JOURNEY TO EXTREMISM IN AFRICA:
PATHWAYS TO RECRUITMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

UNDP 2023

Focus

1. To analyse the **changing nature and continental picture** of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as **to take stock of efforts to counter or prevent its spread** in Africa since the first report was published in 2017;

2. To analyse the **drivers, tipping points and accelerators** affecting vulnerability towards recruitment into violent extremist groups as well as sources of resilience, while **tracking variation in relation to the findings of the first report.**

3. To further examine **pathways from extremism**, with a focus on triggers for disengagement and deradicalization.

4. To further **strengthen the gender-lens**, a dimension often overlooked in policy and programming in the P/CVE field.

Approach

- Conceptually approached through *political socialization theory,* the underpinning research approach posits that pathways to and from violent extremism are shaped in relation to the world around it; through exposure to other ideas, values and belief systems. The framework thus allows **to uncover the 'journey map' of critical enabling factors, drivers and triggers in the recruitment and disengagement process.**

- Relying on 2,196 interviewees across eight countries, **roughly three times as many as in the 2017 study,** across eight countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan) the research set up was similar to the *Journey to Extremism* launched in 2017: comparing ex-recruits as well as a reference group of individuals that had not joined a violent extremist group about potential drivers of violent extremism, to test a number of hypotheses regarding drivers and 't*ipping points*' for individual's recruitment.

- The research further examines **the pathways and drivers to disengagement** as well as the *'turning point'* prompting individuals to leave such groups, by comparing ex-recruits that voluntarily disengaged by surrendering or applying for amnesty, with ex-recruits that were arrested.

