

Threat of violent extremism from a 'grassroots' perspective: Evidence from North Africa

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 100 | Thomas Bentley, Rorisang Lekalake, and Stephen Buchanan-Clarke

Summary

In June 2015, militants from the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) raided a beach hotel in Sousse, Tunisia, killing 38 people (CNN, 2015a). Four months later, ISIL claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian airliner, with 224 fatalities, although the official cause remains undetermined (CNN, 2015b). Similarly, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) killed 18 people on the beaches of Grand Bassam in Côte d'Ivoire in March 2016, and days later attacked an oil and gas facility in southern Algeria (Al Jazeera, 2016).

North Africa has become a focus of violent extremist activity. Aided by weak governance and porous borders, local and international jihadist and criminal groups have proliferated in the region. North Africa has also long been a region from which jihadist groups have recruited. In the 1980s, individuals from the region traveled to Afghanistan to fight in the Soviet-Afghan war. In recent years, many have heeded the call from ISIL. The Soufan Group (2015), a strategic security organisation, estimated as of October 2015 that more than 6,000 Tunisians had traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight for ISIL and that about 600 had returned to Tunisia. Such a large number of returnees presents a significant challenge to security and law enforcement agencies that must assess and respond to the threat these individuals pose.

To date, research has largely relied on the frequency and severity of past attacks to assess the extent of the threat posed by organisations such as ISIL and AQIM. Forced recruitment, kidnappings, extortion, and other violent tactics that extremists use to intimidate local populations often remain unaccounted for in objective data and media reports.

One way to gain additional insight into the threat posed by violent extremists may be to take a "grassroots" approach. In 2015, Afrobarometer Round 6 surveys asked citizens of Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan how active they think ISIL and AQIM are in their country, how much of a threat they think these groups pose, and why they think some people join such groups. Responses suggest that perceptions of extremist activity and threat were highest in Tunisia and Egypt and may not always correspond to objective measures of the number and severity of past attacks. Poverty and religious beliefs were most frequently cited as the main reason for the successful recruitment of extremists in the region.

Our exploratory findings have a limited focus and are time-bound in a field in which attack and countering strategies are rapidly evolving. Even so, they shed some light on community-level perceptions that could be useful as counter-extremism policies are developed and refined.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and findings from Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being released. Afrobarometer

conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2% (for samples of 2,400) or +/-3% (for samples of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

Round 6 findings are based on almost 54,000 interviews completed in 36 countries (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). This dispatch focuses on 5,998 interviews conducted in 2015 in five North African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 32 (available at www.afrobarometer.org) reports on extremism-related findings from the Lake Chad region (Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria), the Sahel region (Mali), and the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Uganda).

Key findings

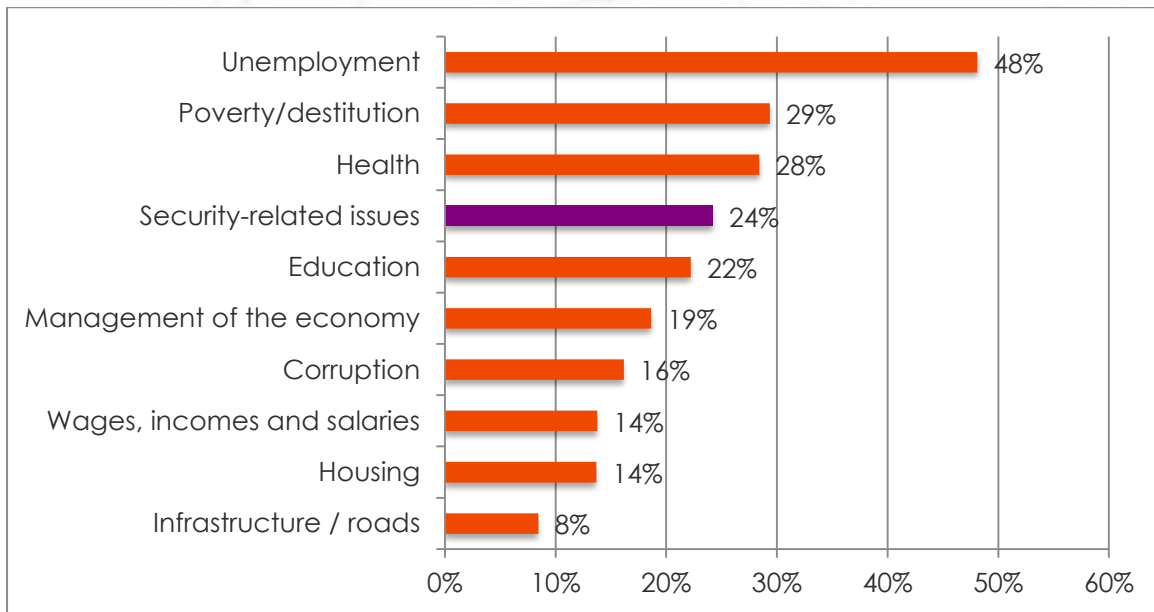
- Security was a significantly higher priority for Tunisians than for other citizens in the region.
- Citizens' perceptions of how active ISIL and AQIM were in their country varied across the region. More than six in 10 Tunisians perceived ISIL (66%) and AQIM (62%) as being "somewhat" or "very" active. About half of Egyptians also saw ISIL (58%) and AQIM (48%) as active, compared to minorities of citizens in Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan.
- Citizens in Tunisia and Egypt were the most likely to believe that ISIL and AQIM posed a significant threat to their national security: 77% of Tunisians and 51% of Egyptians characterized the extent of the threat as "a lot" or "somewhat," compared to 39% of Algerians, 32% of Moroccans, and 24% of Sudanese. These perceptions do not always correspond to objective measures of the number and severity of past extremist attacks.
- In Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, the presence of the army in survey enumeration areas appeared to be associated with lower levels of perceived threat posed by ISIL or AQIM. This relationship did not hold in Tunisia and Sudan.
- Across the region, citizens believed that extremist groups attract adherents mainly due to widespread poverty (cited by 25% of respondents), religious beliefs (18%), unemployment (15%), and lack of education (10%).

