



# VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN EASTERN UGANDA

JANUARY 2019

# BRICS Organisational Summary

Funded under the UK cross-government Conflict, Stability & Security Fund (CSSF), with additional support from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, BRICS supported community-led initiatives with the aim of making populations in East Africa less vulnerable to drivers, enablers, and narratives of Violent Extremism (VE). From April 2016 - August 2018, BRICS was implemented by DAI Europe in partnership with Wasafiri Consulting. The multi-year programme aimed to reach the most at-risk groups and individuals. This was to decrease their vulnerability to VE by working closely with and through community-based influencers who have access to and credibility within these target groups. BRICS worked with security and government actors, whenever possible, to support constructive and sustainable community engagements to prevent the rise of VE. The programme approaches were informed by the research conducted by community-based researchers, which aimed to understand both the root causes of VE and the effectiveness of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) interventions.

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Building Resilience in Civil Society (BRICS)

*in partnership with*

Allied Muslim Youth Uganda  
Muslim Centre for Justice and Law  
Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum  
United Religions Initiative-Great Lakes

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UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

# CONTENTS

	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I.</b>	<b>Research Objectives and Approach</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>15</b>
	Violent Extremism in Uganda	16
	Islam in Uganda	17
<b>III.</b>	<b>Research Methodology and Sample</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Research Findings</b>	<b>24</b>
	Conducting Research in and with At-Risk Communities	24
	The VE Landscape and Drivers of VE	24
	Radicalisation and Recruitment	29
	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism	37
<b>V.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>Appendix A: Partner Organisations</b>	<b>44</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Definitions of Key Terms</b>	<b>46</b>
	<b>Appendix C: Social Network Approach</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>Appendix D: Research Methodology</b>	<b>53</b>



## Executive Summary

**To date, there is a need for more published, evidence-based research on violent extremism (VE) in Uganda.** Much existing research relies primarily on secondary sources or on key informant interviews (KIIs) often conducted in Kampala or regional centres. This research study helps to additionally fill these gaps by supplementing KIIs with interviews of at-risk individuals living in local communities with connections to VE, with the objectives of better understanding:

- a) who and why certain individuals or communities are at risk of VE;
- b) the radicalisation and recruitment process; and
- c) which preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) interventions may be most effective.

**151 interviews were conducted over a two-month period in 2018:** 74 interviews with key informants (government, security, religious, and civil society representatives) and 77 with potential at-risk individuals in Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo Districts in Eastern Uganda. For the purpose of this specific study, **the research defines an at-risk individual as a person who has a direct social network connection to VE through at least one of the following:**

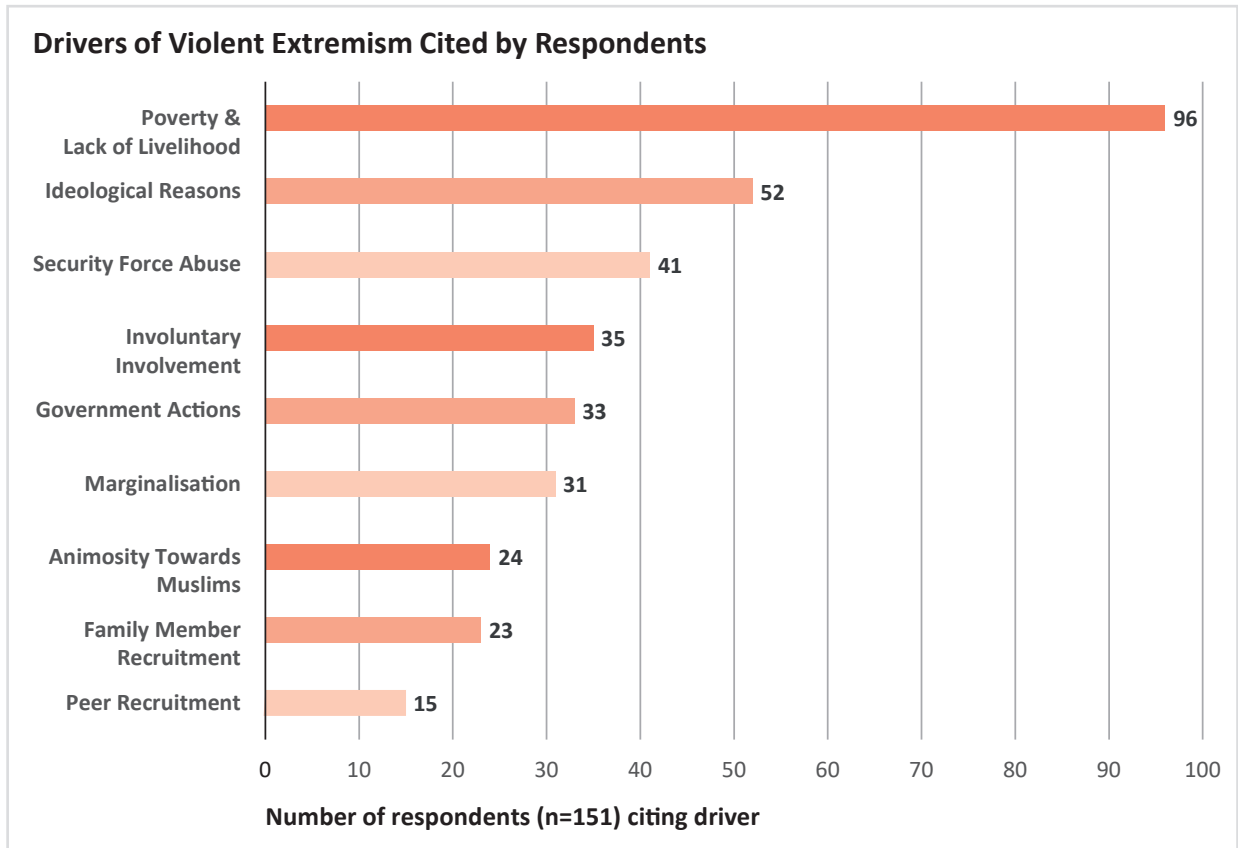
- **has a family member, close peer, or neighbour** who has been involved in or connected with VE (sympathisers, recruiters, fighters, etc.);
- **lives in a micro-neighbourhood** with known VE activity;
- **participates in specific spaces** (e.g., schools, religious centres, social centres, etc.) with known VE activity or a connection to VE groups; or
- **has had significant exposure to VE propaganda** (typically through one of the above sources).

**The research was designed and conducted in partnership with four registered Ugandan civil society organisations (CSOs)** – Allied Muslim Youth Uganda, Muslim Centre for Justice and Law, Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum, and United Religions Initiative-Great Lakes – working on P/CVE programming in Eastern Uganda and elsewhere in the country.

### The VE Landscape and Drivers of VE

- **Active, yet uncertain VE presence in Eastern Uganda:** Through first- and second-hand accounts, there are reports of armed, anti-state organisations active in the region with some confirmed to be VE in nature. While activity has decreased since 2014, respondents reported ongoing recruitment and involvement. Respondents are not always certain of the group affiliations; the Allied Democratic Forces is frequently mentioned though there may be other active groups. There were conflicting accounts of the presence of Al-Shabaab activity.

- **Shift in VE hotspots:** Prior to 2014, Namayingo was a hotspot of VE recruitment, but now Namayemba, Mayuge (in Bugiri District), Bulesa, and Bugiri Municipality appear to be new hotspots due to increased security presence in Namayingo following the unexplained murders of Muslim clerics, as well as increased community vigilance.
- **The most common drivers of radicalisation and recruitment mentioned were poverty and lack of sustainable livelihoods, ideological religious reasons, and security detention and abuse.**



- **Distrust between the government and Muslim communities increases the risk for radicalisation, particularly for the Salafi community.**<sup>1</sup> In particular, Salafi leaders feel they are unfairly targeted by security agencies, arrested for suspected criminal activity, detained without being brought to court, and tortured in ungazetted detention centres. Additionally, the broader Muslim community in this area expresses perceptions of marginalisation, and some believe that they are deliberately excluded from government economic empowerment programmes.
- **Salafi communities are socially isolated, even from other Muslim communities** in the same areas. This isolation and division within the Muslim community and its leadership plays into VE narratives (e.g. anti-government, *takfirism*, restoration of Islamic state, etc.) as well as contributing to further feelings of marginalisation and both inter- and intra-religious violence.
- There is a yet unknown but sizeable number of returnees across the three districts.

<sup>1</sup> While the term *Tabligh* or *Salafi-Tabligh* is commonly used to refer to this population, BRICS uses the term Salafi as it is the terminology used by the community itself and to avoid confusion with the distinct *Tablighi Jamaat* movement. See page 17 of the report for a further discussion of Salafism.

## Radicalisation and Recruitment

- **Unemployed male youth (18-30 years old), especially from Salafi communities, are considered most at risk of VE radicalisation and recruitment.**
- **Five primary pathways to radicalisation and recruitment were identified for men, women, and children:**
  - **Men are either a) recruited for a job and then unknowingly taken to a VE camp, or they b) are identified in select Salafi mosques for additional religious study and radicalised through religious and socio-political narratives.** VE activity takes place among a smaller subset of mosque members, and not all members of these mosques may be aware of VE activity occurring.
  - **Salafi women are most often radicalised and involved in VE through their husbands' ties,** though sometimes through another male family member, such as a brother or father.
  - **Children below 18 years, most often orphans or from poor families, are promised a) scholarships at distant schools, or b) work opportunities in another geographic location,** after which they are radicalised or taken directly to a violent extremist organisation (VEO) camp. Parents and guardians may or may not be aware of the VE connection.
- **There is initial evidence of VE connections between Uganda and Kenya** that needs further exploration.

## Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

- **Many communities and at-risk individuals in these areas are not reached by CSOs** or are unaware of P/CVE and P/CVE-related programming or assistance opportunities, particularly in the villages.
- **Returnees in these districts are frequently isolated and lack income generating opportunities.** There are minimal community-based efforts for the reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees, especially those over the age of 30.
- **Vocational skills training with start-up capital, reintegration of returnees, and strengthening of linkages with government security and district administration were cited by respondents as potentially effective P/CVE strategies.** There is also need for pro bono legal aid interventions for individuals while in detention and afterwards to address their legal claims, as well as psychosocial services for them, their families, and returnees.





## Selected Recommendations

- Recommendations for the **Government of Uganda**:
  - **Facilitate mechanisms to link returnees and at-risk individuals with existing government and civil society service providers** to improve their access to social services and economic opportunities at the local level.
  - **Explore mechanisms to ensure that at-risk communities in Eastern Uganda are more aware of government social development programmes** and the procedures for participation in order to ensure representation from communities with low participation rates.
  - **Expand collaboration with and support of CSOs working in the P/CVE space** so that their efforts, particularly with the security sector, are complimentary.
- Recommendations for **civil society/practitioners**:
  - **Expand programming beyond cities** to strengthen linkages and create networks with local communities.
  - **Design programme interventions in consultation with local communities** so as to best identify the communities' needs and the implementation mechanisms that will be best received by particular communities.
  - **Undertake practical efforts to encourage dialogue between the Sunni, Shia, and Salafi leadership to reduce intra-religious tensions that can lead to violence.**
  - **Pursue specific P/CVE programme interventions, including vocational skills training with start-up capital; reintegration and economic empowerment of returnees;** strengthening linkages with government security and district administration; offering pro bono legal aid interventions for those in detention; and providing psychosocial services for returnees, as well as families and individuals affected by VE.
- Recommendations for **international development partners**:
  - **Provide funding for P/CVE intervention programmes described above targeting economic and social support for at-risk communities.** Include at-risk adults, particularly returnees, in the target beneficiary population.
  - **Be open to working with very small organisations or grassroots efforts that have legitimate access to at-risk individuals and communities.** Include capacity building as a programme component and offer technical support on programme design, management, and financial oversight.
  - **Coordinate between international partners and governments to develop regional and cross-border P/CVE programmes** with Kenya, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Somalia.

