

YOUTH VIOLENCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ZINDER



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This picture was taken during the shooting of a sensitization film on the issues of youth violence and violent extremism. The actors are youths members of *fadas*.

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YOUTH VIOLENCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ZINDER

Research study conducted in December 2016 in the city of Zinder

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the most populated region in Niger, Zinder is facing strong demographic growth and must address the growing needs of a youth representing more than 70 per cent of the population in the region (National Institute of Statistics, 2015). This demography, combined with one of the lowest schooling rates in the country, caused a serious employment crisis and social integration difficulties for a significant number of young adults and teenagers in Zinder. Since 2010, the alternating political power issue in Niger has been widely discussed publicly and raised social claims linked to these issues. In the city of Zinder, young people created informal groups to compensate for the State and authorities' lack of social and integration frameworks. These informal youth groups, called *fadas* or *palais*, are identified as the main actors responsible for urban violence in Zinder. These groups sometimes act as gangs, and are often involved in crime, violent protests, drug use and trafficking.

Thus, the proximity of Zinder with Northern Nigeria – together with linguistics, family and ethnic ties, and with important flows of people and trade between the two regions – raise the question of the potential influence of the extremist group Boko Haram, present in North Nigeria, on Zinder's youth. This question is even more important that young people have reported that Boko Haram recruiters have been approaching young people from the *fadas* and *palais* since 2012. In addition, violent religious demonstrations in the city of Zinder recently led to the destruction of public buildings, places of worship and Christian homes, together with attacks against Christians or people perceived as such. The research aims therefore to understand whether there is a correlation between the conventional youth violence and violent extremism based on religious motives or the use of violence motivated by or based on religious grounds.

Building from individual interviews with young people from the *fadas* and *palais* and members of the local population, this study reveals the influence of the violent extremist ideology on young people from Zinder. They often get a rudimentary or indirect knowledge of Islam, through relatives or the Internet. They are also exposed to radical religious messages that are spread through social networks, traded or sold on CDs and USB drivers on the local market or through informal networks. In addition, charismatic religious leaders are supporting the spread of a rigorist and violent vision of the religion through regional preaching. The mosques and Koranic schools are playing a key role in the dissemination of these ideas, as the religious speech became tougher, and is now affecting more than just the religious aspect. Thus, the study reveals that these messages and sermons are playing an important role in the knowledge and attraction young people have for actions led by extremist groups like Boko Haram. Furthermore, a significant number of young people have a positive vision of these actions, which they justify as acts of defiance towards a system perceived as unfair, as the State policies are not supporting people's aspirations and are viewed as inadequate. Violence is perceived as a means of pressure and assertion against a State seen as a repressive entity, while the religion is perceived as the only tool available for social regulation. In Zinder, where there are several religious movements, the study noticed the rise of the *izala* Salafists, a religious group opposed to the traditional Islam practiced in Niger and close to the Sufis and Malekites.

Furthermore, young people's interest for these rigorist practices and interpretations of Islam can be explained as a form of self-development, an identity assertion and a quest for meaning for young people facing precariousness, a lack of socioeconomic opportunities and marginalization. Surveyed young people come from neighbourhoods deemed to be violent and stigmatized as such, with lack of basic infrastructure and where marginalized people (such as people with leprosy, disabled, deaf or blind people) have been displaced. Most of them are unemployed, or have seasonal jobs, and depend on the food and financial assistance from their families. The unemployment and precariousness of young people in Zinder's *palais* and *fadas* thus push many away from the traditional patterns of self-fulfilment and social recognition, making them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. Supporting strict religious groups also allows them to define themselves against the religious heritage of their parents and the rest of the society, and thus to build an original personal identity. Finally, these young people often participate in their neighbourhoods' informal economy, through drug trafficking, prostitution or theft. For some of these young offenders, religious motives tend to socially legitimize violence, an offence punishable under criminal law. By becoming "defenders" of the values and religious causes, they gain some social recognition.

Overall, surveyed young people think that the factors explaining violent extremism are poverty, social exclusion and injustice, but they also argue that political and religious leaders play an important role in the indoctrination and manipulation of the youth, including through financial incentives. They also point out the role of the preaching centres and Koranic schools for spreading extremist and violent ideologies. Despite the distrust expressed towards the State, the majority of young people think that the State is the stakeholder that is most likely to prevent violent extremism, along with religious leaders.

The authors made the following main recommendations:

- Promoting local dialogue frameworks, especially for intergenerational dialogue;
- Re-engaging the State in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- Implementing a mediation policy with the assistance of religious leaders;
- Adding the prevention of violent extremism in advocacy policies;
- Promoting the rehabilitating and reintegrating process of former violent perpetrators;
- Developing policies for combating young people's precarious conditions and poverty, in particular through implementing training centres and supporting entrepreneurship;
- Implementing a conflict management system at the neighbourhood level; and
- Creating recreational centres and youth development frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

Today, violent extremism is at the heart of strategic concerns and mobilizes the community of researchers, policymakers and the international community. Therefore, documenting relevant and available knowledge within public policies has become a priority. Major global changes in the beginning of the twenty-first century are marked by the spread of identity, religious and political crises and by the rise of extremist groups. Thus, studying these tensions has resulted in a focus on the public insecurity issue, the violation of human rights and the social instability. This situation requires the researchers and experts' community to adopt a rigorous methodology, especially when working on violent extremism, on the phenomenon of radicalization and on all the other related issues. Researchers therefore focused on how societies produce violence, analysing the different stakeholders' motivations and the process that led to this choice.

Although violent extremism is a complex phenomenon and does not have a consensual definition, the definition provided by the Living Safe Together initiative, which is relevant for this study, can be used. It defines this phenomenon as "the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals", including "terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence". According to this definition, "all forms of violent extremism seek change through fear and intimidation rather than through peaceful means". Thus, "if a person or group decides that fear, terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, and then acts accordingly, this is violent extremism". However, it is important to note that violence here is a key concept. As such, radicalization or extremism, whether it be political or religious, is not a problem in itself and "is not a threat to society if it is not connected to violence or other unlawful acts, such as incitement to hatred" (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2014).

Thus, with the development of the violent extremism phenomenon, the political and security situation in the Sahel region countries (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) has become more complex. It brought an additional dimension to the analysis and perception of risks, now combining social, economic and religious factors. Consequently, violent extremism and the radicalization phenomenon, a term often used in French-speaking countries (*phénomène de radicalisation*), have fundamentally changed the in-depth grasp of religion, as it became a geopolitical issue to take into account in order to address peace and security issues.

The Sahel region is located at the crossroads of the Arabic world and the sub-Saharan Africa. It is naturally subject to the influences of the Maghreb¹ and the Machreq,² especially through Islam, which facilitates connections through population displacements, cultural exchanges and religious networks, such as the Sufi Brotherhoods and the Islamic groups. The long-standing illusion nurtured by researchers and Western geopolitical analysts that the sub-Saharan region has not been affected by the influences and the groups active across the Arabic and Muslim worlds is contradicted by history, especially since the end of the cold war. The idea of the Saharan area acting as a barrier between the countries of the Maghreb and

1 Countries of North-Western Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara (Larousse, n.d.(c)).

2 Arabic countries of Asia and North-Eastern Africa: Egypt (Larousse, n.d.(d)).

sub-Saharan Africa is being increasingly challenged by current events with the resurgence of armed groups, the development of trafficking and jihadist groups and the transnational nature of these actors.

The internationalization of terrorism helped the development of several jihadist cells in the world and in Africa in particular. Groups such as Al-Qaeda, and more recently the Islamic State, have been campaigning for the ideological and operational support of the jihadist movements in the Sahel. This synergy helped several terrorist organizations to align with the goals and visions of these terrorist cells, offering the conditions of a genuine subcontracting system through allegiance contracts.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was founded in this context and supports the political ambitions of Al-Qaeda in the Sahel. Among the strategic objectives pursued by Al-Qaeda in the Sahel are the systematic attack on the economic interests of the West and transforming the Sahel into an instable region to enhance recruiting, to train and arm themselves. This is made possible by the chronic instability and the strong difficulty for many States to ensure security and to meet the minimum conditions of political and economic viability. In addition, the porosity of the borders combined with the security system's flaws is worsened by the political instability caused by dysfunctional political systems. The scope of the territories in need of enhancements and safety is a major concern in these countries of the Sahel. In this context, the states of the Sahel have failed to develop a reliable security policy, based on anticipation and future-oriented measures. Incidentally, importing religious ideologies seems to have affected the local belief systems in most countries, and the religious matter is now at the heart of the concerns.

These factors, combined with the intervention and the politico-religious influence of external actors in the Sahel, are reshaping the maps of an ideological conflict in which religion and politics are intertwined.

In fact, once regarded as a distant phenomenon, solely challenging the countries of Maghreb and Middle East, terrorism has become, progressively and in a record time, an endogenous phenomenon embedded in the everyday life of the Sahel countries. Signs of the phenomenon have multiplied, with hostage-taking of employees from Western companies, humanitarian aid workers, journalists and tourists, but also with attacks on urban centres and tourist areas, such as the attacks of the Radisson Blue Hotel on 20 November 2015 in Bamako, Mali; of the Splendid Hotel, on 15 January 2016 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and of the Grand Bassam Beach on 13 March 2016 in Côte d'Ivoire. These events showed the extent of the phenomenon in the region, together with the need to consider the fight against extremism and terrorism as a regional and international challenge.