- Greater focus on a **gendered approach.**

FOCUS COUNTRIES: BURKINA FASO / CHAD / CAMEROON / MALI / NIGER / NIGERIA / SOMALIA / SUDAN

Demographic sample

FIGURE 2 **DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS and COUNTRY OF DATA COLLECTION
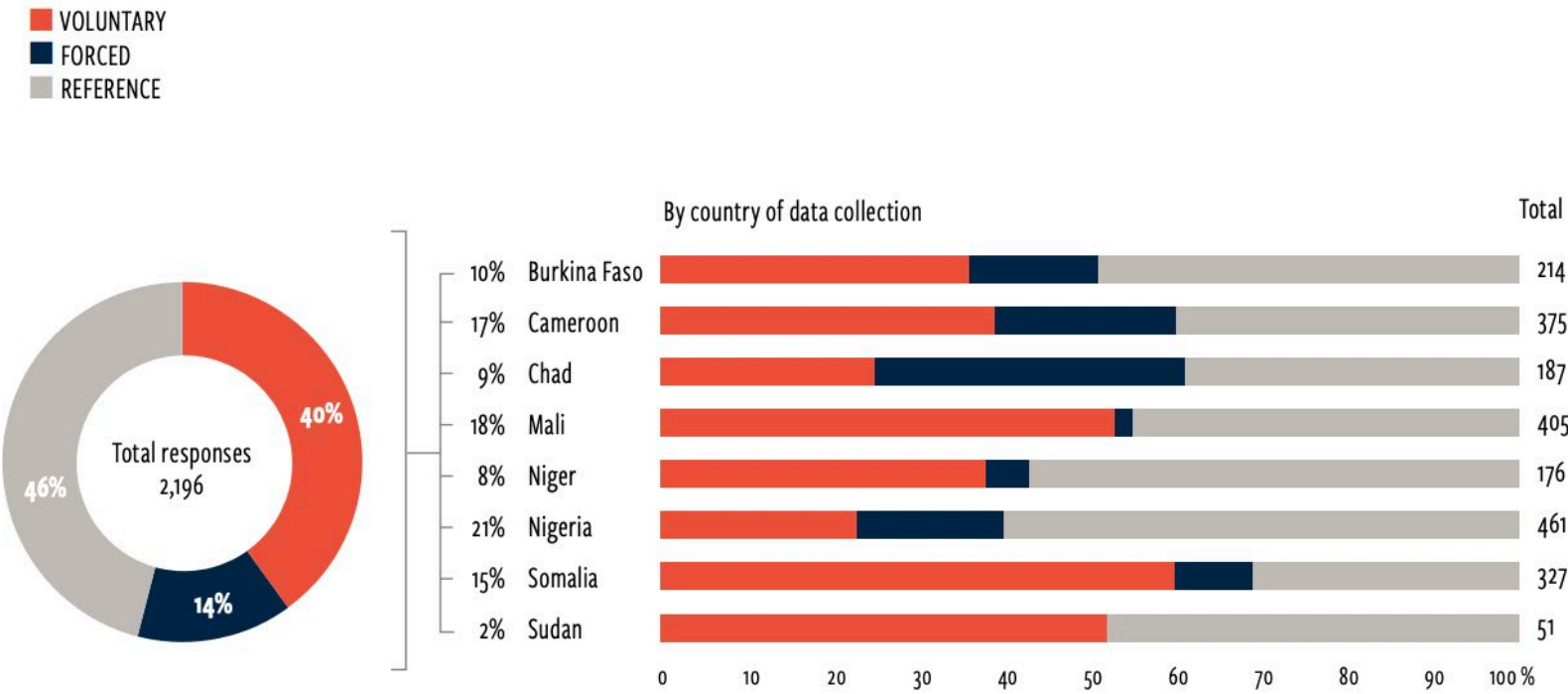
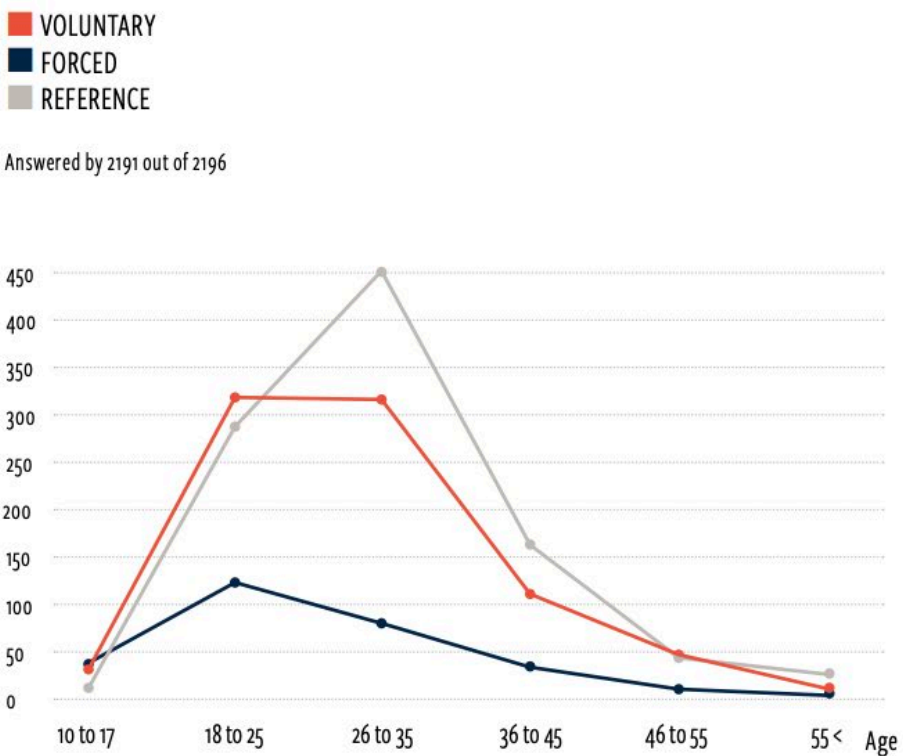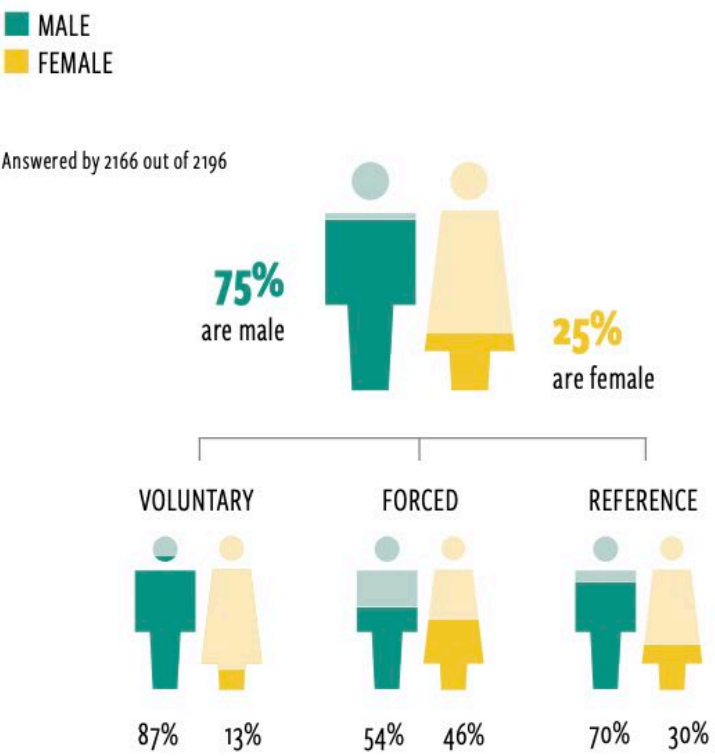FIGURE 3 **AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS** BY CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