- Recommendations for **researchers**:
    - **Adopt participatory research methods with at-risk communities and CSOs** as both respondents and co-creators in the research design to help ensure that research findings inform programming and benefit the community.
    - **Broaden research methodologies beyond KIIs and focus group discussions to learn from at-risk individuals** who are both knowledgeable and affected by VE, and whose experiences can provide valuable information as to their lived experiences with VE. Expand field-based research beyond Kampala and other urban areas to better understand the experiences of rural communities affected by VE.
    - **Conduct rigorous evaluations of P/CVE interventions** to determine which interventions may be most effective in specific contexts and publicly share the results so others may learn from them.
    - **Conduct further research on topics**, including radicalisation and recruitment of university students; human trafficking; transregional VE and VEO connections; the situation of returnees; sources of resilience; and the role of women in VE and P/CVE.
    - **Utilise research to build collective understanding and action around the problem of VE at the community and district levels.** One of the key impacts from the research was initiating discussions around the findings with the respondents at the community and district levels, which have proven effective for bringing communities together around the problem.
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## I. Research Objectives and Approach

**To date, there is a need for more published, evidence-based research on violent extremism (VE) in Uganda.** The Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism (RESOLVE) Network ranks Uganda among the top ten countries most underrepresented in VE research when compared to the level of intra-state violence experienced.<sup>2</sup> Much recent research has been based on a small number of key informant interviews (KIIs) or has focused on the risk posed by Al-Shabaab in Uganda.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, research, whether field- or key informant-based, often focuses on the Kampala region.<sup>4</sup> While this existing research makes important contributions, **more research is needed, particularly more field-based research with at-risk individuals and communities,** to better understand VE drivers, the scope of the problem, and the effectiveness of **preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE)** interventions, especially in more isolated communities. This report aims to integrate the views and experiences of individuals and communities in which VE radicalisation and recruitment takes place alongside the insights from civil society, religious, and government representatives.

**In 2016, Building Resilience in Civil Society (BRICS) conducted two field-based projects examining VE,** one in Eastern, Central, and Western Uganda<sup>5</sup> and the second focusing on the districts of Bugiri, Buvuma, Kampala, Mayuge, and Namayingo.<sup>6</sup> These projects highlighted the need for continued research engagement to better understand current VE dynamics and P/CVE interventions; the second report specifically highlighted the need for participatory community research to work with local stakeholders both to gain trust in local communities and also to ensure that both the research design and results would directly benefit the communities. Additionally, the research emphasised the need to specifically conduct interviews amongst Salafi communities in Eastern Uganda as their views and experiences are often not included in research.

2 Rex W. Douglass and Candace Rondeaux (2017). "MINING THE GAPS: A Text Mining-Based Meta-Analysis of the Current State of Research on Violent Extremism." RESOLVE Network, United States Institute of Peace.

3 See for example: Peter Romaniuk and Tracey Durner (2018). "The Politics of Preventing Violent Extremism: The Case of Uganda." *Conflict, Security & Development* 18(2): 159-179 and International Crisis Group (2018). "Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa." Two of the exceptions include Lindsay Scorgie-Porter's research on the ADF (2015): "Militant Islamists or Borderland Dissidents? An Exploration into the Allied Democratic Forces' Recruitment Practices and Constitution." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 53(1): 1-25; and Anneli Botha's research on the ADF and the Lord's Resistance Army (2016): *Terrorism in Kenya and Uganda: Radicalization from a Political Socialization Perspective*. Lexington Books.

4 See for example: International Organisation for Migration (2017). "Strengthening Social Cohesion and Stability in Slum Populations: Baseline Study Kampala-Uganda."

5 Wasafiri Consulting (2016). "Regional Stakeholder Mapping Project- Country Report: Uganda." Conducted as an immediate precursor to the BRICS programme.

6 BRICS (2016). "Local Perceptions of the Nature and Dynamics of Violent Islamic Extremism."

**In December 2017, BRICS undertook a research partnership in three districts in Eastern Uganda – Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo Districts – with four Ugandan civil society organisations (CSOs) working on peacebuilding and P/CVE initiatives in these districts: Allied Muslim Youth Uganda, Muslim Centre for Justice and Law, Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum, and United Religions Initiative-Great Lakes.<sup>7</sup> In consultation with them, BRICS identified the following research objectives to better understand:**

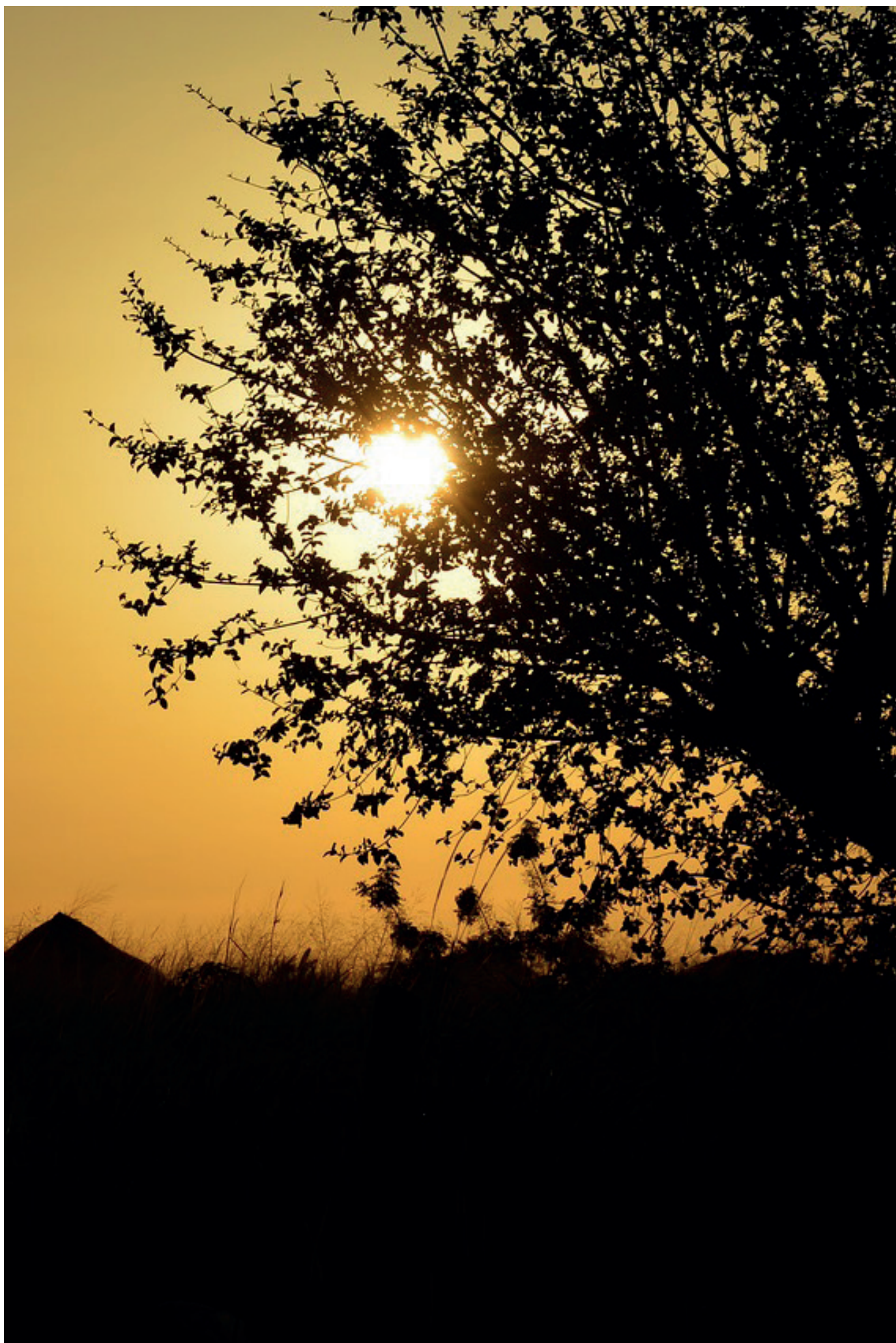
- a) who and why certain individuals or communities are at risk of VE;
- b) the radicalisation and recruitment process; and,
- c) which P/CVE interventions may be most effective.

In addition to providing input on the research process, **the partner organisations were instrumental in obtaining security clearance for the research, facilitating initial introductions for the researchers, and integrating findings at the programme and organisational levels.** Furthermore, the six field researchers were all staff of or affiliated with the partner organisations, which provided them with local knowledge and context, and importantly, allowed the researchers to communicate research findings in real-time to their organisations to ensure that the research findings would be incorporated into programme planning and events so that the communities in which the research was conducted would directly benefit from the research findings. The partner organisations also provided a platform for research dissemination at the local level.

The initial findings and draft report were presented to key stakeholders at the national and local levels including government; security services; domestic and international CSOs; academia; and international development partners for their feedback. Additionally, the findings were shared with local community members, religious leaders, and interview participants.

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<sup>7</sup> These organisations had also participated as KIIs for previous BRICS research. *See Appendix A for a description of these organisations.*



## II. Context

There is no single accepted definition for **violent extremism** (VE) and the term is widely used to describe an array of beliefs, acts, and motivations from a diverse group of individual actors and organisations.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this study, VE is considered as material and/or immaterial support for or engagement in violent acts justified by an inflexible and uncompromising ideology.<sup>9</sup> The extent to which individual actors or supporters embrace this ideology may vary (see *Appendix B for definitions of key terms*). It is important to highlight however that the individuals, groups, and ideologies that may be connected to VE are not homogenous nor static, and specific contexts matter both geographically and temporally. Additionally, when VE is supported by an organisation there may be differences in emphasis and approach not only within the leadership structure, but also between leadership and rank-and-file members. This diversity adds to the complexity of both studying and trying to address VE, as further discussed in the case of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) below.

Post-independence Uganda has experienced periodic violence, and armed extremist groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the ADF have been particularly significant. While Uganda has experienced various forms of VE, this report focuses primarily on manifestations associated with the ADF and/or affecting the Salafi community in Eastern Uganda. This is a result of both a) the significance of the ADF in the communities where the research took place; and b) building off BRICS' previous research in Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo, which specifically found that there was a need to include the views and experiences of Salafi communities in research on VE. This focus emphasises depth over breadth in the research topic, and it should not be taken that this is the only form of VE that is affecting either Eastern Uganda or the country as a whole. Additionally, while many of the respondents and affected individuals and communities are Muslim, it should be emphasised that VE radicalisation and/or recruitment affects only a very small minority of individuals, Muslim or otherwise, and it is condemned by the majority.

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8 See for example the following discussions: Jason-Leigh Striegher (2015). "Violent-Extremism: An Examination of a Definitional Dilemma" presented at the Australian Security and Intelligence Conference; and Andrew Glazzard and Martine Zeuthen (2016). "Violent Extremism." Professional Development Reading Pack No. 24. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSCRC).

9 Drawing on Lauren Van Metre (2016). *Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya*. United States Institute of Peace.

As discussed above, VE is a complex phenomenon, in particular when concerning the ADF. There is not a universal consensus on whether the ADF should be considered a VEO, particularly when concerning the centrality of religious ideology in justifying violence, as the apparent emphasis on religion has varied since its founding.<sup>10</sup> The use of religious ideology has varied based on different contexts. Accounts pertaining to ADF were included in this report because of its long history of recruitment in Eastern Uganda; its continued usage of religious narratives for radicalisation and recruitment purposes in Eastern Uganda; similar narratives and drivers to other VEOs; and possible ties to other transregional VEO networks. As described above, the ADF and other organisations identified as VEOs are not necessarily monolithic and their manifestations may vary geographically, temporally, and across the organisational structure.

## Violent Extremism in Uganda

The ADF, a merger of three rebel groups – Allied Democratic Movement, National Army for the Liberation of Uganda, and Uganda Muslim Liberation Army – became active in 1996 with a stated goal of overthrowing the Museveni regime. Founded by Jamil Mukulu, a Muslim convert, the movement has advocated for an Islamist state (*khilafa*). The group was most active in the late 1990s, frequently engaging with the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF). The 2000 Amnesty Act offered amnesty, rehabilitation, and reintegration to combatants of rebel groups, including the LRA and ADF, who renounced violence. Despite members partaking in the amnesty,<sup>11</sup> the ADF has remained active, with a spike in activity in both Uganda and particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since 2007. Since 2014, the deaths of more than 12 Muslim clerics and leaders as well as other prominent Ugandan politicians and members of government have been attributed to the ADF.

In addition to ADF, Al-Shabaab has also operated in Uganda. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the largest VE attack in recent Ugandan history – two bombings in Kampala in July 2010 as spectators were watching the 2010 FIFA World Cup Final, killing 74 and injuring many more – in retaliation for Uganda’s support for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

10 For example, Romaniuk and Durner (2018) do not consider it an Islamist VEO. For further discussion on ADF and the significance of religion, see research by Lindsay Scorgie-Porter (2015); Kristof Titeca and Daniel Fahey (2016) “The many faces of a rebel group: The Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” *International Affairs* 92: 1189-1206); and Suranjan Weeraratne and Sterling Recker (2018). “The Isolated Islamists: The Case of the Allied Democratic Forces in the Ugandan-Congolese Borderland.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30(1): 22-46. Scorgie-Porter notes a decline in the importance of religious rhetoric between the periods 1996-2003 and 2003-2013. Some have argued, particularly in light of the lack of religiously-focused requests in the 2008 peace discussions with the Congolese and Ugandan governments that religion is no longer or has never been central to ADF. The Congo Research Group (2018) “Inside the ADF Rebellion: A Glimpse into the Life and Operations of a Secretive Jihadi Armed Group” has identified that religious branding still plays an important role in some Congolese camps and videos. The Ugandan Anti-Terrorism Act lists the ADF as a terrorist organisation together with the LRA and the Lord’s Resistance Movement.

