as well as modern knowledge. Students with this knowledge profile [a combination of Quranic and secular education] range from two to eight percent depending on the university. They are generally active in Muslim students' associations and position themselves as religious leaders afterwards. Having both Francophone and Quranic educations give them a comparative advantage and better prepare them to reach their goals [and reduces their vulnerability to radicalization]. In the Arabic/Islamic universities, it is rather the coexistence of several religious movements, a sense of being discriminated against for having an Arabic/Islamic diploma and the corresponding lack of employment possibilities that we observe to be the main factors of radicalization. In prison settings, the main factors of radicalization are judicial errors and slowness in rendering judgments, which create a sense of frustration and injustice among detainees. Cohabitation between ordinary criminals and suspected jihadists reveals a 33 percent risk of tipping ordinary prisoners towards extremism.

**Recommandations**

Following the analysis of vulnerability factors and actors involved in the process of radicalization of young people in rural, urban, university and prison environments, we formulate recommendations in the form of concrete actions according to the specificity of each environment. The implementation of these recommendations will undoubtedly contribute to significantly reduce the risks of radicalization in Niger.

These recommendations are made to the government, the NCSSS and development partners (non-governmental organizations, associations and civil society organizations).

1. **To Reduce the Vulnerability Factors of Young People in Rural Areas**

- To the government and its partners:

The lack of job opportunities and employment prospects, illiteracy, the low knowledge level of the Quran and ignorance of national laws are the main factors of vulnerability for young people in rural areas. To solve simultaneously these problems, which result from the combination of these factors, the government must consider the progressive improvement of young people's living conditions, wherever they live, by creating work and educational opportunities so these young people can thrive, and so they feel valued and indebted to the state. Specifically, the government can focus its intervention on:

- ❖ The creation of hydro-agricultural amenities in rural areas for the practice of market gardening to promote the employment of young people who depend mainly on agriculture;
- ❖ Awareness-raising, training and support for young people in the practice of off-season agriculture to enable them to be self-reliant and resist the temptations of the highest bidders;
- ❖ The involvement of targeted populations in the definition and implementation of development projects to promote a better balance between supply and the real needs of localities;
- ❖ The adoption of an economic and social development model for young people in rural areas, and the encouragement of all partners to work in synergy on development projects, as well as in the areas of Quranic and civic education;
- ❖ Strengthening and amplifying existing youth awareness campaigns on fundamental laws, civic rights and duties, and the importance of peace, social cohesion and tolerance;
- ❖ The involvement of Quranic scholars ("marabouts") in awareness-raising projects and the multiplication of awareness-raising sessions, especially in rural areas. These scholars can help highlight, discuss and explain the Quranic verses used by extremists to enlist and justify jihad among young people.

- To the National Center for Strategic and Security Studies:

The current state and level of these vulnerability indicators among youth requires the commitment of all actors to address them, with the appropriate tools and guidance. We recommend for the NCSSS to:

- ❖ Accelerate the development of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Radicalization;
- ❖ Distribute as quickly and widely as possible the strategy to non-governmental organizations and donors;
- ❖ Develop a Rapid Radicalization Risk Analysis tool that will serve as a reference tool to target the beneficiaries of radicalization prevention projects in Niger. The tool should be a kind of software.

❖ Urgently set up an Observatory for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Niger that will work with partners in the field. This observatory will be responsible for conducting baseline studies, monitoring indicators and capitalizing the interventions of all implementing partners. The observatory will produce regular reports for the government and its partners on the evolution of vulnerability indicators of vulnerability and draw policymakers' attention to priority areas. This observatory will work in close collaboration with all non-governmental and civil society organization working in the field of preventing extremism.

2. **To Reduce the Vulnerability Factors of Young People in Rural Areas**

● To the government and its partners:

The government and its partners must target young people who are most vulnerable to radicalization to initiate a technical training program, coupled with an educational program and a Quranic curriculum. After their training, they can be integrated in Youth Employment Centers in rural areas or assisted to set up their own initiatives.

3. **To Reduce Vulnerability Factors in a Classical University Environment**

● To the government and its partners:

To reduce students' dependence on government allowances, the government can initiate a program of summer jobs for students willing to work to enhance their financial autonomy. During that period, the government and its partners can set up useful activities requiring a large workforce (e.g., inventorying rented houses or shops for the Directorate of Taxes, conducting awareness-raising sessions on hygiene, health, sanitation, protecting of the environment, etc.).

4. **To Reduce Vulnerability Factors in Arab/Islamic Universities**

● To the government and its partners:

To reduce the feeling of discrimination among students with an Arabic/Islamic education, the government must guide students toward academic fields useful for positions in the public administration. The hiring process for such positions should be fair to all students from all educational systems. The government must also monitor the courses of study offered at Arabic/Islamic universities.

5. **To Reduce Vulnerability Factors in Detention Settings**

● To the government and its partners:

The government must strengthen its judicial system to guarantee that the rights of all defendants are respected, and so that all trials are held by their respective deadlines. The government must also separate accused jihadists from other detainees.

6. **To Strengthen the Rule of Law and Democratic Culture**

- To the government and its partners:
    - ❖ Promote transparency in the management of public resources by publishing annual reports and make them available to the public;
    - ❖ Involve more people (especially youth) in the development of projects and programs;
    - ❖ Standardize public relations and communications so that the government reasserts leadership of all actions taking place in the country.