THE DISTANT ROOTS OF THE EXTREMISM RISE

Since the 1970s, the Pan-Islamic ideology took over the third-world ideology, which was developed with the Bandung Conference³ and marked by strong nationalist figures, such as Colonel Abdel Nasser in Egypt. The death of the latter in 1970 marked the decline of the Egyptian leadership on the African continent, together with the third-world ideology. This paved the way for the dissemination of radical Islamic ideologies, mainly from the Gulf countries. This process was facilitated by the emergence of religious or charity organizations, funded by other countries in the region, and spreading radical Islam through preaching (*da'wah*) and assistance to the poor (*ighatha*). Consequently, these groups have emerged as the link between various religious ideologies, encouraging the challenge of traditional Islam as it is practiced in several areas of the Sahel (Sambe, 2005).

The development assistance provided by the international community to the countries of the Sahel was delayed, resulting in these faith-based organizations becoming more prominent. As the Sahel was experiencing severe droughts in the 1970s, the Western countries were severely affected by the financial and oil crisis and could not assist the countries of the region, unlike the Gulf monarchies. The Pan-Islamic organizations then conducted an ideological conquest based on the *da'wah* and the *ighatha*. In addition to this phenomenon, the states of the Sahel started to weaken due to structural adjustment policies, which was a disadvantage for them in facing the competition from transnational actors on sovereign matters, such as education, health and basic social services. This led to a dual educational system, with the “official” French education system and an informal system managed by Koranic schools and Islamic institutes using a curriculum and pedagogical guidance out of the control of the governments of the region. This duality, combined with the spread of a radical Islamic ideology, has resulted in a clash of religious models and in the challenge of traditional Islam by the new “Arabic-speaking” elites frustrated by the long-lasting political domination of French-speaking and secular leaders. In Niger, this fact was accentuated during the political unrest that occurred at the end of the National Conferences⁴ and the democratic opening started in the 1990s. Furthermore, these political and ideological changes – combined with the vulnerability of the states of the Sahel Belt, often relying on weak institutional and legislative systems – have enabled links connecting violent extremism with other criminal activities, such as money laundering and weapons and drugs trafficking.

The creation and funding of Islamist movements through transnational networks in the Sahel (Mali, Niger and Chad) thus impacted the political orientations and religious practices. In Niger and other countries in the region, the “fundamentalist” Islam has developed steadily by setting new aspects of social, political and religious norms. As a result, religious practice became the constructive matrix of identity and social status for the actors under the effect of social control. Thus, for decades and without anyone noticing, traditional social and political structures have weakened in favour of greater religious influence through indoctrination, using religion as a tool for ideological conversion of Sahelian societies.

3 Conference held in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, and bringing together the representatives of 29 Asian and African countries, which proclaimed their anti-colonialism position and their neutrality regarding the rivalry of the great powers (Larousse, n.d.(a)).

4 While a new constitution was adopted in Niger in 1989, the country was experiencing a serious economic and social crisis. The year 1990 was marked by violence, with a succession of demonstrations “brutally put down” and the start of the Touareg rebellion following acts of exactions against civilians in the Agadez region (Larousse, n.d.(e)). The regime led by Colonel Seibou thus organized the National Conference, from 29 July to 3 November 1991, to review the political, economic and sociocultural situation of the country. The conference lays the foundation of a pluralist democracy, for the first pluralist elections of the country in 1993 (*Le Républicain*, 2015).

EXTREMISM, VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: DIFFERENCES AND INTERFERENCES

In Niger, and especially in Zinder, many social changes were introduced by political pluralism and diversity of religious communication channels (such as community radio and Internet). These phenomena, in addition to the combined economic crisis, the population explosion and poverty in urban areas, are potentially feeding the phenomenon of religious extremism described above.

However, it remains difficult to establish a clear link between religious extremism and a form of more “conventional” violence, found especially among the youth. If the violence in the region of Zinder has already been investigated in several studies (Ali Soffo, 2013; Souley, 2012; Siddo, 2012), the possible correlation between the factors of such violence and the shift towards violent extremism had never been analysed.

The purpose of this study is therefore to know if violence practiced at the youth population level could be motivated by religious grounds and the extremist practice of religion, or if this violence could have been the result of exploitation by extremist groups. To determine if such correlation exists, this study draws attention on the testimony and declarations of young people, the prime actors of this violence.

In general, the expression of violence in the city of Zinder adopts classic forms, such as incivility, delinquency, acts of vandalism, organized fights and mass protests.

With the start of the democratic process in Niger in the 1990s, the phenomenon of violence has accelerated and is fuelled, in particular, by societal changes. These changes include the following: (a) breakdown of the family structure with, in particular, the devaluation of paternal authority; (b) loss of attendance for the institutional authorities with a high integrative value (armed forces, schools); (c) abolition of the national service, which ensured social mixing; (d) rise of youth unemployment and the “breakdown” of the social ladder; and (e) ghettoization of neighbourhoods.

These developments have sometimes led some of the youth to start a form of social protest and a retreat to alternative forms of organization in the absence of appropriate socialization frameworks for citizens. This entails the risk of a conceptual scission of the youth with the society and the State. Especially as the latter is having more and more difficulties in applying the Niger Republic’s motto “Fraternity, Work, Progress” to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are struggling to find their place within the society. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse the link between the rupture factors leading to the “conventional” physical violence and the factors that determine the shift to a form of extremist violence based on political or religious ideology.

SOCIOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE VIOLENCE IN ZINDER

Located 950 km from Niamey, the capital of Niger, the urban community of Zinder covers an area of 559.66 km² and is composed of five municipal districts. The city was the administrative capital of Niger until 1926.

While the census conducted in 1977 resulted in an estimated 1,002,225 inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics (INS), 2005) for the Zinder *département*, the 2012 census resulted in an estimated 3,539,764 inhabitants (*ibid.*). According to the results of the general census of the population and habitat (*Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat* (RGPH)) in 2012, 71.6 per cent of the population is less than 25 years old and has one of the lowest rates of school enrolment (45.8%) of the country (INS Niger, 2015). The gross school enrolment rate was 68.4 per cent in 2010–2011 and 55 per cent in 2013–2014 (*ibid.*).

Today, there is a growing number of press articles about Zinder, and media attention is focused on the frequency of protests causing extensive damage to property and human lives. The common association of the city with violence worries the authorities and civil society stakeholders. Violent demonstrations have led to the death of two people and the burning of a bank in December 2011,⁵ the destruction of several public and private buildings in September 2012,⁶ and the destruction of a Christian school, the sacking of Christian homes and the death of three people in 2015 during the “anti-Charlie” protests.⁷ Violent clashes between rival gangs are also frequent, and have caught the press attention, including at the international level. For instance, in March 2016, Jillian Keenan explained in a *Foreign Policy* article how Boko Haram was trying to use the “ultra-violence” of the Zinder youth as a “weapon of war”.

This phenomenon of violence, described as likely to be used by the terrorist groups, is particularly affecting young people belonging to groups and gangs known as *fadas* or *palais* (French word for “palace”). Well-known to the police, these *palais* are similar to real gangs and challenge the order established by the State and the traditional authorities. These informal structures work on established principles and rules of conduct defining the conditions for joining and developing within the organization. These cover, for example, accepting the ideals supported by the group, loyalty and solidarity towards its members, the regular payment of financial contributions, obedience to orders given by officials of the group and no challenging of the leaders’ authority.

Youth unemployment, households’ poverty, drug consumption, the gradual disappointment of youth from the political world, the manipulation of young people for political purposes and the influence of the media are causes often mentioned in order to explain the phenomena of violence in Zinder. This leads to deviant attitudes and behaviours specific to youth groups, family unit breakdowns, school dropouts, admiration or fascination for criminal and/or terrorist organizations, the

5 Riots following the death of a high school student and a woman from Zinder resulting from clashes between protestors and the police.

6 “Anti-American” riots sparked by the streaming of a movie on YouTube on the Prophet Mohammed, produced by an American Copt, and deemed to be blasphemous in many Muslim countries.

7 Protests following the participation of President Mahamadou Issoufou at the Paris march to pay respect to the victims of the attacks against the French satirical journal, *Charlie Hebdo*. This newspaper had published caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed deemed blasphemous.

rise of identity, religious and regionalism crises, and refusing to join the Republican Pact, causing the gradual weakening of the State.

However, despite its relevance, this data come up against the question of differentiation between classic violence and violence arising from a behavioural shift from a religious radicalization leading to violent extremism. This empirical data has certainly guided the various hypotheses taken into account in this study; however, only the results of the surveys conducted on a representative sample of the youth population of the city will lay the foundation of the analysis of the phenomenon of violent extremism in Zinder.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism in Zinder seems to have various origins and foundations. As noted above, it can be difficult to grasp the difference between the two types of violence (conventional and extremist) without first understanding and analysing their motives.

However, the study attempts to understand to what extent, in a young environment already widely affected by the phenomenon of violence, these already fragile and vulnerable youth would be tempted to join groups or networks within which violence is religiously motivated. Similarly, this study seeks to determine if these young people can engage in acts of violence based on religious motives, and if they themselves justify their acts of violence by a religious commitment.

So far, most of the studies on insecurity or on the sense of insecurity in Zinder have focused on conventional violence. For instance, Souley (2012) – using the categories of offences registered in the police reports and questioning young people from neighbourhoods deemed dangerous – came to the conclusion that the delinquency acts in Zinder are not different from the forms of delinquency found in other Nigerian cities.