Security as a priority in North Africa

The problems that Africans consider most pressing vary with respect to their countries' socioeconomic and political conditions. On average across 36 countries, when respondents were asked to cite the three most important problems that their governments should address, unemployment (mentioned by 38% of respondents), health (32%), education (24%), and infrastructure/transport (22%) were the leading responses (Bentley, Olapade, Wambua, & Charron, 2015). Security-related concerns (combining crime and security, political violence, political instability, ethnic tensions, interstate war, civil war, and terrorism) ranked at No. 7, cited by 19% of respondents.

Across the five North African countries, security-related problems ranked slightly higher. After unemployment (48%), poverty (29%), and health (28%), security-related issues was the fourth-most-important problem, cited by 24% of respondents (Figure 1). This seems to align with preliminary evidence from countries in the Lake Chad, Sahel, and Horn of Africa regions that differences in security challenges correspond with differences in prioritization of security issues (see Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 32).

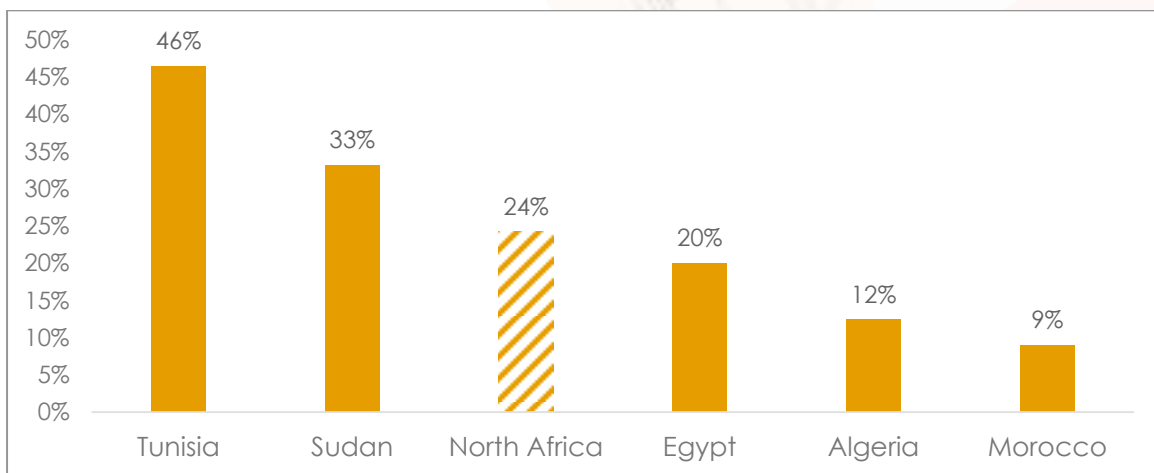
Figure 1: Most important problems | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could give up to three responses. The figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their top three.)*

Almost half of Tunisians (46%) ranked security-related issues among their top three problems, which was 22 percentage points higher than the regional average (Figure 2). Citizens in Sudan also ranked security-related problems higher than the regional average, while only about one in 10 Moroccans (9%) and Algerians (12%) considered security a top concern.

Figure 2: Security among most important problems | 5 North African countries | 2015

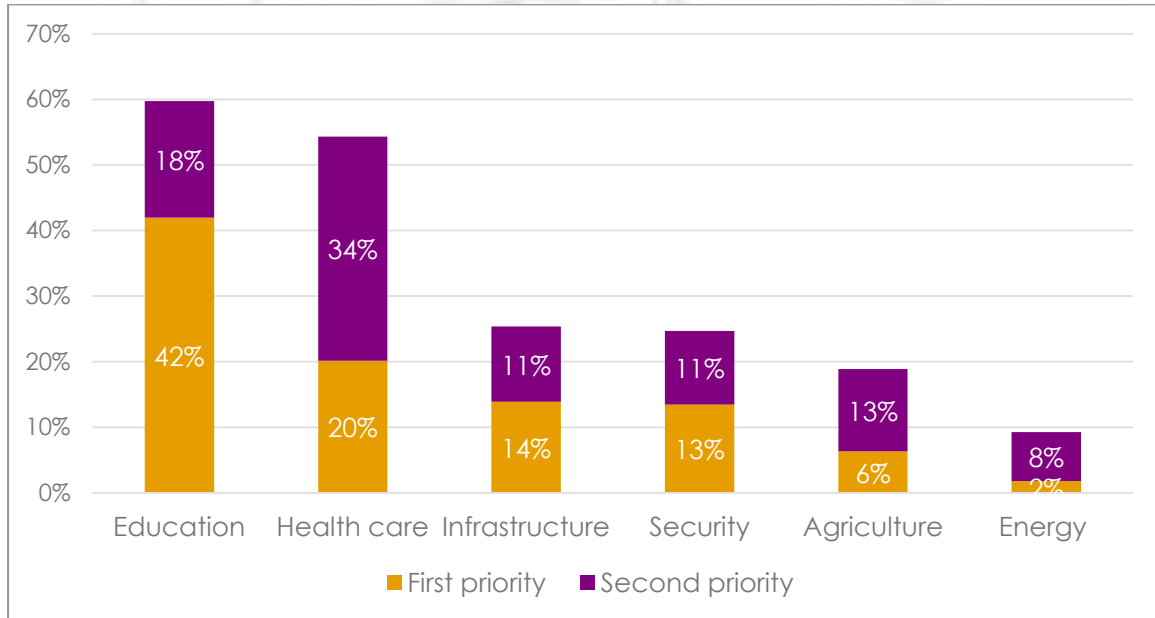


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could give up to three responses. The figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their top three.)*