11 The Amnesty Commission reports 2,315 former ADF members have taken part in the amnesty.



Responding to these and other attacks, the Government of Uganda is formulating a national P/ CVE strategy. While the threat of VE in Uganda is more modest than in neighbouring countries in the region,<sup>12</sup> particularly Kenya and Somalia, VE remains a threat. As described in the research findings below, marginalisation, whether perceived or actual; human rights abuses; political repression; and religious polarisation provide conditions in which individuals and communities are sympathetic to the narratives and goals of VEOs and more susceptible to VE radicalisation and/or recruitment.

## Islam in Uganda

13.7% of Uganda's population identifies as Muslim, representing the largest non-Christian faith in Uganda.<sup>13</sup> There are several Muslim communities in Uganda: Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyya. Sunnis comprise the largest sect, represented by two different leaderships: the Mufti of Uganda at Old Kampala - comprising the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) - and Supreme Mufti of Uganda at Kibuli Mosque. Also relevant are the *Tabligh* (who often refer to themselves as Salafi), a Sunni sub-group largely following *Wahhabi* teachings and with their own leadership structure. The *Tabligh*, uniquely in the Ugandan context, have a core principle of purifying Islam from innovation (*bid'a*). They are often confused with the *Tablighi Jamaat*, a larger global movement, and **for this reason, as well as their own usage of the term, the report refers to them as Salafi.**<sup>14</sup>

The ADF has its roots in the sometimes violent disputes over the leadership of Uganda's Muslim community. In 1991, Jamil Mukulu and other like-minded thinkers broke from the UMSC, the state-sanctioned body for Muslim representation in Uganda, to set up their own leadership structure. Salafis following Mukulu emphasised the necessity of a theocratic government (*khilafa*) and the importance of observing what they believe are the early practices of Islam. This has led to the isolation of their communities with members often shunning Muslims from other non-Salafi communities. **It should be noted that not all Salafis in Uganda follow Mukulu, and many Salafis are opposed to his method and calls to violence.** Mukulu was arrested in Tanzania in 2015.

Namayingo, Mayuge, and Bugiri districts were chosen for the research because of known VE recruitment occurring in the area, as well as Mukulu's personal ties to the region and his previous ADF recruitment from the area. These three districts have some of the highest concentrations of Muslims in Uganda: 36.4% in Mayuge and a combined 24.6% for Bugiri and Namayingo.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Romaniuk and Durner (2018) and Wasafiri Consulting (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2014). *National Population and Housing Census: Main Report*.

<sup>14</sup> Salafism is a religious outlook that seeks to emulate as closely as possible the early Muslim community, specifically the first three generations. The name comes from the Arabic term *as-salaf al-salih* ("the pious predecessors"). However, different Salafi groups vary in their practices and theological emphasis. For example, with respect to politics some Salafi communities avoid political engagement while others have formed political parties and competed for elected office. There is significant diversity among Salafi communities worldwide. In the context of this report, **the term Salafi is used for those communities living in Uganda who utilise the term to describe themselves.**

<sup>15</sup> Statistics from the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census (<http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/centableB7.pdf>) the most recent census for which religion is broken down by district in public reports. At the time of the 2002 census Namayingo was a part of Bugiri and did not become a separate district until 2010.



### III. Research Methodology and Sample

**This research study was designed to be exploratory in nature rather than testing specific hypotheses about VE or to formally evaluate specific P/CVE interventions.** This enabled the researchers to pursue interviews that could provide the best information to give a fuller picture of the VE and P/CVE landscape in Eastern Uganda with the intention of utilising this research to design more targeted research studies in the future.

While previous BRICS fieldwork relied only on KIIs and focus group interviews, **a primary goal of this study was to speak to Ugandans who might be at-risk of becoming radicalised or recruited into VE, primarily those who were already connected to VE through their social networks – family members, close friends, peers, micro-neighbourhoods, specific social spaces** – to learn from their first- and second-hand accounts of VE activity in their communities (*see Appendix C for a further discussion of BRICS’ social network approach model to conducting research with at-risk individuals*).<sup>16</sup> Key informants were also included, particularly in the first round of field research, as researchers identified and developed their local contacts.

Interview participants were identified through a variety of means, including connections through previous research and programming associated with the partner organisations. Additionally, in each of the districts, the research teams used on average three local facilitators who were able to introduce them to at-risk respondents and communities. These were identified based both on recommendations of the partner organisations and also their knowledge of, level of access to, and trust with the local communities. Six researchers conducted the fieldwork with one male-female pair assigned to each district (*see Appendix D for the complete research methodology*).

**BRICS conducted 151 interviews in total: 74 interviews with key informants (government, security, civil society, and religious leaders) and 77 with potentially at-risk individuals** in Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo districts between February and June 2018.<sup>17</sup> The respondents were all Ugandans aged 18 and over.

**The 77 at-risk individuals all had a social network connection to VE,** meaning that every respondent met at least one of the following criteria:

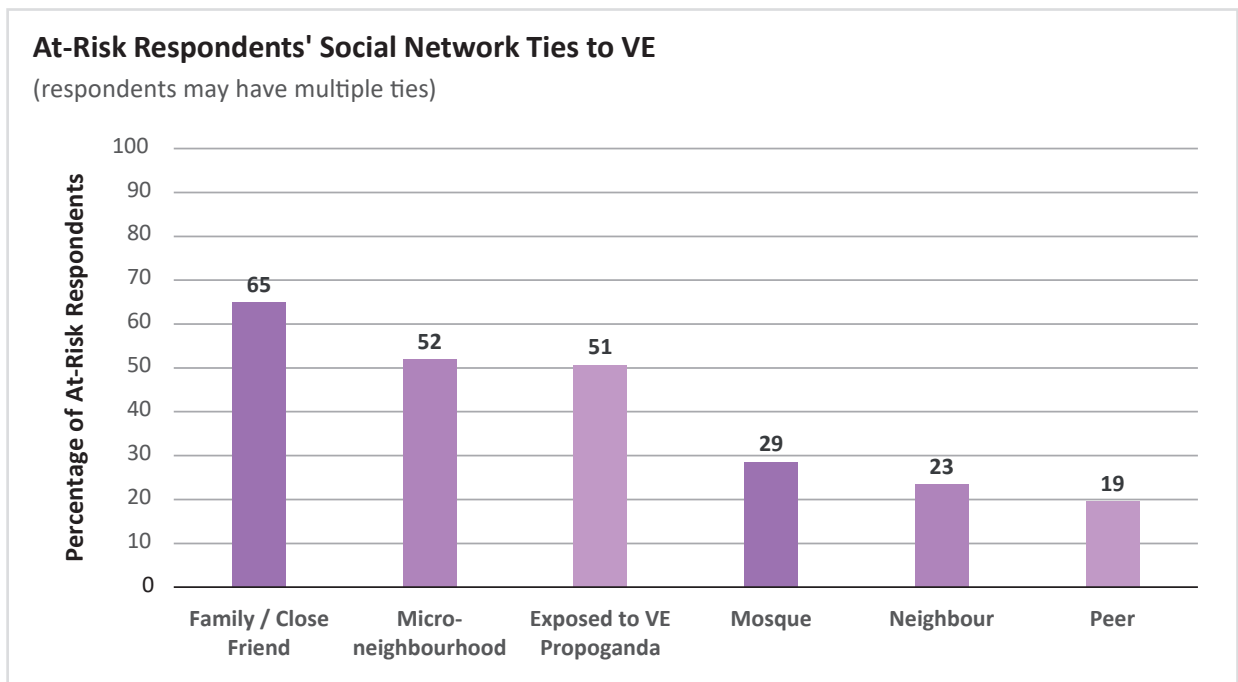
- **has a family member, close peer, or neighbour** who has been involved in or connected with VE (sympathisers, recruiters, fighters, etc.);
- **lives in a micro-neighbourhood** with known VE activity;

<sup>16</sup> See also BRICS (2018). “Preventing Violent Extremism: Understanding At-Risk Communities in Kenya” for a further discussion of social networks and VE in Kenya.

<sup>17</sup> The field research was carried out over the course of two non-consecutive months: mid-February to mid-March and June.

- **participates in specific spaces** (e.g., schools, religious centres, social centres, etc.) with known VE activity or a connection to VE groups; or
- **has had significant exposure to VE propaganda** (typically through one of the above sources).

Therefore, all the at-risk respondents had one or more social network ties to VE that allowed them to speak knowledgeably about VE in their communities, based on their own experience or the experiences of a first-degree contact in their social network. This criterion does not encompass every individual who is potentially at risk, but it focuses on individuals who are both identifiable and for whom there would be a clear pathway towards VE involvement.



### Of the 77 at-risk respondents:

- 27% (21 respondents) admitted to having a family member who was an ADF member.
- 10% (8) acknowledged having been ADF members themselves.
- 26% (20) had been personally held in police detention on suspected terrorism charges.
- 58% (45) of the at-risk respondents were unemployed, subsistence farmers, or had employment from the informal sector. The remainder had small businesses, worked in the transportation sector, or worked for religious institutions.

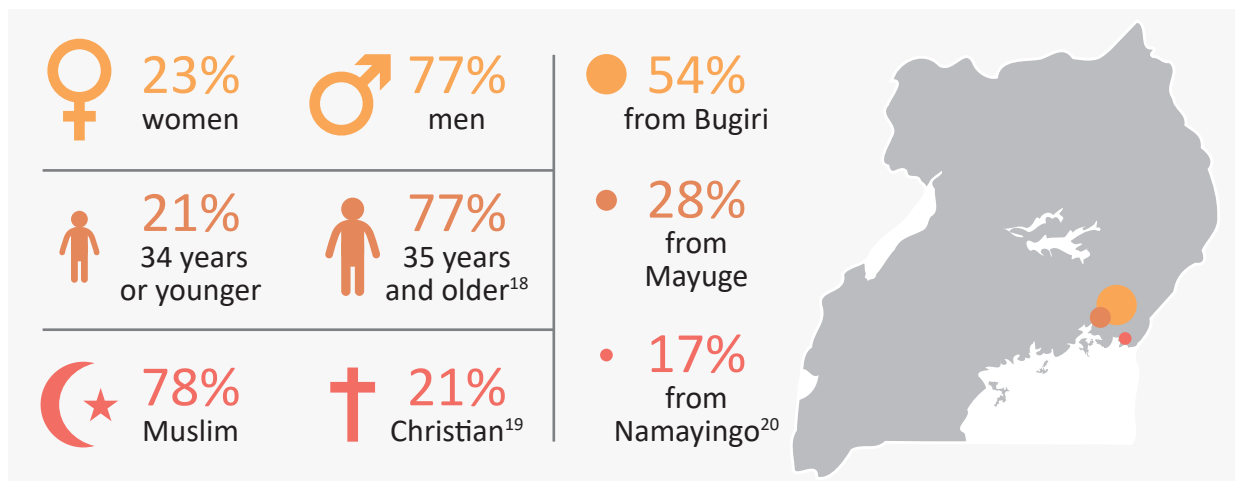
### Of the 74 key informants:

- 45% (33 respondents) were clerics, imams, or religious leaders (including Salafi, Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian).
- 20% (15) were security actors (Uganda Police, the Internal Security Organisation, etc.).
- 16% (12) were government officials (representatives of government agencies and the officeholders of political seats from the local to district level).

- 9% (7) were CSO representatives.
- 9% (7) were local influencers (e.g. educators, community activists, etc.).

Many of the key informants, like the at-risk respondents, also personally knew individuals with a connection to VE. However, they are categorised as key informants because their position allows them also to speak to the wider phenomenon of VE from their professional capacity.

The sample of 151 respondents is comprised of:



### A note on gender

Throughout the study, BRICS endeavoured to utilise a gender-aware approach. In addition to ensuring representation of women (23% of the sample), including Salafi women; three of the six field researchers were women; and issues of gender were incorporated into the interviewer guide.

Respondents came from the following sub-counties:

- **Bugiri District:** Bugiri Town Council, Bulesa, Bulidha, Buwunga, Kapyanga, Muterere, Nabukalu, and Nankoma
- **Mayuge District:** Kityerera, Mpungwe, Malongo, and Mayuge Town Council
- **Namayingo District:** Namayingo Town Council

<sup>18</sup> Two respondents did not have ages recorded. While BRICS sought to have a diversity of ages represented, the sample skewed towards older individuals for two key reasons. First, key informants who held positions in government, security, and CSOs tended to be older by the point at which they gained these positions and knowledge. Second, amongst Salafi respondents, due to the insular nature of the community, as well as suspicions of outsiders it was often preferable that interviewers speak with an older individual.

<sup>19</sup> Two respondents did not have religions recorded.

<sup>20</sup> Additionally, one respondent from Iganga was interviewed.