FIGURE 4 **CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS** BY GENDER

- 552 female respondents – approximately **four times** as many as the 2017 study

Data collection

FIGURE 7 **DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY RESPONDENTS** BY ORGANIZATION and GENDER

- **MALE**
- **FEMALE**

Answered by 739 out of 869

Boko Haram 52%
Al Shabaab 27%
JNIM 17%
Other 4%

Answered by 246 out of 249

Boko Haram 85%
Al Shabaab 10%
JNIM 0%
Other 5%

FIGURE 5 **STATUS OF RESPONDENTS** BY PRIMARY RESPONDENTS and GENDER

- **AWAITING FORMAL PROCESS**
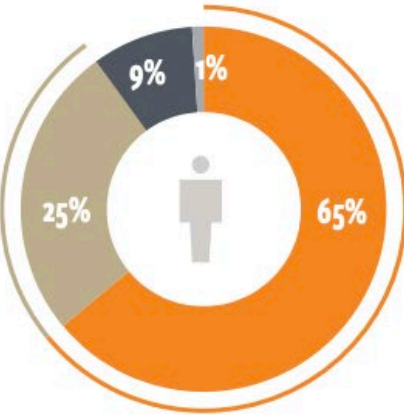- **FORMAL PROCESS**
- **UNDER FORMAL PROCESS**
- **WITHOUT FORMAL STATUS** Sentenced/Sentenced for life

by VOLUNTARY and FORCED RECRUITS
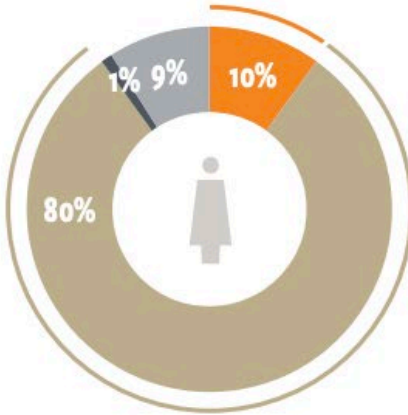Answered by 684 out of 1182

Primary respondents
8% 2% 32% 58%
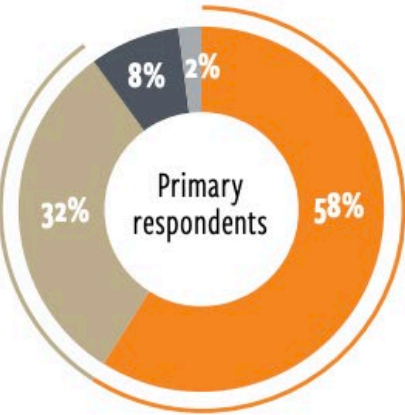
20% Rehabilitation
10% Surrendered
2% Amnesty
31% Arrested
27% Detention centre