When citizens were asked which of six key sectors would be their top two priorities for additional government investment if their government were able to increase its spending, North Africans ranked security in fourth place, about even with infrastructure and ahead of

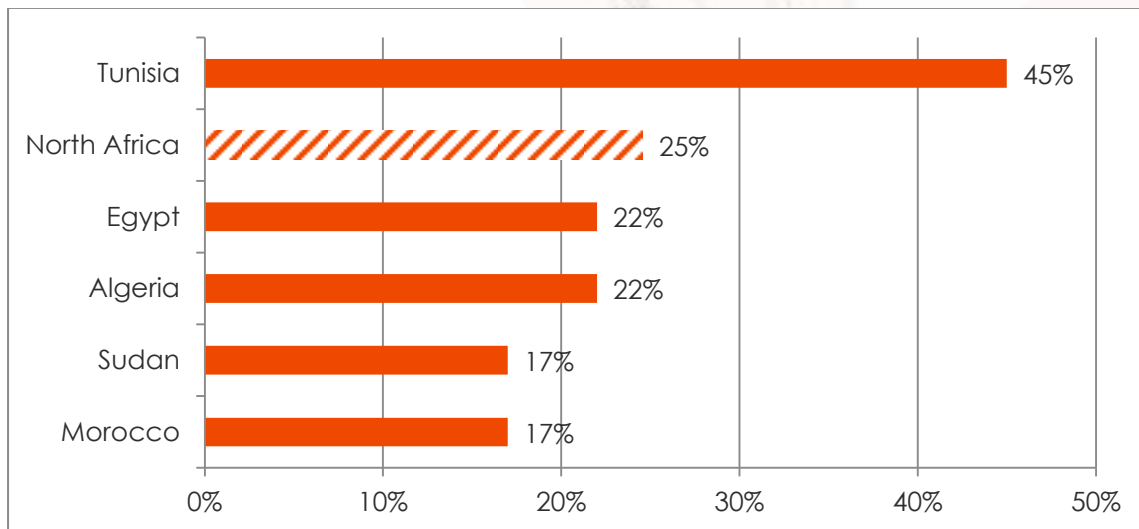
agriculture and energy (Figure 3). Again, Tunisians expressed the strongest preference for security investments: 45% cited security as their first or second priority, more than double the proportion of any other North African country (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Investment priorities | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas do you think should be the top priority for additional investment? And which would be your second priority?*

Figure 4: Security as an investment priority | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas do you think should be the top priority for additional investment? And which would be your second priority? (% naming security as first or second priority)*

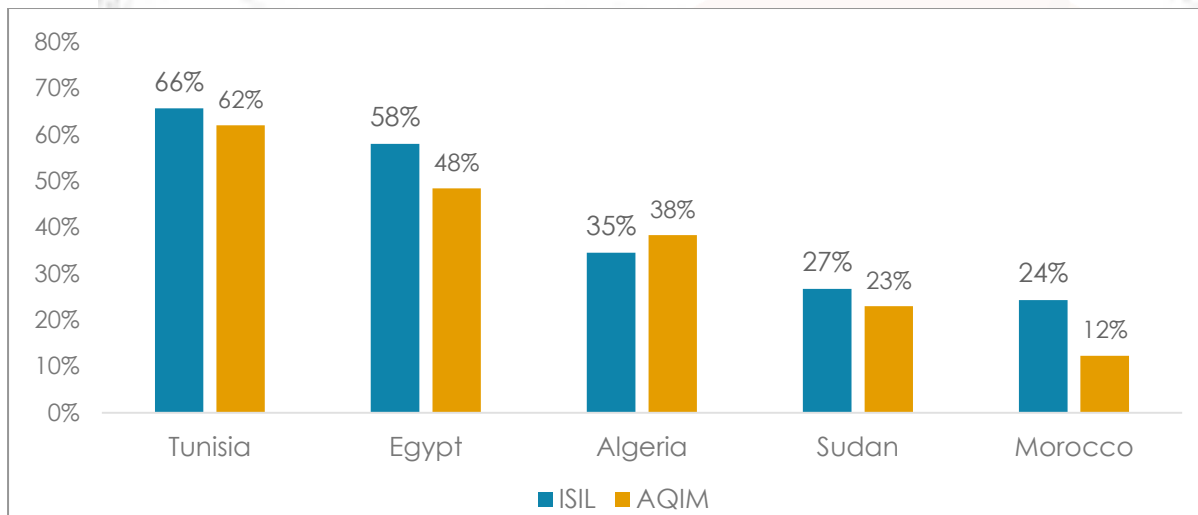
Citizen assessments of the threat posed by ISIL and AQIM

Across North Africa, citizens perceived differing levels of ISIL and AQIM activity in their respective countries. A majority of Tunisians (64% on average for the two groups) and

Egyptians (53%) viewed ISIL and AQIM as being “somewhat active” or “very active” in their country, compared to a minority of Algerians (37%), Sudanese (25%), and Moroccans (18%). ISIL was seen as more active than AQIM in four of the five countries – Morocco (by 12 percentage points), Egypt (10 points), Tunisia (4 points), and Sudan (4 points) (Figure 5).