## Limitations

As with any research study, this research faces a number of limitations in the conclusions it is able to draw (*see Appendix D for a longer discussion of research limitations*):

- This study prioritised depth over breadth with respect to both the topic and geographic focus. It primarily examines one particular manifestation of VE in Uganda, associated with the ADF and affecting Salafi communities, though many other forms of VE exist and need to also be studied. Additionally, the research was limited to three districts in the same region and dynamics may vary in other parts of the country.
- The study is not a random sample of either the population at-large or of specific communities of interest. It is based on a convenience and snowball sample of individuals that BRICS had access to and who were willing to speak to researchers about VE. This, by its very nature, taps into particular social networks while potentially excluding others. To reduce this, BRICS works with multiple local facilitators in a geographic area to try to diversify the sample and gain opinions from a variety of communities and individuals.
- VE is a sensitive topic. Respondents, particularly at-risk respondents, may have incentive not to be truthful or entirely truthful with researchers, in order to shield themselves or their families from potential social or legal repercussions. KIIs were particularly helpful in trying to further verify trends that were identified in research with at-risk respondents.
- Because of safety and ethical concerns, researchers did not knowingly interview anyone who was personally actively involved with a VEO. As a result, much of the information gathered from at-risk subjects was about the experiences of someone in their social network who had been radicalised or recruited (e.g. a family member or a peer, etc.). As a result, it is not possible to know all of the details that led an individual to be involved with a VEO or necessarily to understand their first-hand motivation.

### A note on numbers reported:

- 1) **Not all respondents discussed every topic:** The research was conducted in a semi-structured interview guided by both the respondents' individual situations as well as their openness to discussing particular subjects. As a result, not all the respondents discussed every topic described in the study. Therefore, the numeric findings from the study should not be treated as would the data from a survey. For example, 31 of the respondents mentioned marginalisation as a driver of VE. This does not mean that it can be assumed that remaining 120 respondents **did not** think that marginalisation was a driver. They may not think it is a driver or it might not have been a topic covered in each of the interviews.
- 2) **Respondents provided information not just about themselves.** Respondents were asked about their knowledge and experience with VE, both personally and within their social networks. Therefore, when a respondent spoke of, for example, economic issues being a driver of VE, they could have been referring to themselves, to a single acquaintance, or to multiple other individuals who they knew were involved with VE. The numbers referenced in this paper refer to the number of respondents who mention a particular topic or experience during an interview and not the absolute number of individuals who experienced a particular topic.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For example, if a respondent mentioned that approximately one dozen of his friends had been recruited into VE because of economic factors, this would count as one respondent mentioning that economic factors are drivers of VE.



## IV. Research Findings

### Conducting Research in and with At-Risk Communities

**Working with local partners is critical for accessing at-risk individuals and communities.** In its previous research in Eastern Uganda, a major limitation of BRICS' research was an inability to speak with current members of the Salafi community. However, because of both BRICS' collaboration with the partner organisations and working with security and government channels, as well as local facilitators, it was able to interview dozens of current Salafi members, including women.

**Trust still takes time to build, particularly in insular and marginalised communities.** While BRICS was able to interview numerous Salafi respondents, some remained openly suspicious of BRICS' intentions, stating that they were only participating in the interviews because their religious leaders had asked them to. In other interviews, participants reported information (e.g. denying any knowledge of connections to VE, etc.) that was contradicted by the local facilitators who knew the respondents. As a result, BRICS had to take a cautious approach in assessing what information appeared to be credible.

**Care must be taken to not fall into generalisations made by respondents.** Notably, there were frequently assumptions made by non-Salafi respondents that every Salafi was supportive of and/or engaged in VE. Additionally, there was a tendency by some respondents to assume that because someone disappeared without alerting his family, that he had joined ADF or another militant group. BRICS remained sceptical of these claims unless there was an additional piece of supporting evidence (e.g. reports that the relative had been spotted in the DRC, where ADF is largely based; the disappearance being preceded by extensive discussion of the importance of military *jihād*,<sup>22</sup> etc.) and otherwise remained open to the possibility that these disappearances might have had nothing to do with VE (e.g. family abandonment, leaving to look for opportunities elsewhere, etc.).

### The VE Landscape and Drivers of VE

**There is an active yet uncertain VE presence in Eastern Uganda.** Through first- and second-hand accounts, there are reports of armed, anti-state organisations with religious ideologies active in the region, in addition to combatant groups that did not appear to have a religiously-based ideology. While activity has decreased since 2014, respondents reported ongoing recruitment and involvement.

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<sup>22</sup> See page 32 for a further discussion of the usage of *jihād*.



**Respondents are not always certain of the group affiliations or do not choose to divulge them. ADF is frequently mentioned,** though there may be other militant groups. Several respondents mentioned that they may not be able to differentiate between ADF, Al-Shabaab, and other militant groups. One Christian religious leader spoke of a youth in his community who reported being involved for four months in an **unnamed rebel group**, comprised mostly of young men 15-35 years old based in the jungle, who sought his aid in escaping. The boy reported to him that:

*The first indoctrination phase they went through was hating the government to the core of their hearts. The narrative they passed on to them was that government had left youth behind. They did not care for them. It was like youth didn't even exist and that the only way they could guarantee a brighter future for youth was by fighting the government so fiercely that they would finally overthrow the government. The promise was that if they finally captured power, these young fighters would be influential in the new government. They were many young people in this camp, and new ones were also arriving almost on a daily basis.<sup>23</sup>*

**It was not possible to confirm Al-Shabaab involvement during the study** with respondents disagreeing whether Al-Shabaab was active in Uganda or not, even among security and government key informants. A handful of respondents mentioned with varying degrees of confidence that there were linkages between Al-Shabaab and ADF, with Al-Shabaab members living in Ugandan communities and cross-border recruitment occurring, though again due to conflicting accounts, it was not possible to confirm the accuracy of these accounts.

The narratives that ADF uses in Uganda (e.g. marginalisation of the Muslim community, targeting by security forces, the need to overthrow the government and replace it with an Islamic government, etc.) are identical or similar to narratives Al-Shabaab uses in Kenya, as identified by BRICS' Kenya research, suggesting that there could be sympathy for Al-Shabaab's aims.<sup>24</sup> One Ugandan Salafi respondent noted that at his mosque:

*Although the weekly preaching sessions were addressed by local Salafi leaders, there were other quarterly sessions which would bring speakers from Kenya. These speakers [not of Somali origin] would update the group on the state of jihad in Somalia, but he was not sure if they were Al-Shabaab. However, there were special prayers always for the success of Al-Shabaab.*

**There is initial evidence of VE connections between Uganda and Kenya** that needs further exploration. While studying medicine in Kampala, two Kenyan students from Garissa County, Kenya were radicalised by an unidentified group and latter attempted to travel through Uganda to join Daesh.<sup>25</sup> Additional BRICS research identified that during their visits back to Garissa they radicalised other Garissa residents, including at least one individual who joined Al-Shabaab and travelled to Somalia where he was killed and another who dropped out of university to join Al-Shabaab but was dissuaded before he left for Somalia.

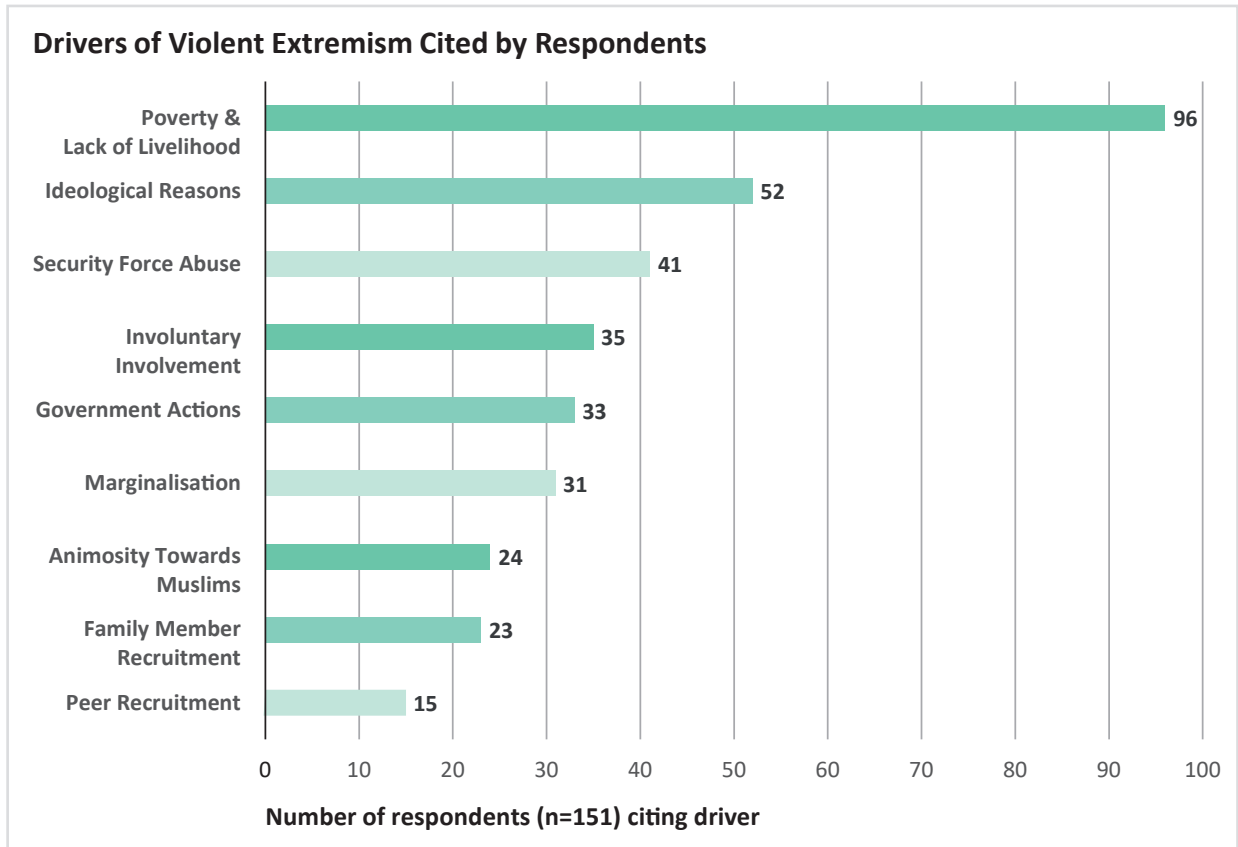
23 Direct statements by respondents are indicated by quotation marks. Any account not listed as a quotation is a detailed paraphrasing by the researcher trying to stay as close to the original language as possible. Geographic locations of the respondents are not provided to further protect their anonymity.

24 BRICS (2018). "Preventing Violent Extremism: Understanding At-Risk Communities in Kenya."

25 "Kenya trainee doctors killed in raid on Libya ISIS base." <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Kenyan-trainee-doctors-killed-in-Libya/1056-3868610-ssbydxz/index.html>

**Shift in VE hotspots:** Prior to 2014, Namayingo was a hotspot of VE recruitment, but now Namayemba, Mayuge (in Bugiri District), Bulesa, and Bugiri Municipality appear to be new hotspots due to increased security presence in Namayingo following the unexplained murders of Muslim clerics, as well as increased community vigilance.

**Drivers of VE:** The respondents noted a variety of macro-structural, personal, and social drivers leading to VE. Some of the most frequent, include:



- **Poverty and a lack of sustainable livelihoods** to provide for themselves and/or their family (mentioned by 96 respondents), is a widespread problem and was the most common driver that was provided as an explanation for joining or sympathising with VE, tying to both susceptibility to be recruited to VE knowingly or unknowingly for financial reasons (see *discussion of recruitment through the promise of jobs below*).
- **Ideological reasons** (52 respondents): Individuals, particularly from the Salafi community, were drawn to VE because of ideological arguments that Uganda should be ruled by an Islamic government (see *further discussion of narratives used in recruitment below*).
- **Security Force Abuse** (41 respondents): **Lengthy government detentions have contributed to tension and mistrust between the Muslim community and the government.**<sup>26</sup> In particular, Salafi leaders feel they are unfairly targeted by security agencies, arrested for suspected criminal activity, detained without being brought to court, and tortured in ungazetted detention centres.

<sup>26</sup> See also research by: Human Rights Watch (2009). "Open Secret: Illegal Detention and Torture by the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force in Uganda."

Amongst respondents, 20 reported being personally arrested and detained on suspected terrorism charges. One Salafi respondent (35-44 years old) who was arrested on terrorism charges in 2016 narrated his detention to the researcher in graphic detail:

*They lived in a very cold room, smelling of blood of those tortured, each of them having their day and time for torture. They would spend the nights blindfolded with handcuffs and their arms twisted behind them, and they were forced to sleep on their stomachs. He remembers a certain “torture machine,” where he would always hear fellow inmates wailing for mercy.*

Additionally, he reported that a police officer made anti-Muslim comments while cutting his beard off with a knife. According to the respondent, he was released after six months due to lack of evidence.