by GENDER
Answered by 813 out of 1181

9% 1% 25% 65%

16% Rehabilitation
9% Surrendered
0,2% Amnesty
34% Arrested
31% Detention centre

1% 9% 10% 80%

51% Rehabilitation
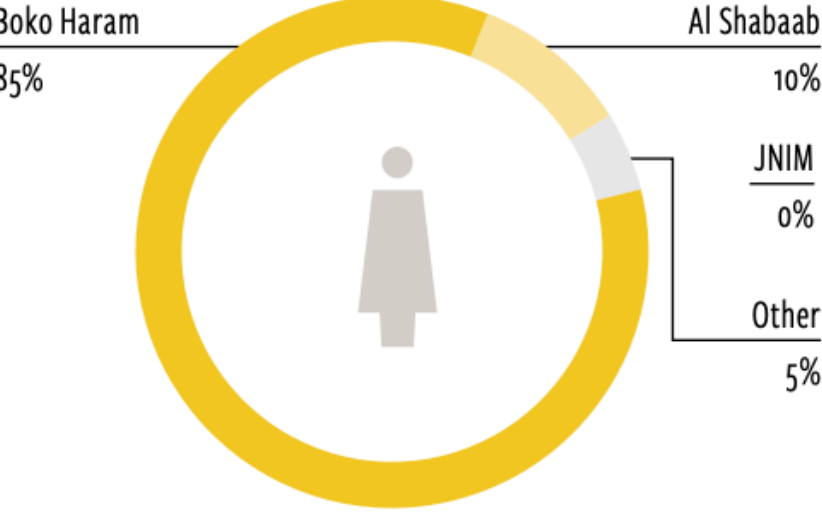16% Surrendered
13% Amnesty
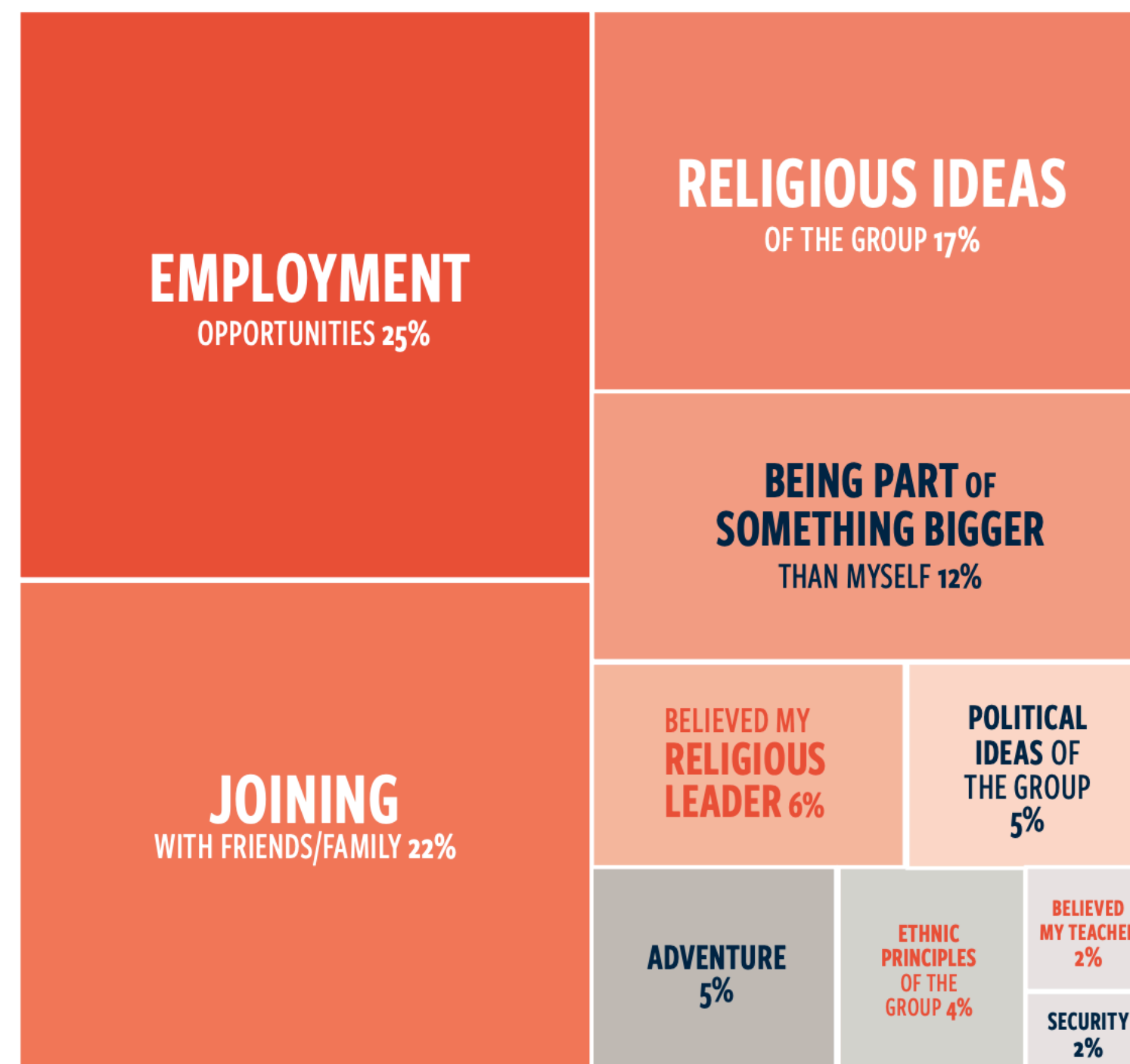10% Arrested
-% Detention centre

Key findings – Pathways to Recruitment

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- Although **25% of surveyed voluntary recruits identified employment opportunities as their primary reason** for joining, the research did not find a significant correlation between unemployment and susceptibility to violent extremism.

- **This study does not find a statistical relationship between levels of trusts and susceptibility to violent extremism**. Levels of trust in state actors and institutions are low among all respondents. 58% of voluntary recruit exhibited little/no trust in national government, compared to 50% of reference groups counterparts.