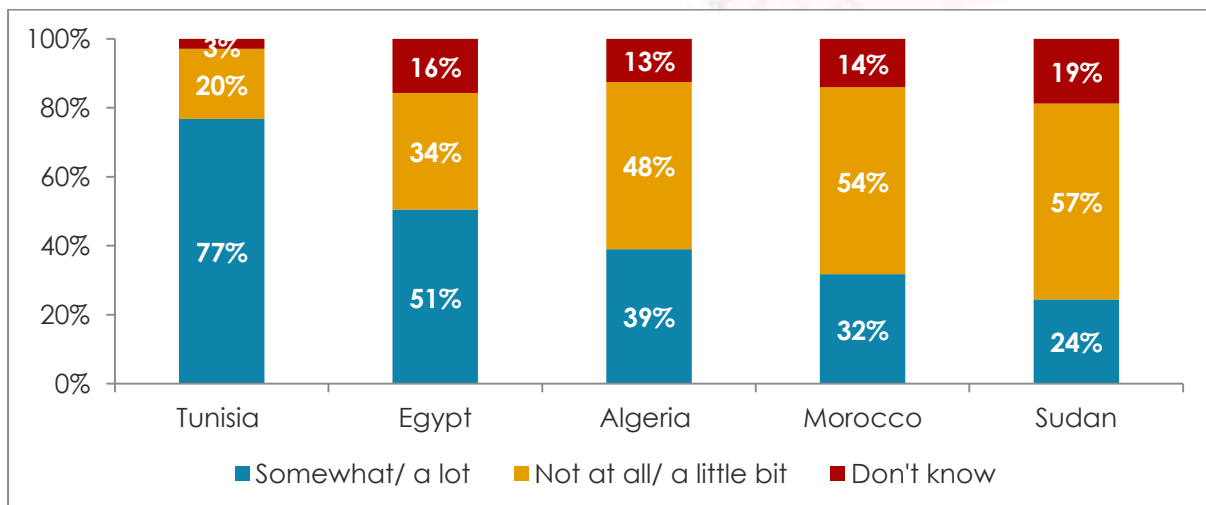
Citizens’ assessments of the threat posed by these groups in their country followed a similar pattern (Figure 6). Tunisians perceived the greatest threat: More than three-fourths (77%) of respondents said one or both groups posed “somewhat” or “a lot” of a threat. About half (51%) of Egyptians felt the same way, while 34% assessed the threat as “a little bit” or “not at all,” and 16% said they “don’t know.” Algerians were divided, with 39% saying “somewhat” or “a lot” and 48% saying “not at all” or “just a little.” A majority of citizens in Sudan (57%) and Morocco (54%) believed these groups did not pose a significant threat.

Figure 5: How active are extremist movements in North Africa? | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: How active do you think each of the following Islamic movements are in [your country]: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL? Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, known as AQIM? (% who said “somewhat active” or “very active”)

Figure 6: Extent of threat posed by ISIL and AQIM | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do ISIL or AQIM pose a threat to [your country's] security?

Citizens' perceptions of extremist threat do not necessarily map precisely to objective data on the number and severity of terror attacks as collected in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2013) and analyzed in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016) (Table 1). For example, Tunisia experienced far fewer terror attacks in 2014 (23) than Egypt (346) and Sudan (157), yet Tunisians were more likely to view ISIL and AQIM as a threat than were Egyptians and Sudanese. Higher levels of perceived threat in Tunisia may reflect factors that are not captured in GTD data, such as local intimidation through forced recruitment, kidnappings, and the return of foreign fighters. Citizen perceptions, in this case, can be useful for a fuller understanding of the security situation, which may not be readily assessable through incident data alone. In Sudan, the high number of terror attacks and elevated GTI score probably reflect the impact of other rebel groups beyond ISIL and AQIM.

Table 1: Citizen threat assessment and terrorism data¹ | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Citizen perception of ISIL/AQIM threat ("somewhat" or "a lot")	Number of terror attacks (2014) (GTD)*	Number of fatalities due to terror attacks (2014) (GTD)*	GTI score (2014)
Tunisia	77%	23	43	3.29
Egypt	51%	346	337	6.50
Algeria	39%	15	37	5.52
Morocco	32%	0	0	2.11
Sudan	24%	157	529	5.77

* GTD data include all successful and unsuccessful terror attacks, not only those attributed to ISIL or AQIM.

** The GTI score is based on the number of terrorism-related incidents, fatalities, and injuries and a measure of property damage from terrorist incidents. Higher numbers correspond to a greater impact.

Citizen perceptions of the level of threat posed by ISIL and AQIM varied subtly by urban-rural residence, sex, and level of lived poverty (Table 2). Across the region, on average, citizens who live in rural areas were slightly more likely to perceive a threat than those who live in urban areas (46% vs. 43%). An exception was Egypt, where more urbanites (57%) than rural residents (45%) perceived a threat.

On average across the five countries, men and women gave roughly the same assessment. But in Tunisia, women (82%) were more likely to perceive a threat than men (72%).

With regard to lived poverty,² citizens with high levels of lived poverty were generally most likely to perceive a threat by ISIL and AQIM, though this was not the case in Egypt.

¹ Numbers are derived from the Global Terrorism Database. To meet the criteria of a "terrorist attack," the act must be (1) "aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal," (2) show "evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims," and (3) occur "outside the context of legitimate warfare activities, i.e. the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law" (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2016).

² Afrobarometer calculates a Lived Poverty Index (LPI) score based on the frequency with which survey respondents went without enough food to eat, enough clean water for home use, medicine or medical treatment, enough fuel for cooking, and a cash income during the previous year. Scores can range from zero (for those who never went without any of these five basic necessities) to 4 (for those who always went without all of them). For more information about the LPI, see Dulani, Mattes, & Logan (2013).

Table 2: Extent of threat posed by ISIL and AQIM | by urban-rural residence, sex, and lived poverty level | 5 North African countries | 2015

		Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Sudan	Tunisia	North Africa
Residence	Urban	38%	57%	32%	15%	74%	43%
	Rural	41%	45%	32%	30%	82%	46%
Sex	Male	41%	51%	33%	27%	72%	45%
	Female	38%	50%	31%	22%	82%	44%
Lived poverty	No lived poverty	35%	51%	26%	20%	76%	41%
	Low lived poverty	45%	50%	30%	20%	76%	44%
	Moderate lived poverty	41%	52%	42%	28%	79%	48%
	High lived poverty	56%	43%	41%	35%	84%	52%
Average		39%	51%	32%	24%	77%	45%

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, to what extent do ISIL or AQIM pose a threat to [your country's] security? (% who said "somewhat" or "a lot")*