BRICS could not independently verify the charges against this or other respondents, nor what evidence there was and did not speak to security forces about these specific claims. **However, there were numerous cases reported by Salafi respondents of similar events happening to themselves, family members, or other Salafis in their communities.** While Salafi respondents were frequently reluctant to speak candidly about VE, they were eager to share their stories with researchers about both the conditions they faced while in detention and also the impact that it has had on them and their communities and how it could lead to future violence. The same respondent described the impact such incidents can have:

*It leaves a huge mark on the reputation of these families. Such discriminative treatment towards Muslims will affect so many generations to come because the children of these times have witnessed such brutality and might wish to seek vengeance for the blood of their parents or guardians who have died at the mercy of security injustices. Their children have not attained any meaningful education [... the families] live under the close watch of the security forces, who monitor their every move. Every business engagement they undertake is questioned and [they] are made to account for any visitor they get at their homes or the movements they make as “free people” who have the right to movement and association among others.*

Furthermore, respondents emphasised that they **viewed these actions as targeting Muslims in particular.** In the words of another Salafi man arrested on terrorism charges:

*“We feel that our religion is not accommodated in Uganda. The people we found in the different detention centres are mostly Muslims, what does this reflect then? As Muslims we have lost peace and freedom in our own country because every crime is pegged against us.”*

- **Involuntary Involvement (35):** When a respondent admitted to being involved with a VEO or described the involvement of a family member, these were almost always described as **involuntary involvement.** While some of these reports are credible, it is also likely that some report involuntarily involvement to avoid either legal or social repercussions. See below for a further discussion of pathways to radicalisation and recruitment through involuntary means (e.g. promises of work or education).

- **Marginalisation** (31 respondents): **In general, the Muslim community in these districts expresses feelings of marginalisation**, and some believe that they are deliberately left out of government economic empowerment programmes. Respondents reported that they were prevented on the basis of their religion from finding out about and participating in government development programmes such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Women Empowerment, and Youth Livelihood Programmes, and that they knew no one in their communities who had benefited from these programmes.

However, other respondents suggested that **extremist Salafi leaders benefit from preventing their followers from accessing these programmes** and use it as a narrative to radicalise and recruit:

*This sect creates a lot of anger and hate while at the same time creating a lot of false hope by promising economic gains and leadership positions mostly by telling them that this country is being run by people who are not religiously upright and that the Salafi have a team of people helping and supporting them to take over government [...] They also create situations of discontent, depicting economic marginalisation by government and deliberate deprivation of economic resources. However, most of this is done to exploit the poverty situations of the people therefore they take advantage of the ignorance in the community (Christian male, security official).*

Residents of Eastern Uganda, in which these three districts are located, have some of the lowest health and development indicators in the country, particularly compared to Central and Western Uganda. The World Bank found that the poverty reduction rate in Eastern was half of that in Central and Western Uganda.<sup>27</sup> While there are no official statistics comparing access to resources among Salafis and non-Salafis, according to data from the Afrobarometer survey, Muslims in Eastern Uganda did not report statistically significant differences in access to resources (access to food, water, medicine, cooking fuel, and basic necessities) than Christians living in Eastern Uganda.<sup>28</sup> In the case of medicine and cash, Christian respondents reported slightly less access.

**In particular, Salafi communities are more socially isolated, even from other Muslim sects** in the same area. This increases their feelings of marginalisation and isolation, which in-turn increases their vulnerability to radicalisation. In the words of one Salafi sheikh (35-44 years old): “we normally tell each other to ‘be very careful with who you talk to because we are like orphans without a parent to care for us.’”

27 World Bank (2016). “The Uganda Poverty Assessment Report.” The study reported that the 2003-2013 poverty reduction rate in Eastern was 4.7% compared to 7.4% and 7.9% in Central and Western Uganda. Northern Uganda, like Eastern Uganda, also suffers from less development and more poverty and had the lowest poverty reduction rate: 3.1%. In 2013, Eastern Uganda had a 21.5% poverty rate compared to 4.7% in Central and 8.7% in Western. Eastern also has many lower development indicators than Central or Western. For example, when comparing Eastern to Central it has less access to electricity (6% vs. 40%); fewer tarmac roads (21% vs. 53%); and higher teacher-student ratios (49.6 vs. 28.8).

28 Afrobarometer Data, Uganda, Round 7, 2018.




**Divisions within the Muslim community and its leadership have significant effects on community relations and play into VE narratives** (e.g. anti-government, *takfirism*,<sup>29</sup> restoration of an Islamic state (*khilafa*), etc.), as well as having been a cause of the original formation of the ADF. 62 respondents discussed intra-Muslim conflict, compared to 13 who discussed inter-religious conflict as being relevant to their communities. Salafi and Shia communities do not recognise the leadership of the UMSC nor in turn are they recognised by the council leadership, which makes it difficult to bring the Muslim community into dialogue. Additionally, there are two mainstream Sunni leadership structures – one in Kibuli and one in Old Kampala (UMSC) – making it difficult to have a unified approach to P/CVE.

## Radicalisation and Recruitment

**Radicalisation occurs in-person** with no online or social media recruitment being reported by any respondent.

**Unemployed male youth (18-30 years old), especially from Salafi communities, are considered most at risk of VE radicalisation and recruitment.** Additionally, children younger than 18 were highlighted as being at risk by 64 of the respondents.<sup>30</sup>

**The study identified five primary pathways through which individuals in Eastern Uganda are radicalised and/or recruited:**

Population	Pathway	Awareness of VE
 <b>Men</b>	1) Promise of work	Unaware of VE connections
	2) Through a mosque	Aware of VE connections, though not necessarily initially
 <b>Women</b>	3) Through a male relative involved in VE	May or may not know of family members' involvement in VE until after relative has left
	a) Travels with husband to VE camp	
	b) Remains in community	
 <b>Children</b>	4) Promise of education	Parents/guardians may or may not know of VE connection
	5) Promise of work	Parents/guardians may or may not know of VE connection

29 Naming someone as an apostate.

30 Male youth were described by 89 respondents as being at risk of radicalisation and recruitment; individuals experiencing unemployment and poverty (mentioned by 57 respondents); and Salafis (by 49 respondents). Additionally, women were mentioned by 32 respondents and those who had negative encounters with security forces by 26 respondents.



## Men

- 1) **Promise of work:** The high poverty levels in Eastern Uganda makes men, particularly youth, susceptible to being recruited into VE under the guise of being promised jobs and then taken to VE camps. While recruitment takes place primarily among the Salafi community, there are reports of both non-Salafi Muslims and Christians being involuntarily recruited through employment offers.

One Christian man narrated an account where in 2013 he and two Muslim friends travelled to the Central Region of Uganda after being hired for work there:

*“Later on, another Muslim man come for us saying that the business was transferred to Kasese. He gave us each Ug sh 300,000<sup>31</sup> to send to our families and another 100,000 to keep in our pockets. We agreed to travel with him to Kasese, but when we reached Kasese another man came for us telling us that the business is across the border. We had no choice but to continue travelling. When we got out of Uganda the communication we had with them changed, and they became rude and authoritative. They told us that we are now recruits and that we should obey all their commands. We moved with them and reached a military unit and stayed with them in a place that lacked proper shelter in a forest [...] I saw many people in that rebel camp [described as an ADF camp]. They talked about the joy of killing pagans and why people in the camp are lucky to have the opportunity to plan for God’s war. [...] Then one day while we had gone to collect food a military helicopter came and started shooting at us. I and my colleagues took advantage of the confusion to flee. We took off and found ourselves in another community of people speaking Lingala. We asked them how we could get to the Uganda border, they directed us, and we walked for 7 days until when we entered Uganda. My colleagues disappeared from me at the border. While at the border the Ugandan soldiers told me to go to the military detachment where I got transport to travel to Paida and later to Kampala. I got home safe but have not seen my friends ever since” (Male, 26-34).*

Respondents mentioned harvest and planting seasons as times when men were transported – voluntarily or involuntarily – to join VEOs, and possibly other armed groups, though not the only times. The widespread movement of men to different parts of the country helps to facilitate and mask recruit movement.

- 2) **Recruitment through a mosque:** The other primary recruitment pathway for adult men is through some Salafi mosques where radicalisation and recruitment are conducted by religious leaders using religious and socio-political narratives.

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31 Ug sh 300,000 is approximately \$80 or £62.

## Narratives encountered included:<sup>32</sup>

### Religious Narratives (mentioned 72 respondents)

- Islamic rule (*khilafa*) must be established.
  - A Muslim cannot be ruled by a *kafir* (non-believer) and it is the duty of every true Muslim to capture power by fighting the *kafir* leaders and establish Islamic rule (*khilafa*).
  - Whoever follows the rule of a non-Muslim is a *kafir* themselves.
  - It is better to live in a forest with pure Muslims than in a city where *kafirs* dominate.
- *Jihad*<sup>33</sup> is a religious obligation. Fight for your religion.
  - If you die during *jihad* you will go to heaven.
  - Death in the war on *kafirs* is the noblest of deaths.
- All non-Salafi rule (even other Muslims) is *kafir* and must be overthrown.

### Socio-Political Narratives (mentioned by 42 respondents)

- The government discriminates against Muslims.
  - Muslims do not have the same opportunities and have been left behind in development programmes.
  - If you engage in *jihad* you will benefit: chance for Islamic education, leadership positions in government, and an income.
- The Ugandan government is against Muslims and is trying to eliminate Muslims in Uganda.
  - Security services target Muslims.
- To escape poverty the government must be changed.

While recruitment via a mosque is premised on religious justifications, it also promises an end to social, political, and economic marginalisation through the realisation of a theocratic state. As described by one individual familiar with the recruitment process:

*The recruiters, mostly scholars and teachers of religion from Kampala, would promise the youth jobs once they achieved their political ambitions of toppling the government of Uganda. They were mainly promised high ranking positions in the army of the new government and were made to think about an Islamic state where Muslims would rule and practice the sharia law.*

**However, not every member of a mosque associated with VE is targeted for radicalisation.**

One mosque attendee describes the hierarchy existing within her mosque:

*Even inside the mosque still not everyone is trusted. Members have highly varying levels of access to both the top [VE]commanders and information. She noted that it happens at many prayers for them to be divided into groups to receive extra lessons or instruction depending on the need at hand. There are some young people she has observed at some mosques who started from zero and were treated with suspicion but today hang out with the top clerics. "You just earn it, over a long period of time. They suspect everything."*

<sup>32</sup> Respondents were asked if they were familiar with narratives that VEOs used to radicalise and recruit followers. This list is a compilation of the responses by theme.

<sup>33</sup> Muslims typically distinguish between two types of *jihad* ("struggle"): the "greater *jihad*," a personal "struggle" to live a moral, religious life; and the "lesser *jihad*," a military struggle to defend Islam. These narratives make reference to the second meaning.



A relative of an individual attending a mosque suspected of having ADF leanings describes these private lessons:

*Scholars and teachers of Islam would come in small numbers at the mosque in a pre-arranged and systematic manner and would meet with the youths in groups especially in the evenings. The meetings would only happen when security [for the mosque] is fully available. The recruitment would happen in the form of [religious] seminars but eventually the end result would be a call for rebellion. Those who would refuse the ideologies promoted would be secluded and would publicly become enemies of the Salafist group.*

Additionally, respondents described visiting preachers who come to these smaller meetings to actively recruit individuals to leave for VE camps.

**Several respondents reported family members who disappeared and are reasonably,<sup>34</sup> presumed to have joined VE groups through their mosques.** These include not only male youths, but also older men with families. There are confirmed cases of two or three people from the same family disappearing at different times to join VE groups. Disappearances – suspected or believed to be connected to VE – were a reoccurring issue with 63 respondents discussing disappearances in their community. In some cases, a family member would either directly say they were leaving for *jihad* without saying where they were going or hint that they might. In other cases, a family member might disappear without warning, for example, stepping out of the house for a few minutes to ostensibly do a chore and then never returning. For disappearances that have not been confirmed or reasonably suspected to be VE related there is also the possibility that these disappearances might have had nothing to do with VE (e.g. family abandonment, leaving to look for opportunities elsewhere, etc.).

## Women

3) **Through male family members: Women were only reported to have been radicalised or recruited into VEOs through a male relative (i.e. father, grandfather, or husband),** likely due to the patriarchal orientation of Salafi communities. Women might grow up in a household sympathising with or active in VE or they may become involved once their male family member (particularly husbands) converted to Salafism and then is subsequently radicalised. However, not every wife of a VE supporter necessarily is aware of her husband's VE involvement until after the husband has disappeared to join a VE camp, as recounted by one respondent:

*My late husband was a truck driver and would deliver merchandise in the Western region of Uganda. One time we did not see or hear from him for a long time, only to hear on the news that he had been killed along with other rebels believed to be ADF rebels in an ambush by the UPDF in Kasese. I was shocked to learn that my husband had been part of the ADF. This forced me to migrate with my children from that area in an attempt to seek refuge and start a new life (Female, 35-44).*

<sup>34</sup> These include reports from community members or government of having been sighted or killed in the DRC. Additionally, respondents indicated that the wives of husbands who have disappeared being allowed to remarry is an indicator that the Salafi community knows that the husband was killed or died and that at this point in time the wife left behind is a widow and is permitted to remarry.