For researchers, the ideal field study to analyse the causes of these offensive behaviours are the areas in which young people are organized in groups called *fadas* or *palais*. The neighbourhoods are the most relevant territorial framework to analyse these regulation methods. As a matter of fact, starting the research from the neighbourhoods' level allows taking into account factors, such as the sociocultural components, the housing type and social networks.

Thus, in Zinder, the neighbourhoods where the *fadas* and *palais* are located are usually marked by endemic poverty and marginalization due to their geographical location, and face the State and local authorities neglect, particularly visible with the housing type. Consequently, a feeling of mutual rejection has developed between political authorities and the youth from these neighbourhoods, the latter identifying with criteria different from the citizenship criteria. In addition, the population of Zinder has developed stereotypes about the inhabitants of these districts, who end up identifying with these stereotypes. They then expressed their rejection of a society and a political system that does not accept them by challenging them with antisocial behaviour. However, it remains difficult to understand whether marginalization is unilateral and carried out by the State and the rest of the population, or a form of self-exclusion of the youth against a system with normative codes and modes of operation they no longer respect.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the tragic school events of December 2011, marked by unprecedented violence and public infrastructure looting, showed another facet of youth violence in Zinder. These protests occurred after the death of a young student in December 2011, for which his school friends blamed the police, and aimed more broadly at relaying claims for a better educational policy. Subsequently, the fact that such protests were more and more organized and targeting public infrastructure put Zinder in the media spotlight, reinforcing its image of a “subversive” city.

Additionally, the deadly riots of 16 January 2015, called the “anti-Charlie” protests, showed categories of violence that had never been observed so far.

These riots, based on strong religious claims, revealed the part played by the religious speech in the violent protest against the State. In addition to attacking the State and political authority symbols, rioters also targeted what they viewed as opposed to their vision of Islam (such as churches and cultural centres). Thus, these riots showed a new shape and intensity for the following reasons:

- **Protesters’ target:** Protesters targeted Christians—although they were from Niger, and attacked their property, the structures perceived as being part of the French interests (French Cultural Centre), the public buildings, as well as the headquarters of the ruling party. These acts are similar, in their nature and their orientation, to the Boko Haram attacks on Christian people in Nigeria and against the symbols of the disputed States;
- **Authors:** So far, no objective criteria allowed to categorize the authors of the “anti-Charlie” violence, contrary to incivility riots (predominantly led by young people). According to several testimonies collected during the field survey, the “anti-Charlie” events had the particularity to affect all age groups. A strong presence of women has been found, which is a new fact in the social landscape; and
- **Geographical location of the protests:** If some areas are deemed “dangerous” (such as Kara-Kara and Garin Malam) and are often affected by violent protests, it should be noted that almost all areas of the city of Zinder were affected by the 2012 riots when the anti-American demonstrations against an “anti-Islamic film” led to the destruction of the largest Catholic Church in the country. The same observations could be applied to the demonstrations following the *Charlie Hebdo* events in 2015. Similarly, the other main towns of the departments of the region have almost all been affected with the same intensity and similar targets.

During these events, the religious factor, or its manipulation by political actors, has played a decisive role in the protests’ success. These elements suggest that another form of violence is being dealt with, and thus with other models of analysis that the classic study of *fadas* and *palais* cannot comprehend.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the analysis of the violent extremism phenomenon is often conflicting with attitudes of denial in countries with a Muslim majority, because the question is often taboo due to fear of the people’s reaction. The latter have a rather mixed perception of how the extremism issue is treated, including regarding the so-called fight against terrorism that religious leaders did not hesitate to present as a new facet of the “war” against Islam, led by the Western countries or international organizations controlled by the Western countries. Governments, often reluctant to address this issue, are facing a public opinion often based on these according to which the fight against terrorism would be a new Trojan horse of “the West” seeking to intensify its military presence in the region. This view is expressed in analysis literature including, sometimes, in Western experts’ analyses that are explaining, for example, the Boko Haram phenomenon as a “conspiracy” serving some strategic interests (Collon, 2014). There is often an attitude of denial especially from political authorities concerned with attracting foreign investment and developing tourism, which would be affected by the potential risks associated with violent extremism. The phenomenon is often hidden or always perceived as distant from a Nigerien context enjoying relative stability. This weighs on attempts to

study the phenomenon of violent extremism, as the reluctance of the respondents themselves is difficult to overcome in these contexts.

In order to link the general phenomenon of violence in Zinder with the emergence of religious extremism, it is important to take into account the variables defining the subjects, their environment and more importantly, the interaction between the subjects and their environment. For this purpose, this study, in its design and theoretical framework, is based in particular on the work of Pauwels et al. (2014). According to this work, which can guide the study, two fundamental principles of human behaviour must be kept in mind in order to understand the complex phenomenon of extremism. This is what Pauwels calls “agency”, referring to the predisposition of actors to act deliberately in interaction with their environment, and the possibility that they may or may not comply with the moral rules commonly accepted by the society.

This means that the identified risk factors, both individual and environmental, can only be accepted as causes for political violence, if they directly influence the perception of alternative actions in a particular situation and the rational choice process.

Based on lessons drawn from the literature review and adapted to the Zinder region context, it can be noted that the city of Zinder is facing three types of violence, interacting with each other, each having its own mode of expression and propagation:

- A form of violence based on incivility: this is the phenomenon of delinquency that takes shape around the youth gangs called *fadas* and *palais*;
- A form of violence closer to the forms of expression of violent extremism, with a political and protesting nature, which would fit within the sociopolitical context of the country, with the growing challenging of political elites, for example, with the successive above-mentioned school riots. With this type of violence, perpetrators are destroying public buildings, the heritage of the State and ruling political parties, with, for instance, the events and unrest of September 2012 and November 2016;⁸
- A form of violence caused by **violent religious extremism** that manifests itself in several ways. In 1993, the headquarters of the Association of the Women of Niger, Zinder, was torched by Islamist activists on behalf of the defence of the “Islamic values” and “purification of morals and practices”. These activists attacked the headquarters of the women they considered as being at the origin of a “divine curse” that caused drought in the country, because of their indecent clothing fashion (Hassane, 2006). Later on, attacks on Christians and their religious symbols started, such as during the event of September 2012. These so-called anti-American riots resulted among other things resulted in the rampage of the largest church in Zinder. The churches had again been targeted during the “anti-Charlie” riots of January 2015. This *modus operandi* is similar in many ways to the one used by Boko Haram, which targets Christian symbols and which considers this community as an extension of the West and of its values or as its “agents”.

First, of the three types of violence identified in the city of Zinder, violent and religiously motivated extremism is the most problematic. It feeds on ideologies that

⁸ Student riots in response to the demands of the students of the University of Zinder to improving their conditions of life and study (Barma, 2016).

are often derived from perceptions that are unknown to the general public and local authorities, as well as on other exogenous elements linked to international events (such as Palestinian issues and the situation of Muslim minorities in the world). Second, it should be noted that violent extremism does not initially refer to clearly identifiable stakeholders' attitudes and opinions. Moreover, one of the specificities of the violent extremism phenomenon is that its causes can only be spread and draw attention after the commission of a violent act, in most cases by an unsuspected agent after an unpredictable shift.

ASSESSMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS AND RISK FACTORS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

From a sociological point of view, violent extremism is presented as a process of systematic rupture with the cultural group of origin: the family, neighbourhood, territory or community. This divide consists of a crystallization of the politically violent and radical identity, in which the individual sees groups and individuals outside his or her own political organization as enemies. Thus, sociologically, radicalization is not the result of a religious process, produced by traditional cultural institutions and the confessional heritage, but rather the outcome of an ideological and political process.

From a sociopolitical point of view, violent extremism has become prominent within the societies of the Sahel and has transformed these large geographical areas into a shelter for criminal or terrorist groups. The process of dismantling the State structures, weakened by the austerity measures imposed by international donors (International Monetary Fund, World Bank), has accelerated the implementation of a religious ideology contesting the social services deficit. This situation has favoured the rapid development of faith-based organizations that provide support and social assistance in place of the State. These organizations impose a security challenge on the Sahelian states, already weakened by severe economic and political conditions, far beyond their defence and security capabilities. With this new conflict context, Sahelian societies as a whole have undergone profound changes and have, for some, lost the most significant sociocultural landmarks from which their millennial civilizations have emerged. Thus, the peaceful coexistence of diverse and often divergent religious practices has been abruptly replaced by a culture of contestation, with the progressive weakening of symbolic and cultural values that guaranteed social cohesion.

Similarly, violence, as a mode of contestation, is institutionalized while destroying family units and weakening the cohesion and mediation frameworks, favouring an ideological and religious indoctrination. This is visible through not only ideological but also political opposition of radicalized religious groups with their own societies. In Niger, as previously in Libya and Mali, these new forces are constantly challenging the classical social order that they describe as unfair, deviant and imbued with practices viewed as "animist" or "satanic" (Western culture).

Like the neighbouring countries of the region, Niger is experiencing complex political issues marked in recent years by a succession of chronic political instability. In addition to its geographical position at the heart of Sahel–Saharan interactions, Niger is in a difficult position, having to manage internal policy needs and its

openness to foreign forces. Niger is therefore firmly committed to a quest for legitimacy in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. In Niger, for example, there is a strong commitment of the authorities to security issues within regional frameworks such as the G5 Sahel, and the threat is taken seriously despite the lack of resources to deal with the many security challenges.