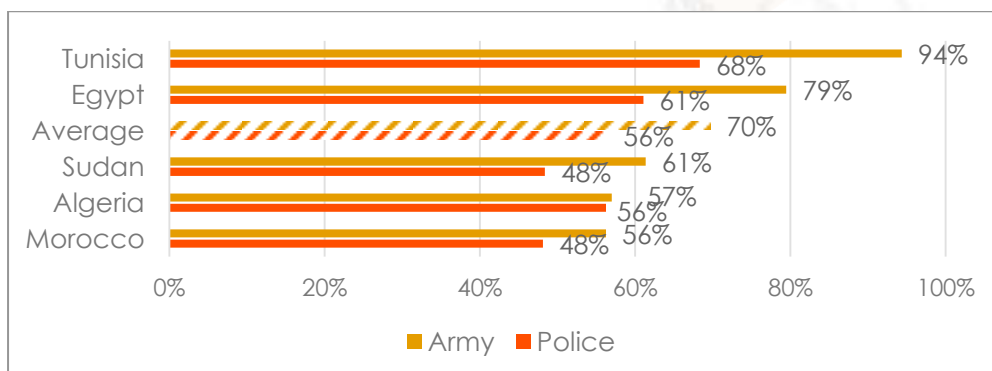
Does the presence of trusted security institutions reduce the perceived threat of violent extremism?

States require adequate security infrastructure in order to effectively counter threats posed by armed extremists. One might speculate that the presence of a security institution could make citizens feel safer, especially if citizens trust the security force.

Afrobarometer field teams make observations in each sampled census enumeration area (EA) about available services and facilities, including whether there was any visible police or army presence. Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the population of the country as a whole, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.

Across the North Africa region, as in most other surveyed countries, more citizens trust the army than the police. On average across the five countries, 70% of respondents said they trust the army "somewhat" or "a lot," while only 56% said the same about the police (Figure 7). In Tunisia, nine of 10 citizens (94%) trusted the army, compared to roughly seven of 10 (68%) who trusted the police. Trust levels for both institutions were significantly lower in Sudan, Algeria, and Morocco.

Figure 7: Trust in police and army | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The army? The police? (% who said "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Figure 8: Extent of perceived ISIL and AQIM threat, by security presence | 5 North African countries | 2015