When their husbands and sons are away, wives and mothers of presumed ADF fighters are left to look after their families, often with little to no source of income. Due to both high birth rates and polygamous marriages, wives and mothers often were carrying for approximately five to more than a dozen dependents, though the numbers can be even higher. In an extreme case, one respondent's three adult sons all had suspected VE involvement – one had died after being granted amnesty, one was reported to be with ADF in the DRC, and another is currently in detention. All of their wives left them, leaving her with more than 30 grandchildren to take care of.<sup>35</sup> She reported being unable to cover all of their school fees and was dependent on the support of friends and family to survive, leaving her and her family in a highly vulnerable situation.

Additionally, **these wives of suspected VE fighters are viewed with suspicion in the broader community** due to suspected VE ties and the belief that they are passing information onto their husbands, making them more vulnerable and dependent on support from ADF sympathisers or supporters within their communities.

Women, however, do not necessarily play a passive role in VE. They are reported to spread VE messaging to other women in the mosque; gather intelligence on the local community; and transport weapons. Additionally, some women will join their husbands in VE camps. One woman whose husband was personally recruited by Jamil Mukulu, described her experience:

*She and the wives of ADF fighters received combat training. The women were responsible for providing day-to-day security for the camp, as the men would be away for several months on assignment. The other role of the women in the camp was to cook for the male fighters who would be at the camps at any given time. Collecting firewood and growing food was also their responsibility. Occasionally they would get maize and millet flour in small quantities. She says life in the camps was unbearable. They rarely ate more than a meal a day. They ate food without sauce and did not have basic domestic supplies like soap, sugar, and salt. They were sick most of the time with no medical care and they would look for herbs from the bush. Compared to other women with children, her condition was “more bearable” because she had no children.*

After her husband was killed in combat, she remarried another fighter, which was expected of her, but eventually escaped.

<sup>35</sup> Both young brides and polygamy were commonly reported among the respondents, contributing to the large numbers of children affected by VE.



## Children

- 4) **Promise of education: Children younger than 18 years are reportedly recruited through local madrassas or promised scholarships at distant schools where they are then radicalised,** as described by one security official:

*School children are also radicalised by groups claiming to be NGOs providing scholarships but intend to expose them to radical ideologies. Sometimes these NGOs infiltrate the children's parents telling them that if the child joins the programme, the parents will benefit from the child's development. There is now some tracking of scholarships that are brought into the community. Questions are asked, "where is the child going?" Nowadays people in the community are themselves alert. They track the movements of those found to be suspicious and report to police.*

24 respondents mentioned the promise of scholarships as a pathway to radicalisation and recruitment.

Parents and guardians may be unaware that their child is being recruited into a VE network, hoping for the best outcome for their child. In other cases, the parents or guardians may know or suspect that there is a VE-connection and are either willing to let their child go for either ideological reasons or due to financial hardships supporting the child.

As described above, respondents report **being left on their own to care for a dozen or more children:** wives after their husbands disappeared or were imprisoned and women caring for their grandchildren.<sup>36</sup> One woman attending a Salafi mosque described the process by which these children became involved with VE directly:

*Many families are poor and usually led by single mothers with numerous children. For them giving up children for the cause of jihad is not only noble but also relieves the financial burden on them. So they are always more than willing to give children [...] this community has several mothers whose children disappeared like this and in many cases never return, but they cannot even open their mouths to ask what is happening and more continue to disappear.*

- 5) **Promise of work:** Similar to the promise of education, children leave their communities with an adult (sometimes but not always a family member) under the guise of going for a specific income generating opportunity and then are trafficked into a VE camp. As with education, parents and guardians may or not be aware of the VE ties.

**There were reported connections of radical groups in Eastern Uganda (Namayingo, Bugiri, and Mayuge) to the Buvuma Islands and the border districts of Busia, Mbale, and Kasese.** Additionally, there were reported movements between Kenya and Somalia by recruits and/or preachers. Four respondents reported hearing of Ugandans travelling to Somalia for suspected VE purposes. Two also mentioned the presence of visiting Kenyan preachers at mosques suspected of or known to have a VE connection.

<sup>36</sup> Additionally, several former male detainees whose wives left them because of their suspected VE ties reported that they were in a similar situation trying to provide and take care of multiple children.

## Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

**Many communities and at-risk individuals are not reached by CSOs** working in the P/CVE space, more often working under the broader label of peace building or conflict prevention, and are unaware of P/CVE programming or assistance opportunities. Programmes by partner organisations tend not to be known in the villages. However, organisations like MUCOBADI, URI, Red Cross, and MCJL have programmes that are CVE relevant and work with at-risk individuals and communities and have some name recognition. **CSOs, where known, are regarded as more positive influencers in P/CVE** than government due to their perceived neutrality and non-partisan approach.

**Some government security organs and the district leadership are moving from more militaristic approaches to dialogue and building bridges** among the faith leaders vis-a-vis their communities. These efforts include:

- a) Security forces leading dialogue interventions between the different Muslim sects to build bridges and counter the tense relationships that have grown since the 2014 killings of Muslim clerics in the area.
- b) The introduction of service delivery efforts such as Operation Wealth Creation, which is relevant to marginalised and poor populations, such as Salafi communities.
- c) One town council and district leadership reported trying to bring on board the Salafis living in the forest reserves of the National Forestry Authority to begin benefiting from government programmes such as the extension of health services through mobile clinics and creation of access roads through the forest reserves to bring services closer to this community.

**Returnees from VEOs, both those who have taken part in the government amnesty programme and those that have not, are present in the communities in which interviews took place.** While some respondents report that their communities had been welcoming and accepting of returnees, it is far more common for returnees to be viewed with suspicion. Returnees are frequently isolated and stigmatised by their communities and commonly move to new areas where they are not known. There are minimal community-based efforts for reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees to provide income generating livelihoods and community reintegration. Many returnees exceed the age requirements for youth economic empowerment programmes. Returnees are commonly at risk of recidivism due to an inability to support themselves and their families.

Currently it is unknown how many returnees in total live in these districts. The Amnesty Commission reports that 23 individuals originally from Mayuge and Bugiri received amnesty (211 total from the Eastern Region). However, initial fieldwork suggests that there are far more currently in Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo. 67 respondents discussed the presence of returnees in their communities and BRICs was informed of more than three dozen specific returnee cases, including both returnees that had received amnesty and those who secretly returned, though there are likely more.

**Increased dialogue between Muslim sects** may help to increase empathy and lead to cooperation when addressing VE issues in the community. Additionally, it may reduce the isolation of the Salafi community. Respondents from across a wide spectrum – Muslims, Christians, religious leaders, security officials, government leaders – all pointed to the importance of increased inter-, but particularly intra-religious dialogue. In July 2018, BRICS co-sponsored an intra-faith Ramadan *iftar* event to bring together Salafi, Sunni, and Shia religious leaders from Eastern Uganda, which gave them opportunities to share both their grievances and also to discuss how to strengthen relations, particularly with the aim of addressing VE. Following this dialogue, the leaders continued meeting.

**Vocational skills training with start-up capital, reintegration of returnees, and strengthening of linkages with government security and district administration were cited by respondents as potentially effective P/CVE strategies.** There is also need for pro bono legal aid interventions for individuals while in detention and afterwards to address their legal claims, as well as psychosocial services for them, their families, and returnees.

**A minority of individuals are radicalised and/or recruited into VE.** While further research is needed to identify resilience factors, respondents mentioned employment opportunities so as not to be susceptible to promises of work; religious education and knowledge to respond to VE narratives and claims; and the intervention of peers and family members.

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## V. Recommendations

While VE activity in Uganda is less than in neighbouring countries such as Kenya, distrust of the government and socio-economic marginalisation has created conditions that can and are being exploited by VEOs, particularly amongst Salafi communities. As a result, there is a strong need to fill the gap with preventative interventions that reach these communities. **Of particular importance are approaches that build and strengthen the networks of individuals and communities that are most at risk of radicalisation and recruitment**, particularly at the community level. These include opportunities for income generating activities; inter- and intra-faith dialogue; and bridging gaps between communities and government.

BRICS recommends the following:

- Recommendations for the **Government of Uganda**:
  - **Facilitate mechanisms to link returnees and at-risk individuals with existing government and civil society service providers** to improve their access to social services and economic opportunities at the local level.
  - **The National Technical Committee (NTC) continues to consult individuals, communities, and local organisations with first-hand knowledge of VE**, and incorporates their insights into government efforts, including the ongoing development of the national P/CVE strategy.
  - **Explore mechanisms to ensure that at-risk communities in Eastern Uganda are more aware of government social development programmes** and the procedures for participating in order to ensure representation from communities with low participation rates.
  - **Expand collaboration with and support of CSOs working in the P/CVE space** so that their efforts, particularly with the security sector, are complimentary.
  - **The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) continues and increases its efforts to monitor and prevent human trafficking across the Ugandan border, particularly involving children.**
  - **Work with local communities to understand their grievances over terrorism-related detentions** and find ways to address their legal claims related to these detentions. Additionally, ensure that citizens are both aware of and guaranteed their legal rights.
  - **The Ministry of Education expands educational opportunities for children and youth** so that they are not recruited to VE through the promise of educational scholarships.
  - **Increase funding to the Equal Opportunities Commission to enable it to generate accurate information on marginalisation and claims of marginalisation** by communities in Eastern Uganda, including the Muslim community.



- Recommendations for **civil society/practitioners**:
  - **Expand programming beyond cities to strengthen linkages and create networks with local communities.**
  - **Design programme interventions in consultation with local communities** so as to best identify the communities' needs and the implementation mechanisms that will be best received by particular communities.
  - **Utilise evidence-based research to evaluate and inform P/CVE programming.**
  - **Undertake regular external programme reviews** that involve and consult at-risk groups, including those not reached by the programme to understand why they are not participating, and modify programming accordingly.
  - **Undertake practical efforts to encourage dialogue between the Sunni, Shia, and Salafi leaderships.**
  - **Pursue specific P/CVE programme interventions, including vocational skills training with start-up capital; reintegration and economic empowerment of returnees;** strengthening linkages with government security and district administration; offering pro bono legal aid interventions for those in detention; and providing psychosocial services for returnees, as well as families and individuals affected by VE.
  - **Increase collaboration, networking, and information exchanges** about best practices in the P/CVE space.
  
- Recommendations for **international partners**:
  - **Provide funding for P/CVE intervention programmes described above targeting economic and social support for at-risk communities.** Include at-risk adults in the target beneficiary population to ensure that adult returnees are provided with support to prevent recidivism.
  - **Be open to working with very small organisations or grassroots efforts that have legitimate access to at-risk individuals and communities.** Include capacity building as a programme component and offer technical support on programme design, management, and financial oversight.
  - **Ensure all P/CVE programme evaluations are made public** to enable learning, and better interventions in the long term.
  - **Coordinate between international partners and governments to develop regional and cross-border P/CVE programmes** with Kenya, Tanzania, the DRC, and Somalia.
  - **Continue supporting the Government of Uganda to formulate and actualise the P/CVE policy** as a way of streamlining national efforts.

- Recommendations for **researchers**:
    - **Adopt participatory research methods with at-risk communities and CSOs** as both respondents and co-creators in the research design to help ensure that research findings inform programming and the community. Additionally, the capacity of local researchers should be strengthened.
    - **Broaden research methodologies beyond key informant interviews and focus group discussions to learn from at-risk individuals** who are both knowledgeable and affected by VE, and whose experiences can provide valuable information as to their lived experiences with VE. Expand field-based research beyond Kampala and other urban areas to better understand the experiences of rural communities affected by VE.
    - **Conduct rigorous evaluation of P/CVE interventions** to determine which interventions may be most effective in specific contexts. These evaluations need to be **made public and shared** with the policy and practitioner community to advance learning and improve programming.
    - **Investigate transregional VE and VEO connections**, particularly between Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, the DRC, and Uganda.
    - **Conduct further research on topics**, including radicalisation and recruitment of university students; human trafficking; the situation of returnees; sources of resilience; and the role of women in VE and P/CVE.
    - **Utilise research to build collective understanding and action around the problem of VE at the community and district levels.** One of the key impacts from the research was initiating discussions around the findings with the respondents at the community and district levels, which have proven effective for bringing communities together around the problem.
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## Appendix A: Partner Organisations

BRICS has partnered with four local organisations in Uganda, already working in the P/CVE space, with ongoing P/CVE-specific or P/CVE-related projects:

### 1) Allied Muslim Youth Uganda (AMYU)

Allied Muslim Youth Uganda (AMYU) is a non-partisan youth-led non-profit organisation founded in 2013 to bring together organisations and individuals from various backgrounds to network and build collaboration for creating solutions to socio-economic challenges facing communities in Uganda. AMYU therefore achieves its mission and vision through collaborative initiatives with its partners in various fields to provide a common platform for communication and promoting the socio-economic welfare of young people and communities in Uganda.