At the borders with Libya, Nigeria and Mali, Niger represents major geostrategic challenges. Its long porous borders offer the possibility for Islamic fighters, among others, to transform certain Nigerien areas into strategic retreat zones. Consequently, the presence of a large and young population, suffering from endemic unemployment, in areas often marked by latent conflicts between sedentary and nomadic groups, gives rise to fears that the authorities will turn certain areas into reservoirs of recruitment for new fighters.

It should also be noted that this phenomenon remains widespread, in the perception of regional actors, and not clearly isolated from other regional problems, such as trafficking, banditry and delinquency, which are strongly present in the city of Zinder and the surrounding areas. This confusion has therefore made the present study difficult, while conceptualization difficulties still persist within the scientific community with regard to this sensitive subject.

INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS, OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Initial assumptions

As pointed out above, population growth, which is one of Niger's major challenges, remains a problem for the region and the city of Zinder. This is compounded by accelerated urbanization, the expansion of the city and a massive rural exodus, resulting in a high proportion of young people and children, many of whom are increasingly evolving in a context that became multicultural. This multiculturalism is linked to the migration of populations from border regions, particularly Nigeria. This situation impacts the stability or precariousness of young people, which is linked to difficulties in reconstituting family circles among migrants and opportunities for professional integration. The creation of other socialization frameworks by young people thus becomes a way of supplementing the family structure and the sense of civic belonging with other modes of organization.

The *fadas* and *palais* – the youth organizations in Zinder often referred to as the source of violence in the city – refer to different realities according to their mode of action, functioning and internal organization.

A *fada* refers to a group of young people who do not necessarily share the same convictions or have not instituted a commonly recognized integrated normative framework. Its development in the city of Zinder is often linked to the inactivity, unemployment and dropout of young people.

A *palais* refers to a group of young people who share the same convictions, objectives and ideals. The structure called *palais* follows, to some extent, a formal organizational logic. Each *palais* has its own codes, rules of operations and laws. Generally speaking, the members of the *palais* are opposed to the values and laws of the State and the society in general.

In addition to these alternative modes of organization and socialization, the Nigerian education system in general is facing economic issues that do not facilitate universal education and, above all, its genuine democratization. Equal opportunities are not guaranteed by such a system. This general change, with little benefit to social inclusion, does not spare the city of Zinder, which is still experiencing its effects. A study on education and poverty in Niger (Abdallah, 2006) shows that there is a gap in educational levels between the capital, Niamey, and regions such as Zinder, as well as between the regions themselves. This is particularly visible with the primary school completion rate, since this study shows that in Zinder “fewer than four in ten (36%) children completed the basic cycle 1 in 2004–2005. The gap between Niamey, which has the highest completion rate (87%), and the other regions ranges from 63 points (Zinder) to 40 points (Dosso), again reflecting the extent of regional disparities” (p. 22). This situation is compounded by the massive exclusion of young people from secondary schools in the city of Zinder following their failure at school.

As a result, these disparities affect the perceptions of different socioeconomic problems. This leads to a gap between the populations of Zinder and the decision makers in Niamey, as underlined at the presentation of the first results of this study by a civil society representative working for the integration of young people. This structural misunderstanding between the inhabitants of a region that consider themselves marginalized and a political elite seemingly misjudging the state of mind of a region that is viewed as “rebellious” or “subversive”, influences the approach and conception of the violent extremism phenomenon and its threats.

Yet, the population does not equally perceive these threats. While some consider these threats to be real threats, others believe that they are exaggerated by the authorities and the international community, although they believe that prevention is necessary. This was shown by the informal exchanges with actors involved in social work during the preparation phase of the restitution of this study. The precariousness, corruption and bad governance denounced by the populations reinforce their perception that the country’s wealth would only benefit the elites and Western powers. This negative perception of public action and political authority deeply affects citizens’ relations with the State. The absence of the latter in some areas is gradually being filled by religious organizations, which are seizing the opportunity to sustainably reinforce their influence. Therefore, it is clear that the space left by the State, especially in the poorest neighbourhoods, could be exploited by terrorist groups with their infiltration strategy. Out of 10 Islamic organizations with their headquarters in Zinder, and apart from organizations with national coverage, 6 are dedicated to “Islamic charity” or “development” and “solidarity” (Association Islamique du Niger (AIN), 2015). Zinder is thus described since the 1990s as a “refuge city in the shadow of Islamist ‘infiltrators’” (*Agence France Presse* (AFP), 2015). Likewise, people and witnesses from the *fadas* reported that Boko Haram has undercover members, particularly among young people and refugees fleeing the abuses of the terrorist movement in neighbouring Nigeria. The governor of the region has put forward the figure of 10,000 people (*ibid.*) who have fled Nigeria and are living in Zinder, some of whom are waiting to move to Niamey or other regions.

As mentioned above, this influence of religious radicalism is not new in Zinder. In the 1990s, the *boujé* or “skirt” operation was launched in Zinder and Maradi after a sermon explained the drop in rainfall was a consequence of “moral depravity”, illustrated by young girls’ clothing behaviour. As a result of this sermon, extremists

started to attack young girls by tearing off their skirts, stripping them off their clothes and subjecting them to physical and moral violence. This movement spread rapidly, targeting other social strata, including prostitutes and bar managers, who were also abused (Hassane, 2006:65).

Overall objective of the research

The overall objective of the research is therefore to determine whether there can be a correlation between traditional youth violence and religiously based violent extremism or the use of religiously justified or motivated violence. The results and conclusions will enable considering initiatives in favour of young people at risk for a direct and positive impact on their withdrawal from illegal activities. Such initiatives should also minimize the influence of violent extremist groups on young people.

Specific objectives of the research

Objective 1: To improve the level of analysis of vulnerable groups and criteria for assessing the risk of a shift to violent extremism in the Zinder region.

Objective 2: To offer opportunities for reintegration that take into account real needs and are based on a better understanding of risk factors.

Objective 3: To define the identification criteria of people affected by violent extremism and develop community resilience.

Research questions

How can the sociocultural, political, religious and economic foundations and implications of extremist violence in the city of Zinder be explained?

The following sub-questions arise from this main question:

- Is the social environment in the city of Zinder, marked by conventional violence, conducive to extremist violence among young people?
- Is the economic situation of parents and young people themselves a determining factor in the extremist violence of young people in the city of Zinder?
- Can the violence issue management by the State or local authorities encourage a gradual shift towards violent extremism?
- Does religious conflict in border areas impact the behaviour of young people in the city of Zinder and lead to violent extremism?

Research hypotheses

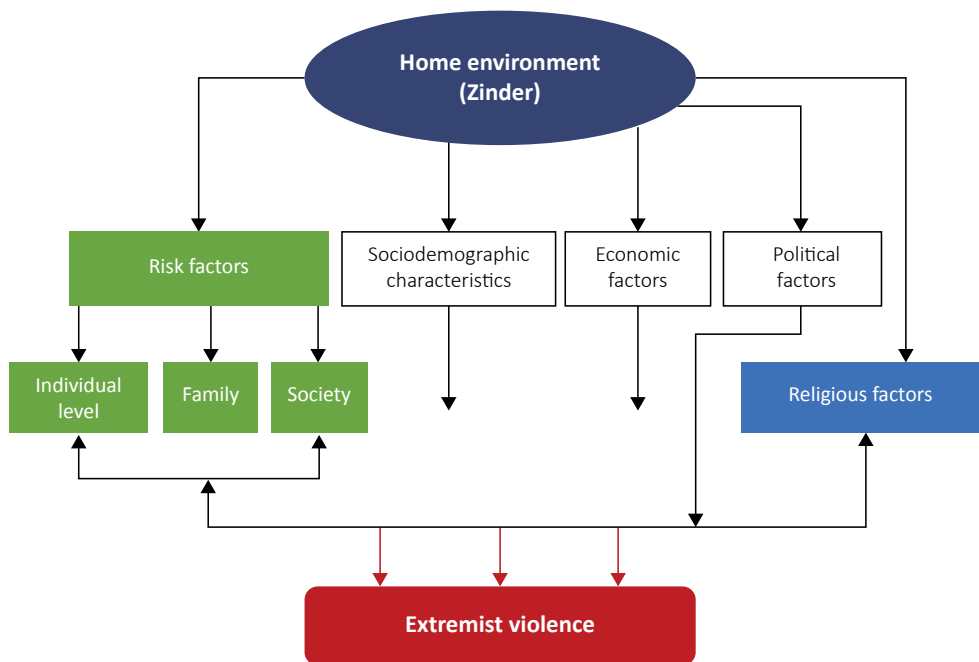
In accordance with the research questions and outputs, the main hypothesis is hereby presented:

With the combination of various factors that will need to be analysed, violent extremism could find its foundation in the worsening of economic and sociocultural issues and in recent religious changes in Niger.

Sub-hypotheses

- Social risk factors could, in some ways, determine violent extremism that could affect young people;
- The economic situation of parents and young people themselves could explain the violent extremism of young people in the city of Zinder;
- The violence issue management by the authorities could encourage violent extremism;
- The religious conflict in the border areas could have an impact on the behaviour of young people in the city of Zinder and encourage a certain shift towards violent extremism.

The analysis will be based on the following conceptual framework:



THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE AND SOCIOLOGICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE EXTREMISM PHENOMENON

In this methodology section, the theoretical frame of reference – that is, the analysis model – the investigation methods, the corpus choice and finally a brief presentation of the study environment will be discussed.