- Among the 48% voluntary recruits who had experienced a trigger event, i.e. a 'tipping point' factor, **as many as 71 % experienced short, punctuated and sharp escalations of human rights abuses such as government action, killing of a family member or and arrest of family member (10%)**, similar to the first study.

- **Low levels of access to information and communication increases vulnerability to recruitment**. Recruits that never use or lack access to internet at the time of joining, joined more quickly than others.

- **Male recruits were more likely to join with friends, female recruits with family** While 61 percent of male recruits joined with a friend, 50 percent of female recruits joined with family (husbands).

FIGURE 18 **PRIMARY REASONS FOR JOINING THE VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUP** BY VOLUNTARY GROUP

Multiple-answer question. Shows percent of individuals who selected reason.
Answered by 519 out of 756

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES 25%

RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE GROUP 17%

BEING PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF 12%

JOINING WITH FRIENDS/FAMILY 22%

BELIEVED MY **RELIGIOUS LEADER** 6%

POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE GROUP 5%

ADVENTURE 5%

ETHNIC PRINCIPLES OF THE GROUP 4%

BELIEVED MY TEACHER 2%

SECURITY 2%

Gendered drivers to recruitment

- **Economic factors – employment opportunities particular salient factor for men (27%), relative to women (14%)**

- **Religious idea of group -** (19%), relative to women (5%)

- **Peer influence** central in both groups' decision; however male recruits were more likely to join with friends, female recruits with family/husbands

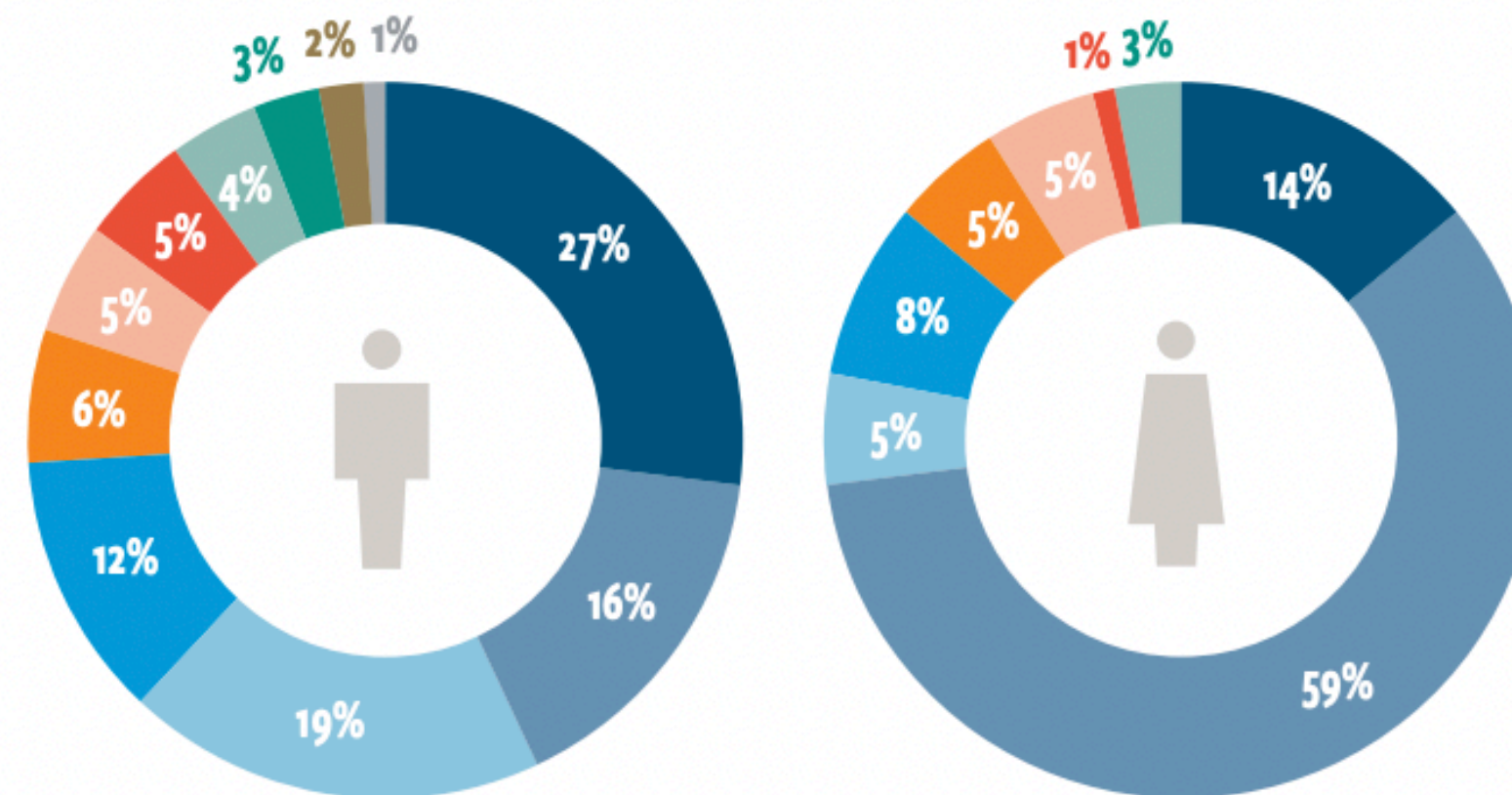- Sense of belonging – **being part of something bigger** (12%) among men, less salient for women (8%)