Figure 8a: Algeria

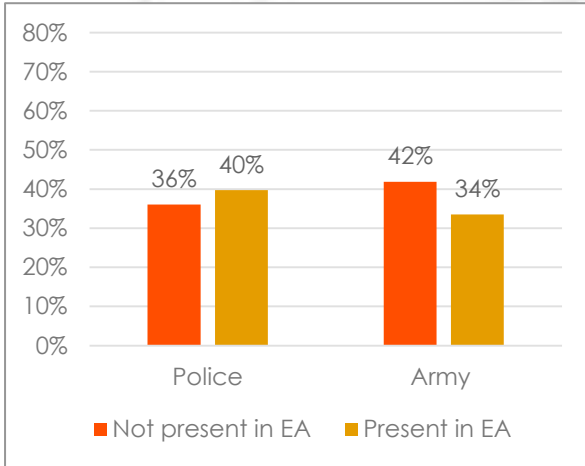


Figure 8b: Egypt

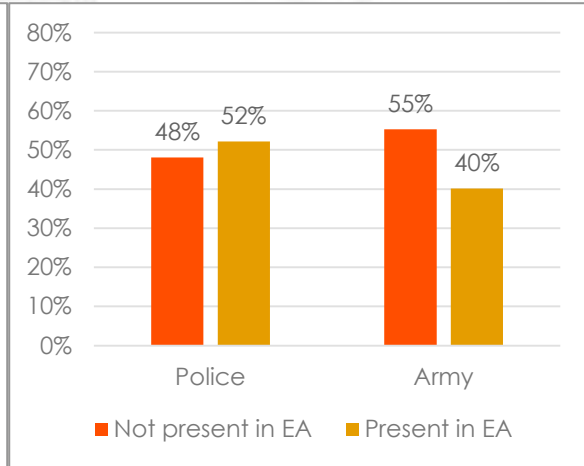


Figure 8c: Morocco

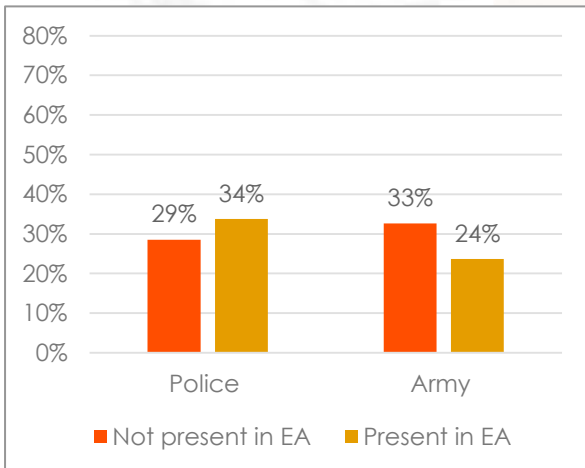


Figure 8d: Sudan

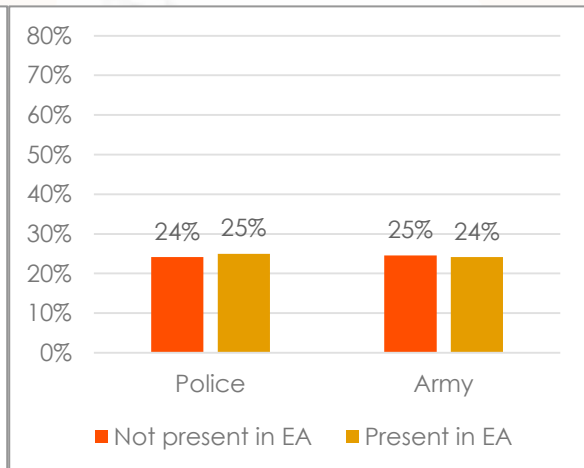
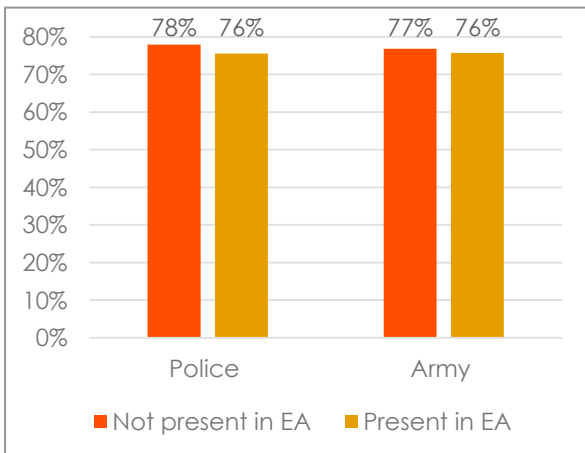


Figure 8e: Tunisia



Figures show % who perceive ISIL/AQIM as "somewhat" or "a lot" of a threat, disaggregated by whether police and army were present in the enumeration area.

When examining the relationship between the presence of these security institutions and the perceived threat posed by ISIL and AQIM, results are mixed. In Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, areas with an army presence expressed lower levels of perceived threat than areas without an army presence (Figures 8a-8c above), while police presence seemed to correspond with higher perceptions of threat.

In Sudan and Tunisia, however, neither army nor police presence seemed to make a difference in perceived threat levels (Figures 8d-e above). An understanding of the interplay of multiple variables (including the effect of perceived threat on police/army presence) will require more extensive data collection and analysis.

What motivates people to join extremist organisations?

Thousands of North Africans have traveled to the Middle East to serve as fighters for extremist groups. Estimates for 2015 alone cite up to 1,500 Moroccans (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2015), 6,000 Tunisians, hundreds of Egyptians and Algerians, and roughly 100 Sudanese (International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, 2015; Soufan Group, 2015). Understanding the motivations that lead individuals, groups, and communities to support violent extremism remains a challenge for researchers and policymakers.

Scholars have argued that a variety of factors can work in different combinations depending on the context. Poverty is often seen as a driver of extremism but may in fact work in confluence with other political and social grievances (Krueger 2003; Krueger & Maleckova, 2003). For example, Denoeux and Carter (2009) found that if one controls for civil liberties,

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www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

poorer countries do not generate more terrorism than richer countries, meaning that the extent of individual civil liberties, not poverty, may influence the risk of experiencing violent extremism. Bueno de Mesquita (2005) shows that a model that takes

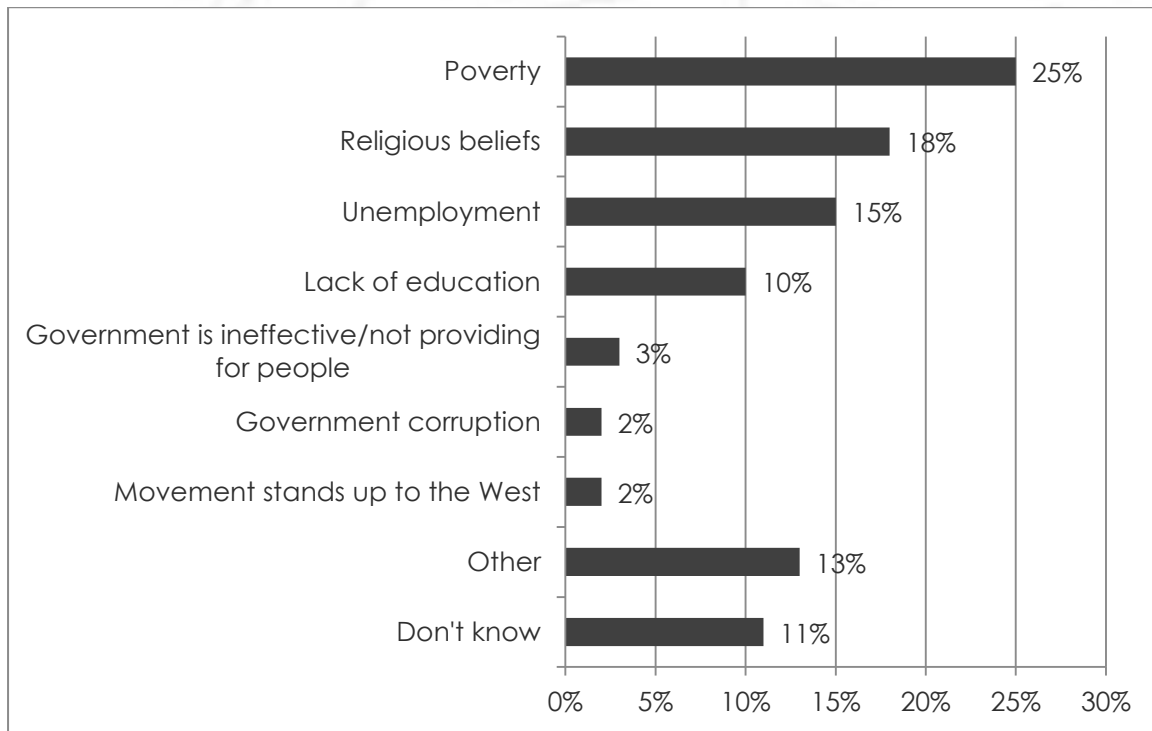
into account the effects of both ideology and economics on terrorist mobilization fits the evidence better than one assessing economics alone. Moreover, violent extremism espoused as a result of political exclusion and poor economic conditions may be advocated in religious terms. In brief, theories that attempt to assign a single, independent "cause" of violent extremism should be taken with caution.

The present analysis is *not* intended to provide causal explanations for why individuals join violent extremist organisations. It provides a glimpse of ordinary citizens' views of the motivations of recruits, which might offer some insight into the types of environments that may be susceptible to successful terrorist recruitment.