Based on the various variables set out in the hypotheses of this research, it is believed that the following reference theories are relevant to the framework of analysis. Mentioning these different theories and approach methods shows the multidimensional nature of a study that seeks to detect the signs of violent extremism in a young population at the crossroads of several issues: precariousness, marginalization, sense of injustice and exclusion.

Drawing on the theoretical framework developed by McMurtry and Curling (2008) in the context of *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*, the question will be analysed by integrating the different assumptions they put forward:

Rational choice theory

This theory holds that “people freely choose their behaviour and are motivated by the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure” (McMurtry and Curling, 2008:22). In that respect, “there is some support in relation to violence, where youth use violence to protect themselves in situations when they feel they lack power”. From this point of view, this theory is appropriate for the framework of analysis since it is assumed that risk factors at the individual level favour a gradual shift towards extremist violence in the city of Zinder.

“Economic deprivation” theory

This theory of “economic deprivation”, widely used by McMurtry and Curling (2008), is consistent with the hypothesis that, in Zinder’s case, the economic situation of parents and young people themselves could lead to a sense of frustration that can be used by extremist groups. Evidence gathered during data collection could support the application of this analysis model.

“Social learning” theory

Based on the fact that the use of violence can be the culmination of a process of learning and acquiring codes and practices, particularly through peer influence (McMurtry and Curling, 2008), this theory seems adequate to provide explanatory elements for the case study. In fact, the young people of the city of Zinder, gathering in *fadas* and *palais*, create networks of alternative socialization and mutual assistance, adopting and reinforcing certain behaviours through their peers. This process of recreating new socialization frameworks outside the traditional sociopolitical boundaries can lead individuals to gradually detach themselves from their regular environment and identify with other imaginary or ideological communities. This is very often the source of strong activist religious commitments that are found in violent extremist groups.

Media influence theory

This theory highlights the fact that “media violence leads to social learning of violent behaviour” (McMurtry and Curling, 2008:25). In the framework of the study, this allows to understand the impact of the media on the evolution of the link between youth and violence in a context of social diversity, the proliferation of community and transnational media and competition from religious models (traditional Islam and the current *izala*, known as reformist). However, virulent preachers often dominate community radio stations due to the influence of some puritanical groups on the media sphere. Moreover, the linguistic porosity and therefore ideological due to the sharing of Hausa language with the neighbouring areas of Nigeria exposes the Zinder youth to the talks and sermons broadcast from this country. Lastly, new technologies and the increasingly mobile and easily transferable nature of communication media (memory cards, USB drivers, Whatsapp) also facilitate the transmission of ideologies and beliefs.

Perceptions of injustice, crime and violence

In line with McMurtry and Curling (2008), it is noted that a sense of injustice can lead to violence and lead a person to justify and rationalize criminal acts. In the context of this research, the link between injustice, marginalization of youth from disadvantaged families and violence is analysed. Added to this is the fact that the sense of injustice and rejection perpetuates in the subject feeling victimized, an attitude of “challenge” and “bravado” towards authority, as shown by McMurtry and Curling (2008) in their work on experiences of youth violence.

While striving to go beyond the theoretical frameworks, their contribution to refining the analysis, which will be corroborated by empirical and factual evidence from the field survey conducted as part of this study, will be considered.

PRESENTATION OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA RESULTS OF THE STUDY

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method as presented by the experts provides the opportunity to “get a glimpse of people’s behaviour and perceptions, and to study their opinions on a particular topic more thoroughly than in a survey. It generates ideas and hypotheses that can help to understand how a question is perceived by the target population and helps define or identify options related to this question” (Kani Konaté and Sidibé, n.d.).

The research team used in-depth focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. These interviews were conducted with resource persons, religious leaders, members of the defence and security forces, prisoners (youth and religious leaders) and heads of households.

These discussions revealed that the neighbourhoods perceived as most affected by violence and, to a lesser extent, violent extremism in Zinder are Kara Kara and Garin Mallam (District II (*arrondissement*)), Franco (District I) and Djaguindi (District III). The districts of Dan Yaro Sultan and Tilacoco (District I), Dispensary (District III) and Haro Banda (District IV) are also mentioned, although with a lower level of violence. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that according to some interviewees in this study, the city as a whole is actually affected by the phenomenon of violence.

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ZINDER: PROCESS, FACTORS AND LOCAL PERCEPTIONS

From 2010 onwards, the change of political leadership issue in Niger, strongly linked to the social issue, caused numerous public debates and brought back, in the form of demands, most of the problems of the city of Zinder, such as unemployment, delinquency, riots, informal economy, school failure, exclusion and ghettoization. The young people thus organized themselves into informal groups to compensate for the lack of socialization and integration frameworks from the State and the authorities.

The instigators of these youth organizations are considered to be the key players of violence in the city of Zinder, although the extremist nature from a religious point of view cannot be categorically established from the outset. Several explanations were given on cause of the expansion of this type of organization.

According to some of the surveyed heads of households, the informal youth organizations (*fadas* and *palais*) are a direct consequence of politicians seeking to use them in a context of social unrest and contestation. For instance, President Mamadou Tandja’s attempt to extend his presidential term beyond the limit set by the Constitution led to several demonstrations in 2010. The city of Zinder was in favour of the *Tazartché* (presidential re-election) as shown by the demonstrations organized in support of the president. Thus, it is clear that politicians can use

violence as a tool for their own purposes, and that the phenomenon is therefore not unrelated to political developments in the country. However, the local demonstrations are sometimes based on underlying religious motives, justifying the demonstration strategy.

Young people very often appear at the front seat in face-to-face meetings with law enforcement officials to express their dissatisfaction. They are then widely reported in the news, and they crystallize collective fears through drastic actions such as vandalism. Some politicians believe that this recurring issue is the work of the parliamentary opposition that would manipulate young people and drive them into the uprising and revolt. It is noteworthy that young people in the *fadas* and *palais* are regularly used to maintain order during propaganda and awareness campaigns.

Furthermore, violence is also linked to the virulent preaching of some radical mosques and imams, as was the *boujé* incident in 1993. Yet, despite these local events, the fact that violent extremism is a global phenomenon that knows no borders is a widespread belief in Zinder. The populations are thus able to find a “logical” link between acts committed within a process of religious radicalization, such as attacks on Christian places of worship, and regional or international events. Violent extremism is also linked, according to many heads of households, to a “culture shock” between deep-rooted traditions and new religious dissenter practices, and is consequently seen as an educational issue. Education here refers to all means of transmission of values, beyond the strictly academic framework. Hence, the opinion of this interviewed preacher can be better understood, as he states that “extremist violence is linked to a poor education. If the child receives a good education, there are some actions he or she will not do” (interview of 20 December 2016).

A Sheikh preacher, known in Zinder for his proximity to the people of the districts affected by the violence, also mentions this problem of education and insists on the fact that:

Parents are increasingly neglecting their responsibility. Choosing the right spouse, establishing communication with children and monitoring friends they spend time with, because bad company implies bad behaviour (interview of 20 December 2016).

Extremist groups from neighbouring Nigeria are also attempting to use these young people, as reported by a former leader of Zinder’s *palais*. He thus explains how “recruiters” enter the city, and the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in particular, and offer unemployed young people to follow them for a financial reward.

In addition, it is noted that the religious speech serves to legitimize criminal acts of violence, as observed during “anti-Charlie” demonstrations. In these circumstances, young people, usually regarded as “delinquents”, become “advocates” for a supposedly religious cause. This change of status then gives them a new form of legitimacy or even social recognition. These young people, who are usually excluded, gain a more valued status on the social sphere, thus thinking that they are empowered to solve society’s problems through a “defence” of Islam.

However, it is important not to reduce the recruitment of young people by religious structures and their indoctrination to a mere act of exclusion or a quest for social valorization. It also stems from a certain social instability experienced by young people exposed to precariousness, unemployment and exclusions, which creates

a sense of frustration among them and quickly turns into an identity crisis. This enlistment is part of a self-building process that young people undertake to give meaning to their sense of self and personal development. Thus, Avenel and Cicchelli (2001) note that “Islam carried by young people is not a mere reproduction of the parents’ heritage, but rather an original creation intended to support the creation of an autonomous personality” (p. 74). Consequently, much of the behaviour of young people results not from a lack of socialization, but rather from an attachment to a certain identity quest. It is a form of “deviant conformism” that is explained as a rational way of adapting to objective living conditions.

This young people’s identity and social value quest can also be linked to the women’s endeavour shown by their participation in “anti-Charlie” violence.

The causes of youth violence in Zinder therefore remain complex and heterogeneous. They are not limited to a single explanation but rather require a multi-factorial analysis combining structural variables and stakeholders’ logic and also context effects. This heterogeneity is explained by the words of a young tailor who explains that “in Niger, all the violence problems are not only linked to economic, political or religious factors. Some also see the violent extremism phenomenon as a response to the social exclusion of young people from the social system” (interview of 18 December 2016).

As such, the causes must be considered in a context of spatial concentration of unemployment, as well as with the influence of the family and peer group, the rooting of individualistic ideology and the stakeholders’ strategies to face the institutional and political responses they receive. All these violent young people share a number of characteristics related to their social conditions. Most of them come from broken families, where parental authority is missing or lacking. Accordingly, one shopkeeper explains that “the phenomenon is caused by a family problem, where neglecting men leave all decisions in women’s hands” (interview of 17 December 2016).

The role of the family can be controversial, but is not an isolated factor. For example, in order to understand the affiliation mechanisms of young people with extremist organizations, it is necessary to explain the links between families and their status in the district where they live (families of notables for instance). The survey shows, however, that children from large families are more affected by violence than children from smaller families, regardless of their parents’ income and employment status.