"Most of the youth who were part of the group had wives and kids leading a financially stable life"
Ali, 24 years old, Somalia

FIGURE 27 **PRIMARY REASONS FOR JOINING THE VE GROUP** BY GENDER

Legend:
- EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- JOINING WITH FAMILY / FRIENDS
- PRELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE GROUP
- BEING PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF
- BELIEVED MY RELIGIOUS LEADER
- ADVENTURE
- POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE GROUP
- ETHNIC PRINCIPLES OF THE GROUP
- BELIEVED MY TEACHER
- SECURITY
- SEEKING JUSTICE

Answered by 524 out of 765

Men: 27%, 16%, 19%, 12%, 6%, 5%, 5%, 4%, 3%, 2%, 1%
Women: 14%, 59%, 5%, 8%, 5%, 5%, 1%, 3%
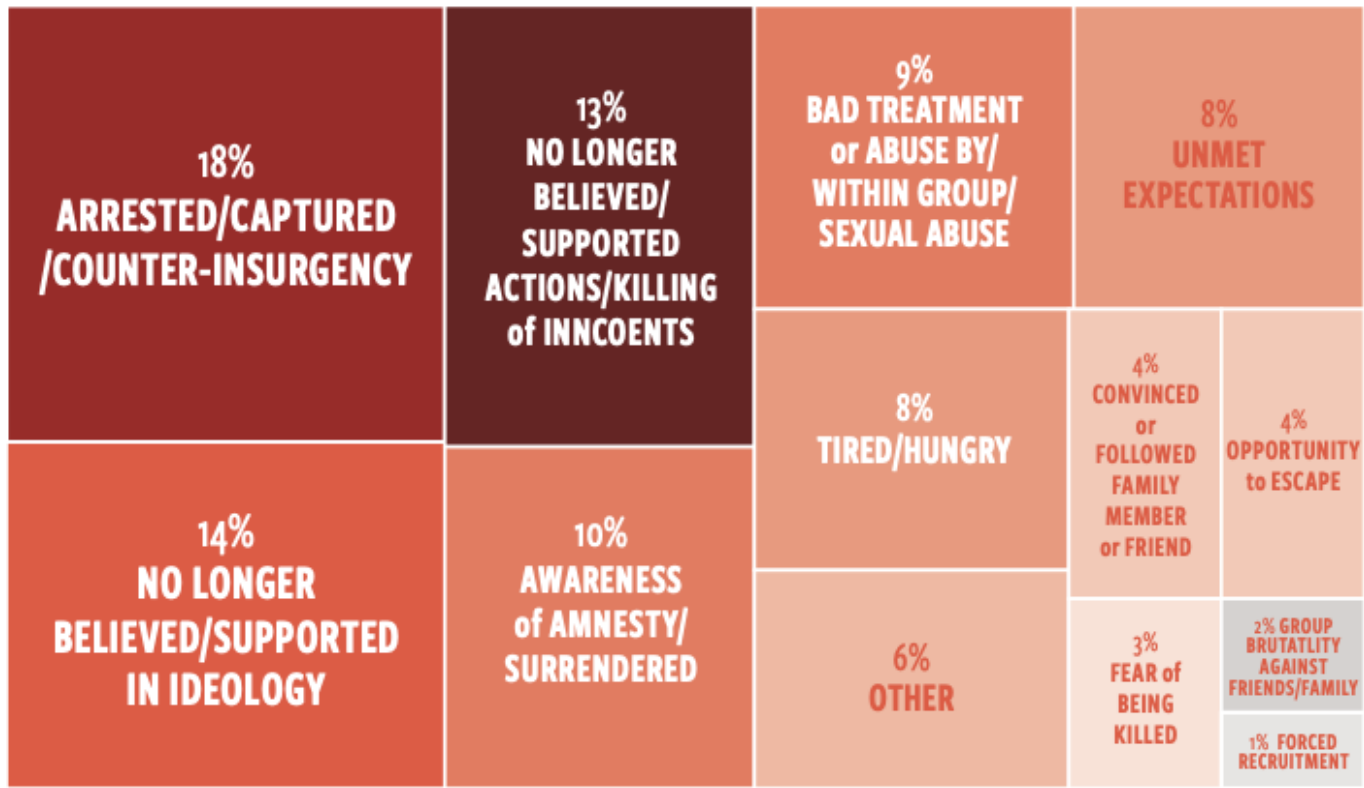
Key Findings – Pathways to Disengagement