### 2) Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL)

Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL) is a Ugandan faith-based NGO dedicated to promoting and advancing justice, tolerance, and human rights in Uganda. MCJL has a primary focus on poor and vulnerable members of grassroots communities and further encompasses the diverse community as a whole. MCJL empowers local communities to effectively advocate for their rights and duty bearers to deal with dynamic social challenges, especially in the Muslim communities in Uganda. MCJL uses a multi-pronged approach to solve issues in the areas of focus through sensitisation, advocacy, lobbying and interventions powered by technology, tackling human rights issues, access to justice, gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR), poverty, and violent extremism. MCJL works directly with local communities and also in partnership with both public and private sector entities.

### 3) Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF)

Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan, youth-led, faith-based development organisation. Established in 2011, UMYDF provides a link for connecting all Muslim youth across clusters and development policy processes in Uganda so as to promote their active, responsible and continuing participation in local and global development. UMYDF works to create a socially inclusive environment where all young Muslims and non-Muslims are engaged, informed and inspired to take on the challenges in their development processes as the route to achieving their ambitions and dreams.

#### 4) United Religions Initiative-Great Lakes (URI-GL)

United Religions Initiative-Great Lakes (URI-GL) works with the different organisations and individuals who are dedicated to non-violence and the respect for life. It is situated in Uganda but also harnesses URI's global work in the African Great Lakes countries, namely Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, and South Sudan. Its main purpose is to promote *enduring daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the earth and all living beings*. It works with grassroots organisations and groups in the above countries on topical programmes especially around peace and justice. It is also part of the global URI with its support office in San Francisco, California.

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## Appendix B: Definitions of Key Terms

### At-risk

At-risk individuals are those who are susceptible to radicalisation and/or recruitment by violent extremist groups due to macro-structural factors, personal situations, and/or social network ties. For the purposes of this research, the report targeted its at-risk respondents uniquely based on their social network ties.

### Jihad

Muslims typically distinguish between two types of *jihad* (“struggle”): the “greater *jihad*,” a personal struggle to live a moral, religious life,; and the “lesser *jihad*”, a military struggle to defend Islam. The VE narratives described in this report make reference to the second meaning.

### Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

P/CVE refers to activities that aim to prevent individuals or groups from adopting violent extremist ideologies, being mobilised, and/or engaging in VE activities or to dissuade them once they have joined. Furthermore, these activities may work to strengthen communities in order to build resilience to VE. These interventions can be on an individual, family, community, or national level. CVE and PVE can be distinguished based on the point of intervention.

### Radicalisation

This is “the process by which people come to adopt beliefs that not only justify violence, but also compel it” and the pathways from thinking to action on the convictions.<sup>37</sup> Radicalisation may take place through several pathways, including self-radicalisation or as part of an ongoing recruitment process into an organised group. It is not necessarily a linear pathway.

### Recruitment

Recruitment is the process by which violent extremists or VE groups attract individuals to participate in formal and semi-formal VE organisations or activities. Recruitment may utilise a number of strategies including invoking specific or general grievances, ideology, increased status, and/or material benefits.

<sup>37</sup> Randy Borum (2012). “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories.” *Journal of Strategic Security*. No. 4: 7-36.

## Resilience

Resilience is the ability of a social system to absorb shock so that the system does not collapse. It may involve adopting new strategies and relationships, or adapting traditional ones, to prevent, mitigate, or recover from violence.<sup>38</sup>

## Salafism

Salafism is a religious outlook that seeks to emulate as closely as possible the early Muslim community, specifically the first three generations. The name comes from the Arabic term *as-salaf al-salih* (“the pious predecessors”). However, different Salafi groups vary in their practices and theological emphasis. In the context of this report, **the term Salafi is used for those communities living in Uganda who utilise the term to describe themselves.**

## Terrorism

The deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through the unlawful use of force or threat of violence against persons or property (*including taking of hostages*), in order to provoke a state of terror amongst a population and/or to compel governments or an organisation to change policies or provide financial ransoms.<sup>39</sup>

## Violent Extremism (VE)

Violent extremism is material and/or immaterial support for or engagement in violent acts justified by an inflexible and uncompromising ideology.<sup>40</sup> The extent to which individual actors or supporters embrace this ideology may vary.

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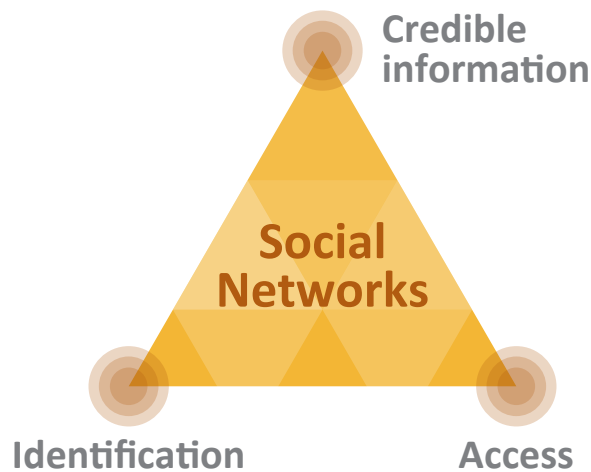
38 Drawing on Lauren Van Metre. 2016. “Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya.” United States Institute of Peace.

39 The United Nations Security Council, despite agreeing to various Resolutions on Terrorism (e.g. Resolution 1566 of 2004) has notably refrained from an agreed definition. BRICS’s definition was developed from a selection of definitions including those put forward by the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations and academic sources.

40 Drawing on Lauren Van Metre. 2016. “Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya.” United States Institute of Peace.

## Appendix C: Social Network Approach

Given the sensitive and often secretive nature of VE, credible information about radicalisation, recruitment, and intervention is often difficult to obtain. Respondents may be difficult to identify and access, reluctant to speak on the subject, not forthcoming with the interviewer, or not be able to speak knowledgeably on the topic. Building on the existing VE research corpus in East Africa, and BRICS' own 15-months of community-based research in Kenya, BRICS developed *a social network-based approach* to address three common challenges in the VE research: **credibility, identification, and access.**



### Challenge 1 - Obtaining credible information about VE:

Individuals willing to be interviewed may not be able to speak knowledgeably about VE. For example, community perception surveys offer useful insights on a wider community's attitudes towards VE and how it should be addressed.<sup>41</sup> However, community respondents may not be well informed about the actual nature and practice of radicalisation and recruitment depending on their own personal proximity to VE. In contrast, former VE combatants or other types of VE supporters have first-hand information about radicalisation, recruitment, and VE activities, and can speak credibly as to why they joined, and, if applicable, how they left VEOs.<sup>42</sup> However, given that former combatant research frequently takes place in prisons or detention facilities, respondents may be more likely to alter their explanations to portray themselves in a favourable light since their responses might affect their treatment in detention and/or their legal outcomes.<sup>43</sup>

41 See for example: Charles Villa-Vicencio, Stephen Buchanan-Clarke, and Alex Humphrey (2017). "Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya." Life & Peace Institute and The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

42 See for example research by United Nations Development Programme (2017). "Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment."

43 In the Uganda research, BRICS was also able to interview some former combatants who had received amnesty and could speak more openly about their experiences.



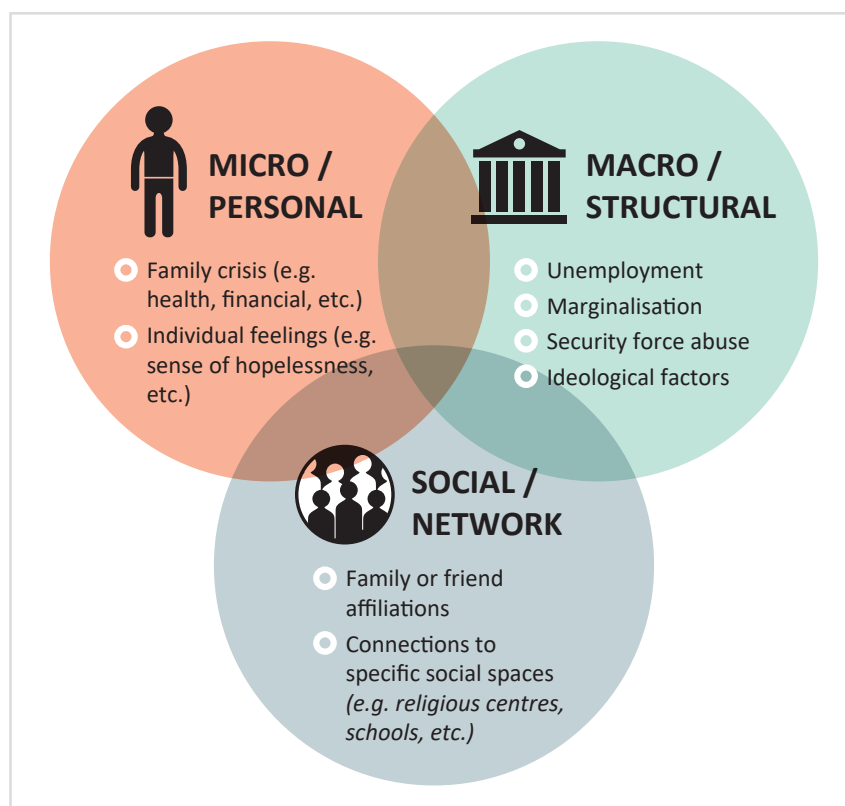
Additionally, there are ethical challenges with interviewing detainees whose participation in research studies may not be voluntary.

→ **Response: Interviews with individuals who are themselves at risk of radicalisation and recruitment offer a middle ground** for gaining potentially well-informed information about VE, as well as learning about effective P/CVE interventions without the same level of ethical and security concerns present when engaging with active or detained VE members.

## Challenge 2 - Identifying who is at-risk:

While at-risk individuals are a common focus of P/CVE interventions and research, they are often identified by broad and widely-shared demographic characteristics, such as age, religion, county-level or broad neighbourhood-level residence. Because these demographics include so many individuals, they also capture individuals who may have very low chances of ever becoming radicalised or recruited and may not have a first or second-hand knowledge of VE.

In order to have a more targeted approach to identifying at-risk individuals, BRICS focused on the drivers that make someone at-risk, in the first place. **Existing research on VE highlights a number of common drivers,**<sup>44</sup> most often differentiated as push- or pull-factors. In examining the drivers identified by the broader P/CVE research community, as well as its previous research findings, **BRICS utilises a model dividing the drivers into three categories: macro-structural factors, micro-personal situations, and social network ties.**



44 For models and theorisations of VE drivers, see for example: United States Agency for International Development (2009). "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism;" and James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen (2016). "Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation." Royal United Services Institute.

While drivers are a foundational part of theorising and programming towards P/CVE it is important to highlight three aspects of this model:

- **Not every individual who experiences one or more of these drivers will ever actually become radicalised or recruited** due to a number of reasons, such as their lack of exposure to VE messaging or a resilience factor like family support.
- **The significance of a particular driver varies from individual to individual.**
- **Individuals can experience more than one driver and the interaction potentially heightens risk levels.** BRICS emphasises the importance of the intersection of drivers by portraying them in a Venn diagram rather than as distinct categories. For example, as seen in the diagram, an individual may be unemployed, but may not be vulnerable to VE until there is an additional driver, such as a family crisis or a social network link to VE recruiters.

→ **Response: Through this model, BRICS chose to focus on social network connections to VE as the primary means of identifying at-risk individuals.** Macro-structural factors, such as lack of a sustainable livelihood, may not be discriminant enough because they affect a significant proportion of the population. Furthermore, when considering how research could affect future programming efforts, it is difficult to have a significant impact on societal-wide interventions aimed at macro-structural drivers, especially for small P/CVE initiatives. Micro-personal situations, such as family crises, are difficult to identify and programme for, on an individual basis.

Focusing on individuals who have **existing social network connections to VE** (e.g. family member, peer, social space, etc.) does not reach every person potentially at risk of VE, but this approach:

- **allows researchers to employ a systematic and targeted approach to identify individuals with credible knowledge of VE** through their own experiences and knowledge of the experiences of their social network ties to VE;
- **provides a clear definition of at-risk and criteria for inclusion** in research or programming;
- **focuses on individuals who have an existing proximity to VE** in their lives and for whom there is a clear pathway towards VE involvement through their social networks;
- **targets drivers for which there are potentially more focused and impactful P/CVE interventions**, particularly for smaller organisations.