Other factors also come into play, such as the opportunities’ boom in a mass consumer society, the religion and the ineffectiveness of criminal sanctions. A strictly judicial approach to violence acts, besides its inadequacies, cannot remove the meaning behind acts of violence only by classifying them and turning them into a sentence.

The study also highlights the effect of other social factors such as the importance of school failure, which is an even more prominent variable than the social origin, in the propensity to delinquency and violent behaviour. In fact, the democratization of the education system has produced its own selective and segregated logic and generates substantial frustrations as aspirations for success rise. One head of household explains that “this phenomenon is linked to the economy because these young people do not have jobs. The religion is another reason, but the whole problem lies in school failure” (interview of 20 December 2016).

Further, the city of Zinder is facing an unprecedented employment crisis due to its very high population growth, coupled with food insecurity, which is worsening the living conditions of some city dwellers. As a result, urban violence is strongly linked to widespread poverty and the impossible social integration of a large mass of young adults and adolescents. This creates a tense and unstable social climate, which can degenerate into riots if the State undertakes unpopular reforms, even if they are motivated by economic reasons.

This employment crisis impacts young people's lives because having a job gives them a personal identity and social recognition. Unemployment and precariousness among young people in Zinder's *palais* and *fadas* thus diverge a large part of them from the classic self-realization schemes. This assertion is supported by a mechanic who explains that "in Zinder, the factors of extremist violence are essentially linked to unemployment (...)", and by a farmer who says that "young people are left on their own and live in increasing precariousness, which explains the violent extremism" (interviews of 21 December 2016).

VIOLENCE AS A PHENOMENON LINKED TO POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS MATTERS

It is noted that many excluded young people seek to legitimize their rebellion against society by finding justifications based on the defence of a form of Islam that can be described as radical. For these young people, the driving force behind their "conversion" to Islam is not society's hatred, but rather an identity uneasiness and a search for authority, in a context of social norms loosening and parental authority resignation.

Perhaps the most striking fact in the history of violent extremism in Zinder is the January 2015 "anti-Charlie" movement. Collective violence during these demonstrations was an expression of collective anger and frustration. While the motivation for this violence was mainly religious, there was also a hidden aim to target the political order in general. The scale of the riots, how they spread throughout the country, their duration and the damage they caused were a political and religious turning point, initiating an impressive media response. As such, the symbols of fire and chaos drew international attention at a time when terrorism prevails in the media.

"Anti-Charlie" protests have a multidimensional aspect, associating local, religious and institutional issues. Hence, whereas the riot outbreak was not directly dictated by religious preachers, the sermons in mosques contributed significantly to the mobilization. As a matter of fact, the religious endorsement strongly contributed to the popular nature of the riots, generating a powerful binding. All social strata and structures participated in the riots, as the religious speech gave social legitimacy to this faith-fuelled protest. This multidimensional nature of the movement is visible in the statement of a surveyed retailer, who believes that:

Young people find themselves in poor economic positions. Politics no longer support them. Then with the outbreak of the prophet's cartoon crisis, the problem becomes religious and leads young Muslims to manifest their discontent. After the President stated that "we are all Charlie", the people of Zinder violently responded, on a Friday, shouting "Allahou Akbar" (God is the greatest). In Paris, President Mahamadou Issoufou had left to show his attachment to the colonizing

mother and, better yet, it was a sign of sympathy with the French people who had been hurt and was mourning following the attack. This statement was confirmed in a TV5 Monde interview with the President, in which he insisted that: "We are all Charlie". For the most part Muslims, people from Zinder did not support this assertion, which they considered to be heathen and *riddah* (apostasy) because anyone dishonouring the prophet declares war on Muslims. Thus, in response to the President's remarks, the people of Zinder, who were upset and generally angry, quickly disapproved Mahamadou Issoufou. On Friday 16 January 2015, right after the prayer, they went out all over the city to protest, shouting *Allahou Akbar* (interview of 17 December 2016).

It is noteworthy that long before the riot's outbreak, the authorities were informed about the holding of such a protest. As a matter of fact, young people on motorcycles were distributing leaflets throughout the city announcing the protests against *Charlie Hebdo*, exactly like the anti-American demonstrations in 2012. But the lack of adequate security measures that could have contained the outbursts shows that the authorities were surprised by the turn of events and the intensity of the violence.

It should also be noted that these episodes of sporadic violence must be linked to the continuing phenomenon of urban violence that has marked the city for many years, according to survey sources. The administrative and judicial authorities have expressed their growing concern about this phenomenon, which is linked to poverty and the economic crisis, the school system crises, the urban growth, the inadequate social policies and to a form of responsibility resignation from the parents. However, the "anti-Charlie" demonstrations have highlighted the mobilization capacities of religious leaders, whose vindictive sermons have played a more prominent role in popular mobilization than the calls for demonstrations made by some politicians.

It should be stressed that in Zinder, the political scene is characterized by the presence of two strong movements: (a) the political parties of the current parliamentary opposition (which control the city and region of Zinder); and (b) the technical administration (governorate, decentralized technical services) dominated by the members and sympathizers of the ruling majority. The parliamentary opposition's rhetoric therefore consists of attacking the administration in general, the police and political authorities. This means that any demonstration or gathering necessarily have a political or religious meaning, whether organized by the politicians themselves or exploited by them for political purposes as in the "anti-Charlie" demonstration.

According to these first elements, there seems to be links between political contestation, socioeconomic issues and extremism, leading to violence religiously justified by the stakeholders. It is noteworthy that the religious endorsement given by imams redefines the nature of the contestation, which slides from the sociopolitical field to the religious territory, and ultimately legitimates and justifies violence.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF VIOLENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN ZINDER

The young people responsible for the above-mentioned actions are generally presented as excluded from society, which leads to marginalization and violence. The problem then is the gap between an integration norm and the restoration of social ties, where the ties seem to be in decline. The journey of these young people is sometimes chaotic, and most of them have criminal records or dismissals. Regular periods of time in jail confine them to a dead end and leave them with social or psychological after-effects and stigma. In addition, prison can also be a step towards radicalization, as prisoners spend time, sometimes years, in a situation of permanent promiscuity. During the researchers' visit to Zinder's detention centre, young prisoners shared a strong feeling of rejection from the State and the judicial institution, seen as being unable to ensure fair justice.

Thus, the prison institution, with its everyday tensions and its sanctions, reinforces the social hatred of some young offenders. They can also deepen the extremist interpretation of their faith in contact with individuals who are already radicalized, by a one-sided interpretation of the texts, hence justifying a rejection of the political system regarded as unfair and incapable of ensuring justice. The prison environment is therefore often seen as a place where criminal or jihadist networks can be regenerated or integrated into existing networks, although this is denied by the Zinder prison administration. Nevertheless, it is in this sensitive environment that the articulation between social marginalization and the desire to create a different self, especially through religion, is seen.

As a result, the survey revealed that the majority of violent young people followed a similar trajectory: a difficult childhood in underprivileged districts, marked by family disorganization, violence, school failure, disaffiliation,⁹ which creates a sense of frustration and humiliation transformed into hatred of society, the shift to delinquency and prison.

Additionally, the survey showed that the most vulnerable districts of Zinder also have the most important social difficulties indicators. With the worsening economic situation, a parallel economy has taken root in poor neighbourhoods, linked to the spread of drugs, prostitution and the sale of various stolen goods. Small groups gravitate around this economy and engage in these delinquent behaviours.

ZINDER FACING TRANSNATIONAL FAITH AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Interviews conducted in the city showed that Zinder's youth are well aware of the sociopolitical developments in neighbouring Nigeria, including the Boko Haram phenomenon. As a matter of fact, many young people travel to neighbouring Nigeria for small business, while others have family members who live there. They are thus connected to the country's realities, and are particularly vulnerable to the violence linked to extremism.

9 "In sociology, disaffiliation is a process described by the French sociologist Robert Castel (1933–2013) which refers to the 'dissociation of social ties' due to unemployment and social isolation. (...) The disaffiliation refers to the lack of affiliation resulting from unemployment and the lack of filiation, namely inclusion in social ties (relational isolation)." (Tourev, n.d.)

These trips to Nigeria and other conflict zones (Libya, Chad) have a significant influence on young people, who recall their experience as heroes admired by their peers. One respondent noted that “of course, some young people have family in Nigeria. Others go on an adventure. There are young people who also trade with Nigeria” (interview of 20 December 2016). One respondent explained: “The phenomenon experienced in Nigeria has a direct impact since it has affected the behaviour and methods of our young people, who attack other people on the street in the name on the *fadas*” (interview of 20 December 2016).

Among those returning from a long stay in Nigeria, it is sometimes reported that young people develop attitudes or ideas typical of radical people. Other young people doubt, some reject these extremist ideas when some return traumatized, with consequences on their subsequent behaviours: switching to violence or repentance that could lead to a resurgence in religiosity.

Further, the Zinder youth is exposed to radical religious messages through many channels, while they often do not fully understand the basics of religion. Some people have only rudimentary and indirect knowledge of Islam, either through their relatives or from their own personal reading on the Internet, allowing spreading of messages difficult to control. It should be noted that the most rigorist Islamist movements prefer this channel as they control it better than the leaders of traditional Islam. Internet propaganda is also more easily disseminated through the use of the Hausa language, common in the Zinder region and Nigeria. The broadcasting of videos urging jihad on platforms such as YouTube makes it difficult for the Nigerian authorities to restrict the broadcasting of extremist speeches.