Across the five countries surveyed in North Africa, citizens were most likely to cite poverty (25%), religious beliefs (18%), unemployment (15%), and lack of education (10%) as the main reason why some people join ISIL (Figure 9).

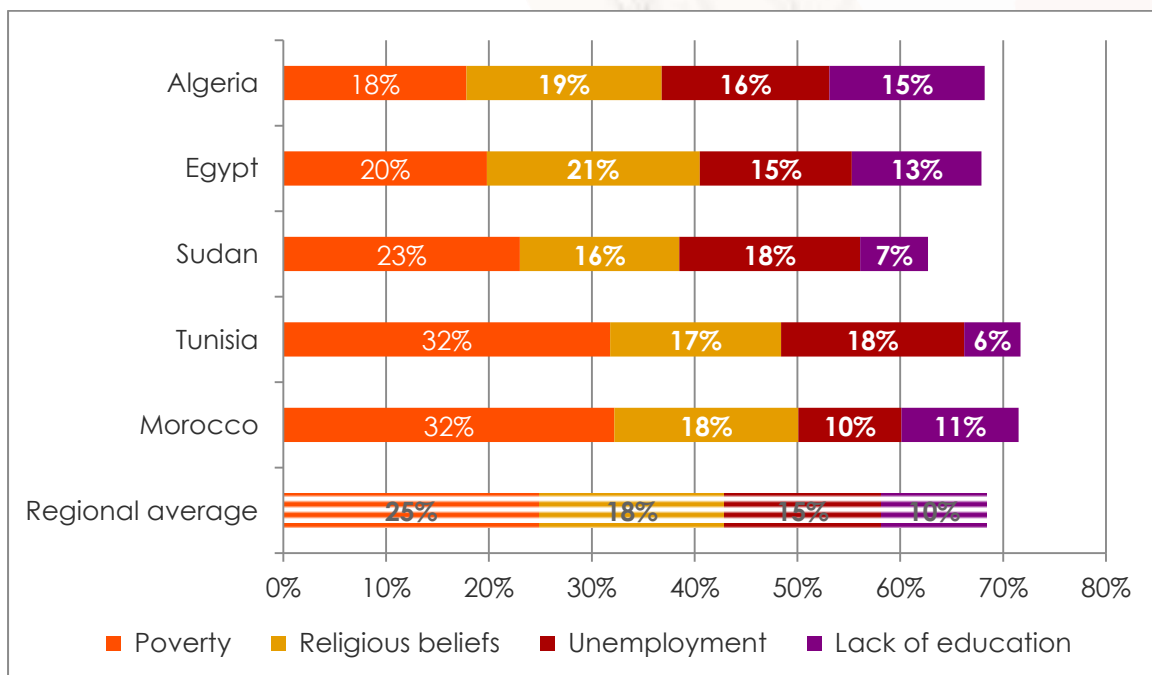
Poverty was the most frequently cited reason in Morocco (32%), Tunisia (32%), and Sudan (23%), while religious beliefs were about as frequently mentioned as poverty in Egypt and Algeria (Figure 10). (See Table A.2 in the Appendix for other response frequencies by country.)

Figure 9: Motivations for joining ISIL | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group? (Figure shows first response.)*

Figure 10: Motivations for joining ISIL | top 4 responses | by country | 5 North African countries | 2015

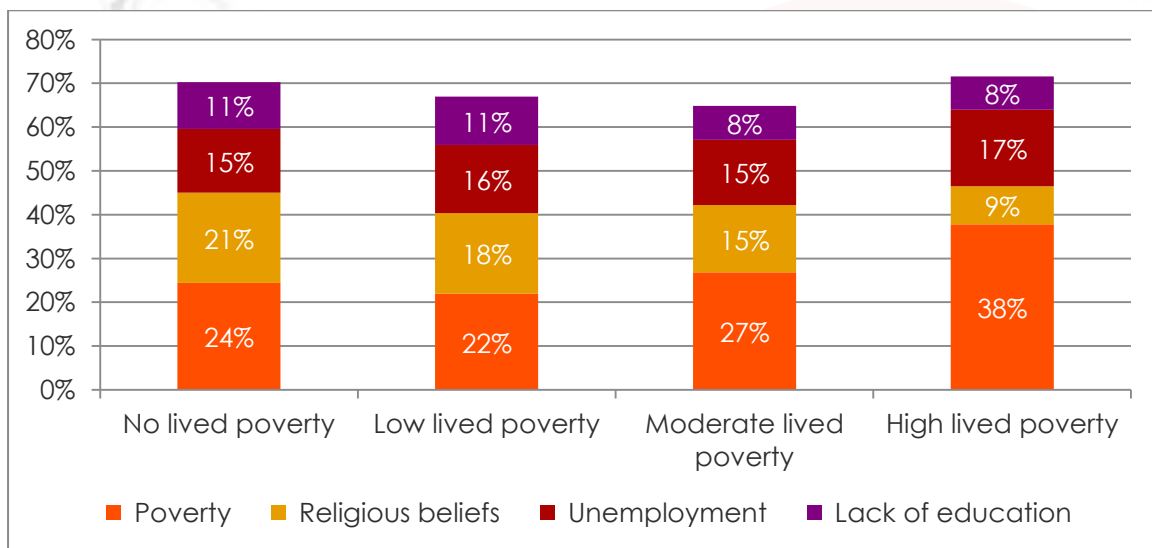


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Respondents at different socioeconomic levels differed in their perceptions of why some people join ISIL. Citizens with high lived poverty were most likely to cite poverty as the top motivation (38%), followed by unemployment as a distant second (17%) (Figure 11). Poverty was also the most commonly cited reason among citizens with no lived poverty, but at a lower frequency (24%), and followed closely by religious beliefs (21%).