Additionally, while the participants are initially identified based on their social network connections, these are not necessarily the only drivers they are experiencing. In practice, BRICS research found that many participants in the study were at the intersection of both social network drivers and/or micro-personal and macro-structural drivers (e.g. having a family member who was connected to VE and also experiencing unemployment). Therefore, even when targeting social network drivers, research interventions can also learn about micro-personal and macro-structural drivers.

### Challenge 3 – Accessing at-risk individuals:

Once identified, at-risk individuals may be reluctant to speak to outside researchers about VE due to its illegality and social stigmatisation, as well as their personal proximity to VE.<sup>45</sup>

→ **Response: Fostering long-term relationships with local community members who have access to and influence with VE networks allows for trust-based, ethical, and safer engagement.** Working with and through trusted intermediaries who are part of at-risk individuals' broader social networks is critical to gaining access to and building trust with potential respondents, engaging them in an ethical and safe manner. Based on previous participatory research, BRICS found that, through long-term engagement, the programme was able to identify and work with intermediaries whose social networks included individuals who may not interact with CSOs or community leaders. This was particularly important to reach the Salafi community.

For this research study, BRICS engaged with multiple community facilitators in a given geographic area to identify and interview research respondents. Additionally, all of the field researchers involved in this study had professional research and/or practitioner experience with P/CVE.

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<sup>45</sup> See for example: Marc Sommers (forthcoming). "Trust-Based, Qualitative Field Methods: A Manual for Researchers of Violent Extremism." Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).



# Appendix D: Research Methodology

## Study Objectives

In order to provide greater context about VE at the local level, this study sought to better understand:

- a) who and why certain individuals or communities are at risk of VE;
- b) the radicalisation and recruitment process; and
- c) which preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) interventions may be most effective.

In doing so, this study addresses the following key questions:

## Key Research Questions

### 1) VE Narratives, Radicalisation, and Recruitment

- Who is most at risk of radicalisation/recruitment?
- Who are compelling voices advocating for VE (i.e. negative influencers)?
- What specific VE narratives are circulated?
- Which of these VE narratives are compelling and why?
- Where are these narratives heard (e.g. specific online groups/websites, individuals, etc.)?
- Does radicalisation happen in-person or online? Both? In what contexts?
- Who is involved in radicalisation and/or recruitment?
- Which organisations (ADF, Al-Shabaab, Daesh, etc.)?
- What are the strategies used to radicalise or recruit individuals?
- What are the regional linkages of VE (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, etc.)?
- Any additional information on “how VE works” in practice?

### 2) VE Drivers

- What are the primary reasons that the individuals choose to either sympathise with and/or join VE organisation?
- For example:
  - Economic situation
  - Peer/family/social networks
  - Interactions with security forces
  - Responses to government actions
  - Ideological agreements
  - Involuntary involvement
  - Etc.

### 3) P/CVE approaches and strategies

- Who are positive influencers in the community?
- Why and how do people leave VE? Who (if anyone) helps them to do so?
- How does the community view returnees?
- What P/CVE programming is happening in the community? What programmes and which organisations?
- How are these programmes and organisations received?
- What P/CVE approaches would be most useful?
- What are the resources at-risk need the most to avoid being radicalised or recruited?

### 4) Gender and VE

- Do men and women experience VE or P/CVE differently? If so, how?

Field research was conducted over the course of two non-consecutive months, mid-February – mid-March and June 2018.

### Population of Study

Interviews were carried out with two categories of Ugandans aged 18 and older in Bugiri, Mayuge, and Namayingo:

- **Key Informants:** government, security, civil society, and religious leaders and representatives
- **Community members who had an existing social network connection to VE**, meaning that every respondent met at least one of the following criteria:
  - **has a family member, close peer, or neighbour** who has been involved in or connected with VE (sympathisers, recruiters, fighters, etc.);
  - **lives in a micro-neighbourhood** with known VE activity;
  - **participates in specific spaces (e.g., schools, religious centres, social centres, etc.)** with known VE activity or a connection to VE groups; or
  - **has had significant exposure to VE propaganda** (typically through one of the above sources).

This does not encompass every individual who is potentially at risk but focuses on those who are both a) identifiable and b) for whom there would be a clear pathway towards VE involvement.

**Excluded** from the study were individuals under the age of 18 and returnees who had not been cleared by the amnesty programme.

## Study Researchers

Six researchers conducted the fieldwork with one male-female pair assigned to each district. All BRICS researchers working on this study have previous VE research experience and/or P/CVE programme experience, which is critical given the difficult and sensitive nature of the research topic. At least one member of each team had previous experience with the districts in which they were conducting research. This helped the researchers to gain the trust of and access to at-risk respondents, as well as having the necessary local knowledge to understand the particular VE contexts of the communities and to adequately assess risk.

Researchers also attended local CSO and government events relevant to P/CVE and were able to share research findings with relevant stakeholders.

## Sampling and Recruitment

Sampling was done through convenience and snowball sampling (*see below on Identifying and Mitigating Bias*). Interview participants were identified through a variety of means including connections from previous research and programming associated with the partner organisations. Additionally, in each of the districts, the research teams used local facilitators who were able to introduce them to at-risk respondents and communities. These were identified based both on recommendations of the partner organisations and also their knowledge of, level of access to, and trust with the local communities. Local facilitators both reached out to the potential respondents to explain the research study and served as trusted intermediaries to vouch for the researchers. This is particularly important given the sensitive nature of the research topic. Additionally, the researchers were able to learn about the potential respondent from the local facilitators to ensure that they did not put themselves in danger by meeting with a respondent (e.g. avoiding meeting with an individual who is actively involved in VE, etc.). **Multiple local facilitators** (an average of three in each district) were used to access a variety of social networks and to reduce sampling bias. Additionally, researchers used snowball sampling to identify potential respondents from interview participants.

## Interview and Reporting Process

Interviews were conducted by a pair of researchers for a variety of reasons: increasing the safety and security of the researchers; increasing the quality of the interview data; and also reducing interviewer biases in interviewing and reporting.

Many interviews were set-up by local facilitators (*see below on Research Ethics and Risk Mitigation*) and took place at a mutually agreed upon location. Interviews were **conducted individually or in small groups of at-risk individuals** if the respondents felt more comfortable meeting together. Additionally, some respondents requested that the local facilitator or other community member be present during the interview because they trusted the local facilitator and did not yet know the researchers.

Interviews were conducted in Lusoga, Luganda, and English based on the language(s) the respondent felt most comfortable expressing themselves in. Researchers asked if they could take notes during the interview, though many did not due to the sensitive topic of the research. Immediately after the interview, the researchers completed an electronic **interview report** form detailing the content of the interview. Both researchers contributed to and reviewed the report to ensure completeness and to reduce individual researcher biases.

The reports were submitted electronically and stored through encrypted systems. No interview or respondent data, including identifiable information, was kept by the researchers and only the Research Director, Research Manager, and Research Analyst/Systems Manager had access to the submitted interview data.

### Data Analysis and Sharing

Once collected, the interview data was coded based on topics and themes identified through an inductive basis. The coding allows for significant themes and trends to be identified; for generalisability (e.g. on the basis of location, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) to be assessed; and to reduce the chance of confirmation bias or overemphasis on a particular set of respondents or researchers' findings.

The researchers debriefed weekly during fieldwork and there were in-person meetings of the full research team to discuss the research findings and methodology at the conclusion of each round of fieldwork. After the research was completed, the researchers shared the findings with local stakeholders and community members.

### Research Ethics and Risk Mitigation

There is inherent risk in studying VE for both the study participants and the researchers due to the nature of topic. However, credible information about VE is critical for designing and conducting effective P/CVE programmes to reduce the prevalence of violent extremism in these communities.

BRICS takes seriously the responsibility it has for both the research respondents and researchers and follows an ongoing and adaptive approach to **risk mitigation**. Researchers were in daily communication with the Research Manager so that any concerns were addressed immediately. Researchers held weekly meetings and there were monthly in-person meetings for the entire research team where risk mitigation was discussed.

**Informed consent** was a cornerstone of the interview process and happened at two points prior to the interview. First, when the respondent was recruited by the local facilitator they were informed about the nature of the interview (e.g. topic, purpose or research, etc.). Second, before the start of the interview, the researchers ensured that the respondents understood that the interview was for research with a goal of informing the design of future P/CVE programming. Respondents were able to skip any question and were able to end the interview at any time if they so wished.



**Expectation management** was also an essential component of the pre-interview discussion. Respondents did not receive compensation for their participation in the interview, except for reimbursement for local transportation expenses if the interview took place outside of their neighbourhood. Additionally, researchers made clear that while the goal of the research is to produce positive change in the respondents' communities there is no guarantee either of programming or of the respondent's inclusion in ongoing or future programmes.

The research strove for the principle of **do no harm**. The conditions of the interview were designed to ensure that the respondent felt as safe and comfortable as possible with respect to location, timing, note taking, and whether the respondent wished to be interviewed alone or with another person present (e.g. another at-risk individual, a support person, or the local facilitator). For example, a respondent might have wished to be interviewed in a location outside of their neighbourhood in order to ensure their privacy. Researchers reviewed all the research products to ensure that the identities of the respondents have been protected and adequately anonymised.

The interview questions could be **sensitive and emotional**, particularly for respondents who have been personally affected by VE. Interviews were suspended or terminated upon request of the respondent or if the researcher judged that the interview was causing emotional distress for the respondent. Additionally, in BRICS research meetings, researchers discuss and roleplay responses to difficult interview scenarios.

BRICS also focused on mitigating risks for the researchers themselves. The researchers have security clearance and active relationships with district governments and security services. Before any interview, the researchers went through a risk assessment process for each individual respondent and discussed any concerns with the Research Manager. The researchers also worked with the local facilitators to gain any additional information about potential respondents in order to adequately assess potential risks and avoid meeting with potentially risky respondents (e.g. individuals who are actively involved with VE organisations, etc.). Additionally, while BRICS could not avoid all risks given the nature of the work, there were strict guidelines in place for interviews to ensure the safety of the researchers. For example, at-risk interviews were conducted by two researchers working together.

## Identifying and Mitigating Bias

VE is a complex phenomenon and BRICS recognises that there are numerous places for bias to affect the study. While many, due to the nature of the research topic, cannot be avoided, BRICS works to actively identify and mitigate these biases. Some of the known sources of bias:

- **Sampling bias:** Because of the topic of the study, non-probability sampling (convenience and snowballing) is used primarily through the recruitment of research respondents through CSOs and local facilitators. This, by its very nature, taps into particular social networks while potentially excluding others. To reduce this, BRICS works with multiple local facilitators in a geographic area to gain entry into different communities and neighbourhoods to diversify its sampling. However, this will never eliminate sampling bias from the study. Therefore, in the analysis of the data, the researchers are particularly sensitive to how the respondents are sampled and who might not be included and acknowledges both the limitations and the potential effects of the sampling bias in the research findings.
- **Researcher biases:** Any research study can be affected by researcher bias in both how they ask questions and also how they record and interpret responses. Additionally, some of the researchers have professional ties to the broader communities in which they conduct research, though BRICS estimates that the benefits of these local ties (e.g. trust, access, contextual knowledge, etc.) outweigh the drawbacks. In order to mitigate researcher biases, BRICS has ongoing research capacity training (e.g. interview techniques, avoiding leading questions, etc.) and researchers conduct interviews in pairs and write joint interview reports. Additionally, while the researchers participated in extensive discussions on the research findings, the data analysis of the interview reports were conducted by the Research Director and Manager who are not members of the communities being researched.
- **Response validity:** Respondents may not be truthful during interviews. This could be due to a variety of factors, including a lack of trust in the researchers, a desire to provide misinformation to the interviewers, or the presence of other respondents or the local facilitator in the interviews due to respondent requests. To mitigate this, researchers sometimes conducted second, individual interviews with respondents as they found respondents are more forthcoming in subsequent interviews as they develop trust with the researchers. Researchers also attempted to verify information provided in interviews (e.g. if a particular recruitment tactic is mentioned in an interview, they will ask other respondents if they have heard of something similar, while maintaining the anonymity of the original source of information, etc.). Additionally, BRICS attempted to mitigate unreliable interview data by conducting a large enough sample (+150 respondents) so that it can establish whether certain information is particular to a single respondent or if it is repeated across multiple interviews.

BRICS also attempts to reduce biases by triangulating its research data with other data sources including previous BRICS research (including interviews with CSOs, grassroots organisers, religious leaders, government officials, security representatives, and other key informants); research and learning from BRICS implementing partners; published and unpublished external research studies; and local and open source media reports. Additionally, BRICS also shared initial findings with key informants and local stakeholders to identify potential gaps or alternative interpretations of findings.



VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN EASTERN UGANDA