Therefore, the Internet, and social networks in particular, play a fundamental role in the media exposure and internationalization of the jihadist ideology. The self-radicalization of individuals in front of the screen is of great concern to youth services, as it creates isolation of the target and facilitates the recruitment of future candidates for violent acts.

Besides the Internet, young people also access radical messages through videos and CDs sold in local markets or circulating through informal networks and small groups. The distribution of these means of communication, popular among radical movements, is often openly carried out in the street by young people.

Exposition to the radical Islam speech is also carried out through charismatic imams and religious leaders whose psychological influence on individuals has been proven. This is done mainly through the regional preaching sessions called *Waâzin Kassa* in which Nigerians play an important role, as will be discussed later in this report. The role of mosques has also increased sharply in recent years, and the religious speech has become more rigorous, no longer strictly focusing on religious aspects. Mosques have thus become platforms for dealing with the most diverse societal issues. Depending on the circumstances, messages encouraging violence are expressed from the top of the *minbars*,¹⁰ as during the anti-American riots of 2012. Thus, in the process of young people’s radicalization, already heavily affected by the phenomenon of violence, it can be observed that the interpenetration between local factors (unemployment, extreme poverty, marginalization) and transnational factors (Nigerian sermon, youth returns), together with the globalization and media effect, results in an internationalization of the “Muslim causes”.

10 The stage from which the imam delivers his sermon during the weekly prayer on Friday.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM THE SURVEY

METHODOLOGY

The research involved 140 *fadas* and *palais* in the 8 districts of Zinder identified as being the most affected by violence (Haro Banda, Tilacoco, Franco, Dan Yaro Sultan, Djaguindi, Kara-kara, Garin Malam and Dispensaire).

In terms of methodology, the researchers decided to focus on existing structures, knowing that the analysis of the phenomenon of violence in general has always relied on these groups. Indeed, the violence in Zinder, in its various manifestations, has always been characterized by this group culture. In this sense, the *fadas* and *palais* were, from the researchers' point of view, the most representative structures of this culture and could highlight the possible evolution of the "conventional" violence towards the "extremist" violence with an ideological and religious dimension.

This aspect of the study is based on a quantitative method in order to collect figures and indicators that can support the analysis and different demonstrations of how the phenomenon of extremism is gaining popularity within the youth community in the city of Zinder.

This quantitative research has therefore enabled to clearly understand, with numerical figures, the distribution of respondents according to their opinions, expectations, motivations and concerns. This dimension of the research was based on a survey divided into six sections. Each of them provides reliable information through indicative variables on the nature of extremist violence and its consequences. The survey is mainly based on the "initial question", the "secondary questions" and the research "hypotheses". All the charts and tables presented in this part were drawn from the survey conducted in November 2016.

In the section below, all sections that present the results and analyse them by linking the variables will be reviewed. This process will result in the verification of the research hypotheses and an in-depth commentary of the results.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEYS

Gender and age of the respondents

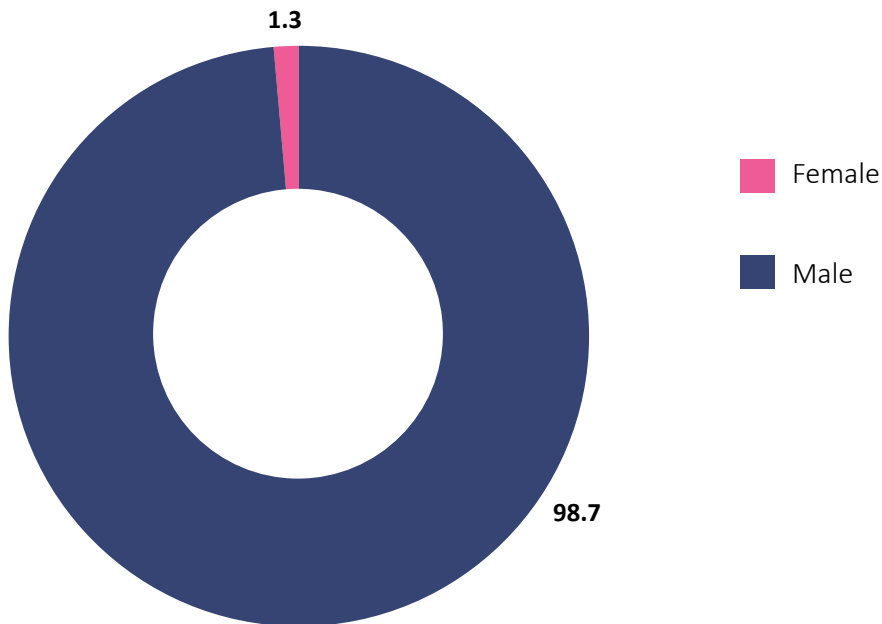
Among the young people surveyed, there was a low presence of girls, that is 1.3 per cent of the population surveyed, and a massive presence of young boys representing 98.7 per cent (see Chart 1).

This low presence of female respondents shows a form of male domination and the Nigerien and Zinder society structure, which remains strongly committed to

traditions. In addition, researchers reported that during interviews, young women refused to speak in the absence of their husbands or male members of the family. Reaching a better female representation was a major difficulty during the study.

Thus, violence and violent extremism are generally a rather masculine phenomenon, although girls' participation in violence is not excluded. However, in view of the domination power that has had a strong impact on the conduct of the study, the girls' presence might not be explained by their belief, but rather by the nature of their relationships with the leaders of these organizations. It is known that the preaching of the radical movements relies heavily on women as representatives of Islamic values: wearing the simple or full-face veil, for example. It is through them that a deep Islamization of the society would be shown, through emerging external signs.

Chart 1: Distribution of respondents by gender



The data resulting from the survey provides fairly comprehensive information on the proportion of young people regarded as the most active in the coordination and leadership of violent and extremist organizations.

Surveyed young people are between 13 and 37 years old, with an average age of 21 years old. Most of the members are in the age group between 15 and 19 years old and between 20 and 24 years old (see Chart 2).

The survey reveals the presence of young minors who, because of social conformity, identify themselves through these organizations with extremist ideas deeply rooted in the city of Zinder. The charts that follow provide details on the distribution of young people who seem to be in contact with ideas or organizations that use violence as a means of protest depending on their area of residence.

Chart 2: Distribution of respondents by age group

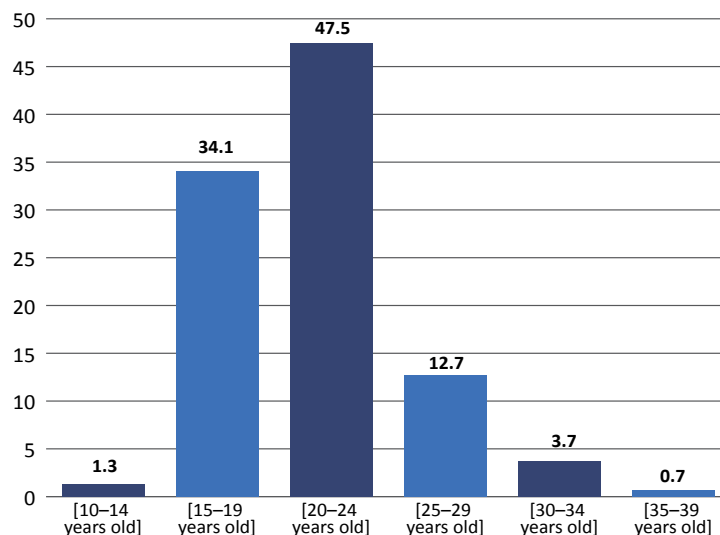
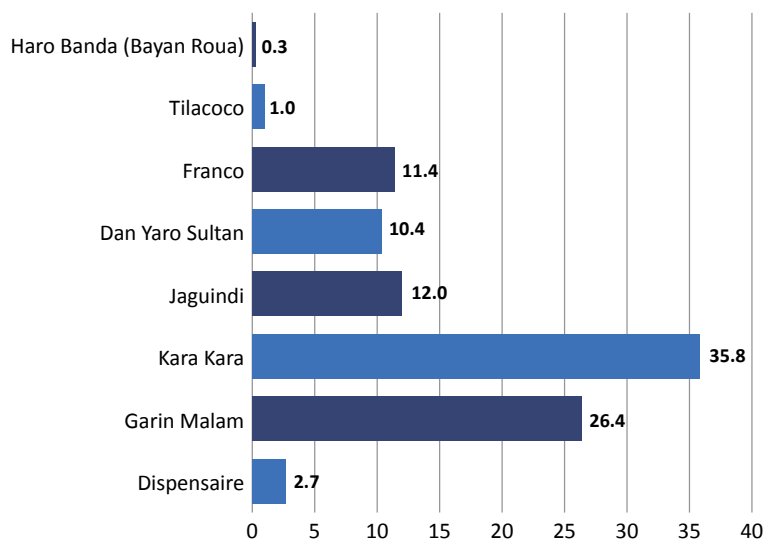


Chart 3: Distribution of young people by areas of residence



Marital status and socioprofessional categories of respondents

The composition of the population in this survey reveals various characteristics in terms of civil status and the nature of the respondents’ activities. With regard to marital status, the results of the survey show that there are 273 single people (91.3% of respondents), 13 married people (4.3% of respondents), 9 divorced people, (3% of respondents), two widowers (0.7% of respondents) and 2 people who did not want to respond (0.7% of respondents). The rate of single people explains the time that they can devote to the night activities conducted by their organizations involved in violent acts. It is also not difficult to understand why organized fighting between rival gangs and the sale and use of drugs are frequent activities, especially at night.