- 77 percent of those who chose to leave voluntarily through surrender or amnesty said their **expectations were not met.**

- **Disappointment of monetary rewards were more prevalent among those that joined quickly (42 percent)**, compared to those who joined within a year (32 percent). 54 percent stated that the group was not providing employment opportunities or doing a poor job of providing them.

- **Disillusionment with the group's ideology and/or actions are key in triggering a 'turning point'.** 68 percent - indicated that 'no longer agreeing with the group's actions' was the most influential, primary factor affecting their decision to leave. 60 percent indicated 'no longer believing in the group's ideology', as the second most influential factor affecting that decision for their departure. **85 percent females who voluntarily disengaged cited no longer believing in ideology as a large or significant factor in their decision to leave, compared to 62 percent males.**

- The findings also point to the **'cascading effects' of disengagement patterns**, which are closely linked to the decision of family, friends and community members to leave.

- 40 percent who disengaged voluntarily from a VE group stated that **government incentives and amnesty programmes** influenced their decision to leave.

Reasons for Leaving VE Groups

FIGURE 60 **REASONS FOR LEAVING THE GROUP,** VOLUNTARY VS. FORCED RECRUITS

■ VOLUNTARY
■ FORCED

Multiple-answer question. Shows percent of individuals who selected reason.

18% ARRESTED/CAPTURED /COUNTER-INSURGENCY	13% NO LONGER BELIEVED/ SUPPORTED ACTIONS/KILLING of INNCOENTS	9% BAD TREATMENT or ABUSE BY/ WITHIN GROUP/ SEXUAL ABUSE	8% UNMET EXPECTATIONS	
14% NO LONGER BELIEVED/SUPPORTED IN IDEOLOGY	10% AWARENESS of AMNESTY/ SURRENDERED	8% TIRED/HUNGRY	4% CONVINCED or FOLLOWED FAMILY MEMBER or FRIEND	4% OPPORTUNITY to ESCAPE
		6% OTHER	3% FEAR of BEING KILLED	2% GROUP BRUTATLITY AGAINST FRIENDS/FAMILY
				1% FORCED RECRUITMENT

"My expectations were to get a house for myself, enough money and a car. But none of these were fulfilled."
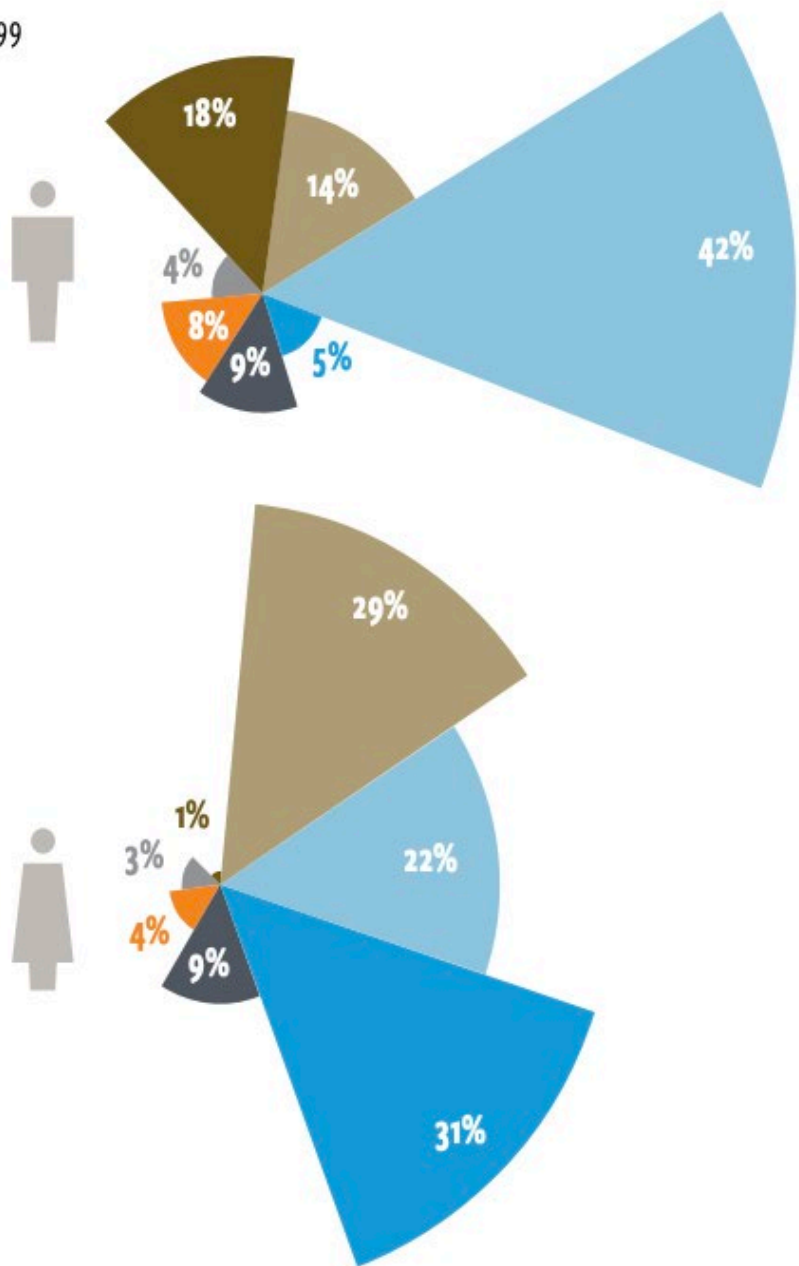*Aden (M), 21, Somalia*