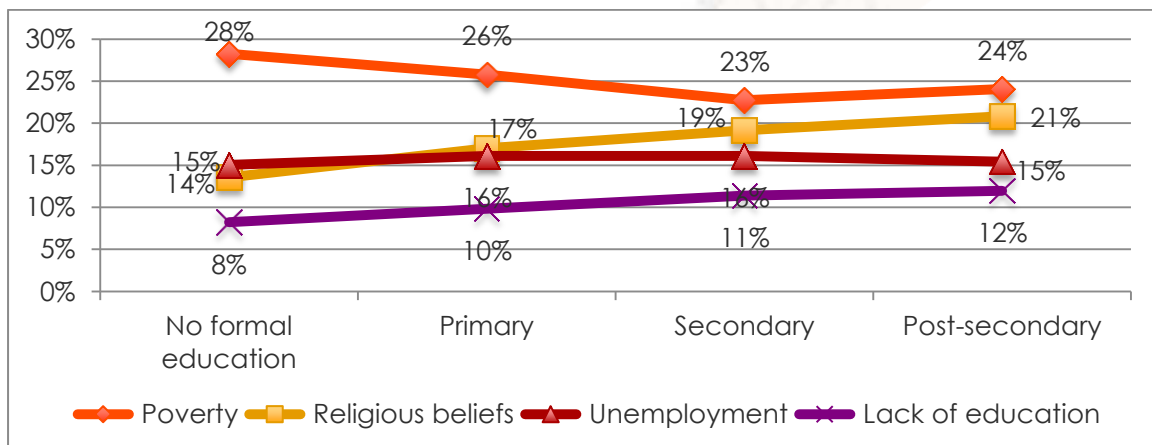
Across different levels of education, citizens perceived similar motivations for why some people join ISIL, with modest variations in emphasis (Figure 12). Less-educated citizens were more likely than their better-educated peers to cite poverty as the top motivation, while those with secondary or post-secondary education more often mentioned religious beliefs and lack of education than those with primary or no formal education.

Figure 11: Motivations for joining ISIL | top 4 responses | by lived poverty
 | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group? (Figure shows first response.)*

Figure 12: Motivations for joining ISIL | top 4 responses | by education level
 | 5 North African countries | 2015



Respondents were asked: *There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group? (Figure shows first response.)*

Perceptions of motivations held fairly constant across gender, urban-rural residence, employment status, and age groups, with poverty cited most frequently, followed by religious beliefs, unemployment, and lack of education (see Table A.3 in the Appendix).

Conclusion

While violent extremism poses a significant challenge for countries across the North African region, Tunisians and Egyptians see ISIL and AQIM as more active and a greater threat than do Algerians, Moroccans, and Sudanese. Public perceptions of the threat posed by violent extremists do not always correspond to objective data based on past attacks. For instance, Egypt experienced far more terror attacks in 2014 than Tunisia, but its citizens were less likely than Tunisians to perceive ISIL and AQIM as substantial threats. Citizens' perceptions of why some people join ISIL focused on poverty, religious beliefs, and unemployment. These exploratory findings suggest that the perceptions of ordinary citizens can help inform researchers and policymakers seeking to counter and prevent violent extremism.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Algeria	May-June 2015	2013
Benin	May-June 2014	2005, 2008, 2011
Botswana	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Burkina Faso	April-May 2015	2008, 2012
Burundi	September-October 2014	2012
Cameroon	January-February 2015	2013
Cape Verde	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011
Côte d'Ivoire	August-September 2014	2013
Egypt	June-July 2015	2013
Gabon	September 2015	N/A
Ghana	May-June 2014	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Guinea	March-April 2015	2013
Kenya	November-December 2014	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011
Lesotho	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Liberia	May 2015	2008, 2012
Madagascar	December 2015-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mali	December 2014	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Mauritius	June-July 2014	2012
Morocco	November 2015	2013
Mozambique	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
Niger	April 2015	2013
Nigeria	December 2014-January 2015	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013
São Tomé and Príncipe	July-August 2015	N/A
Senegal	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Sierra Leone	May-June 2015	2012
South Africa	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Sudan	June 2015	2013

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Swaziland	April 2015	2013
Tanzania	August-November 2014	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Togo	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

Table A.2: Motivations for joining ISIL | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Sudan	Tunisia	Average
Poverty	18%	20%	32%	23%	32%	25%
Unemployment	16%	15%	10%	18%	18%	15%
Lack of education	15%	13%	11%	7%	6%	10%
Religious beliefs/ Religious extremism/ misunderstandings of religious teachings	19%	21%	18%	16%	17%	18%
Don't know	6%	16%	14%	13%	7%	11%
Government is ineffective or not providing for people	5%	1%	2%	8%	2%	3%
The movements' willingness to stand up to the West	4%	2%	2%	4%	0%	2%
Government corruption	5%	0%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Other	12%	13%	9%	11%	19%	13%

Respondents were asked: *There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group? (Table shows first response.)*

Table A.3: Motivations for joining ISIL | by urban-rural residence, sex, employment status, education, and age group | 5 North African countries | 2015

		Poverty	Religious beliefs	Unemployment	Lack of education
Residence	Urban	23%	19%	16%	10%
	Rural	27%	16%	16%	10%
Sex	Male	25%	20%	15%	10%
	Female	25%	16%	16%	11%
Employment status	No (not looking)	25%	16%	14%	11%
	No (looking)	25%	18%	20%	8%
	Yes, part time	24%	19%	15%	9%
	Yes, full time	24%	21%	14%	11%
Education	No formal education	28%	14%	15%	8%
	Primary	26%	17%	16%	10%
	Secondary	23%	19%	16%	11%
	Post-secondary	24%	21%	15%	12%
Age	18-25	24%	19%	17%	11%
	26-35	27%	19%	15%	9%
	36-45	26%	18%	14%	10%
	46-55	24%	18%	16%	11%
	56-65	25%	17%	13%	8%
Average		25%	18%	15%	10%

Respondents were asked: *There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group? (Table shows first response.)*

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