"They claimed that they were better than the government and that was a lie."
Aisha, (F), 21, Nigeria

FIGURE 72 **WHO DID YOU LEAVE THE GROUP WITH?** BY GENDER

■ CAPTURED WITH OTHER GROUP MEMBERS   ■ COMMUNITY MEMBERS
■ FAMILY MEMBERS   ■ ALONE
■ FRIENDS   ■ OTHER
■ HUSBAND/WIFE

Answered by 199 out of 199

18%
14%
4%
8%
9%
5%
42%

29%
1%
3%
4%
9%
22%
31%

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Implications

PVE field often gender-blind – gendered lens key to uncover VE dynamics

- Findings reveals that a gendered lens leads to very significantly different results in understanding the trajectory and pathways into and out of VE groups

- Yet PVE field largely genderblind representing a critical gap to evidence-based programming and policy efforts

- J2E study and its primary data-base presents one piece of the puzzle, but more research needed

Connecting the dots between masculinities and violent extremism

- VE groups tap into and mobilize existing grievances – including ideas of manhood, power and masculinity, as a lever for circumventing status quo, transforming positionality and upwards mobility in recruitment efforts. In turn, when such aspirations are disappointed, it presents challenges in the context of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

- A masculinity-lens is key as part of gender-and conflict sensitive approaches and gender mainstreaming into the PVE field and warrants greater attention in programming and policy efforts, including as part of WPS-agenda

Putting women at the forefront of prevention

- Women's pathway to recruitment appears to be less ideologically motivated than men's, highlighted the **potential of women in curbing ideological narratives** known to be a touch base for mobilizing context-based grievances.

- Women's increased participation in PVE initiatives in both the primary and reference groups, compared to men, underscores women's important and often **untapped potential** in empowering communities in PVE initiatives.

- Specific focus and resources should be dedicated to ensuring gender-sensitive analysis and systematic inclusion of women and girls' perspectives and meaningful participation.

Policy Implications

- Realizing the promise **– towards effective oversight of human rights compliance, rule of law and accountability** to militarized and state-centric counter-terrorism responses

- Reimagining and reinvigorating **the social contract from the bottom-up**

- Strengthening state legitimacy through **improved service delivery, quality and accountability of state service provision**

- Embedding **a conflict-sensitive approach** in efforts to address violent extremism

- Up-scaling support for **localized, community-based approaches** to preventing violent extremism

- **Reinvigorating PVE within peacebuilding and sustainable development policy frameworks**

- Recalibrating the commitment towards **investing in cost-effective prevention and long-term development**

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'I WAS LOOKING FOR WHERE I COULD PRACTICE FREEDOM SINCE I COULD NOT GET THAT IN MY FAMILY. THE SAME THING I EXPERIENCED IN THE GROUP WHERE I FELT LIKE I WAS IN A PRISON. MY OPINIONS AND WANTS WERE NEVER GIVEN CONSIDERATION.'
HAWA, 26 YEARS OLD, SOMALIA'