It should be recalled that drug trafficking is an important lucrative activity that enables violent groups to get equipment and establish links with other organizations in the region, facilitated in particular by the proximity of the Nigerian border. The economic dimension is thus seen as one of the motivations of these young supporters of the violent culture. Drug use is also taken as a substantial and mythical argument that allows the violent participants to surpass themselves, overcome fear and defy legal political structures (such as police, justice, chiefs and *gendarmerie*).

Furthermore, the 13 married individuals, representing 4.3 per cent of the surveyed population, reveal that there is a gradual division of the family unit, with the immediate consequences of spousal violence, parental resignation (children's supervision) and risk factors for spousal infection (disease) by their husbands. The father's status also gives the man a relative behavioural influence on the children. From a psychological point of view, the child who is exposed to violence on a regular basis may be prone to behavioural deviance. It should be noted here that the family environment plays a major role in shaping an individual's personality. This research opens up the perspectives of a field of study and analysis of family structures in order to better understand the production of behaviours and attitudes such as violent extremism in young people.

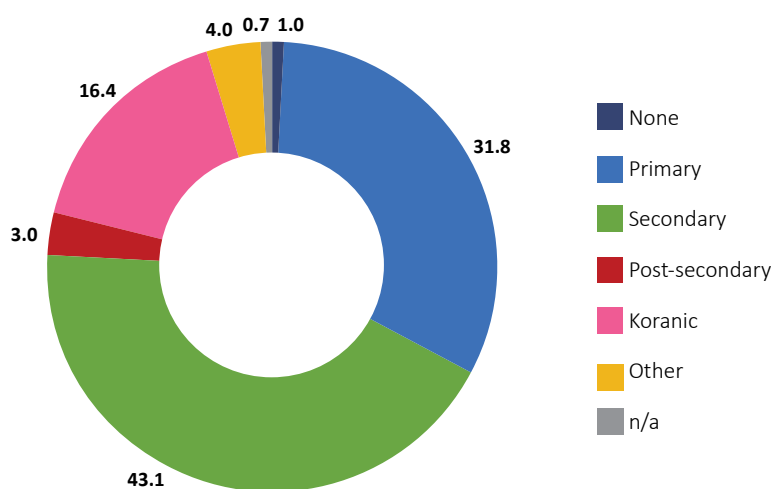
The 9 divorce cases recorded for a population of 299 individuals, representing 3 per cent, are also potentially concerning for the maintenance of social stability of family values and norms. Divorce is regarded as a failure of negotiation between two spouses and marks the ultimate break-up and breakdown of the family. From a sociological point of view, it is accepted that the family is the first formal structure that accompanies the child in the process of socializing values. When it teaches the child ambiguous values, it impacts the social architecture. Such a situation could therefore make children more vulnerable to groups using marginalized people.

With regard to the types of activities carried out by the respondents, 46 participants were schoolchildren, that is 15.4 per cent. This rate of young people attending school among the members of *fada* and *palais* is concerning regarding the quality of teaching and the safety of schools in Zinder. The high number of young people affected by violence in schools explains the chronic instability in the school environment, including strikes, violent protests, physical violence and school dropouts. For example, murder and assault cases in schools are reported almost every year by the police. In fact, the *palais* are present in virtually all of Zinder's schools, and decide the class schedule and impose behaviour on teachers. This means that the school is not in a position to assume its role of educating and transmitting civic norms and values. This situation is worrying as the school is the main place of socialization and should constitute a shield against deviant or violent behaviour. On the contrary, it has been found that the consumption of narcotics and cigarettes is almost tolerated in Zinder's schools. This partially confirms the general assumption that violent extremism may have a sociocultural basis.

Incidentally, 53 respondents were shopkeepers (17.7%), 103 workers (34.4%) and 82 State employees (27.4%). Thus, no socioprofessional sector is spared by the phenomenon. More importantly, there are people involved in violent actions within the administration itself, although the issue is still taboo. From the schools, extremism has thus naturally spread to the public administration. As a result, the State moralization becomes a difficult task, since delinquency is transposed from the street to the administration through public funds embezzlement, counter-

performance, non-compliance with hierarchies and deontology and other forms of corruption. Several interviewees are therefore concerned that the presence of radical stakeholders within the administration could lead to a strong influence or even a form of control of the administrative body by them. These elements represent significant risk factors, which seems to confirm the first research hypothesis linking the issue of violent extremism with the social risk factors worsened by poor governance.

Chart 4: Distribution of respondents by education levels



Of the respondents, 43.1 per cent declare having secondary education, while 31.8 per cent have completed primary level. However, only 3 per cent of this age group was able to graduate because of their socioeconomic situation and especially of the remoteness of higher education centres before the recent creation of the University of Zinder. Further, many young people have followed a strictly religious education through the Koranic school (16.4% of respondents). Among these young people, it is difficult to identify, based on their statements, those who followed traditional (*makaranta*) Koranic school education and those from the Franco-Arabic system. This system combines a teaching based on the memorization of the Koran and an openness to other scientific or theological subjects. These religiously oriented schools are most often managed by Islamic groups in connection with the Gulf countries, who provide the funding and control the curriculum. This raises a number of issues, including the challenge of traditional Islam and its leaders who were, so far, the partners contributing to social stabilization and to some control of the religious speech.

This is causing many internal tensions in the Muslim community, currently conflicted in between religious models: a traditional Islam and its different branches increasingly challenged by new ideologies under the influences of foreign countries.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A PRECARIOUS AND DEPENDENT YOUTH

The data that follow shows, globally, a paradoxical fact: young people are not inactive, but at the same time, they live in a certain precariousness that exposes them to dependence.

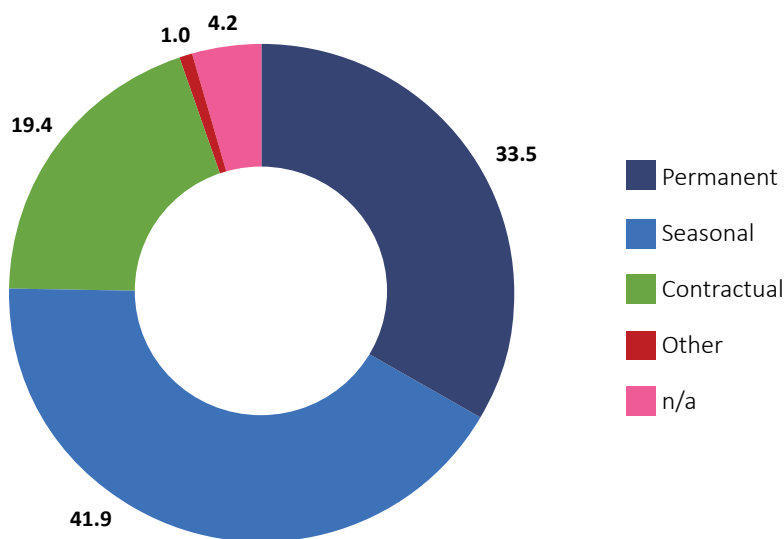
This fact, in itself, is an important factor to be taken into consideration when looking at the nature of the relations between these young people and political and religious organizations, especially in terms of influence.

Table 1: Youth’s income-generating activities

	Numbers	Percentage
Respondents with a paid activity	191	63.9
Respondents without a paid activity	107	35.8
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

Contrary to common misconceptions about the economic profile of young people in the *fadas* and *palais*, it appears that the majority of them claim to have an income-generating activity (63.8%), even if the proportion of unemployed young people is not to be neglected (35.8%). However, among young people with paid employment, only 33.5 per cent of them have a permanent employment compared to 41.9 per cent having seasonal jobs and 19.4 per cent holding a contractual position (see Chart 5). Most of these young people are therefore exposed to economic precariousness. This is confirmed by the fact that the majority of these young people claim to rely on their families.

Chart 5: Types of activities carried out by the youth respondents (%)



Therefore, the economic aspects of these young people seem to foster an unstable working environment, and thus constitute a source of fragility for these young people, which could lead them to radical environments.

Combating violence in the city of Zinder also means being able to recreate a social link, because, as pointed out above, social turmoil is one of the roots of youth radicalization. The family, being the main place for socialization, deserves special attention. For this reason, the researchers sought to investigate the nature of the relationship between the young people of the *fadas* and *palais* of Zinder and their families by asking them if they received assistance from them.

Table 2: Receiving financial assistance from family

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	215	71.9
No	83	27.8
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

As shown in Table 2, out of 215 respondents, 71.9 per cent say they receive help from their family, compared to 83 or 27.8 per cent who declare receiving nothing from their family. Thus, a large part of respondents depends directly on their parents to cover their needs. This may therefore suggest that there is some influence of families on their children. However, it is necessary to know the nature of this link.

Table 3: Type of assistance being received

	Numbers	Percentage
Financial	72	33.5
Food	87	40.5
Moral	47	21.9
Other	5	2.3
n/a	4	1.9
Total	215	100.0

Table 3 shows that 40.5 per cent of respondents receive food assistance from their parents, 33.5 per cent receive financial assistance, and only 21.9 per cent receive moral support. However, this moral support could be an important element in deconstructing the violent speeches conveyed by the media, and the religious and political leaders mentioned above.

This data also confirms the hypothesis that the loosening or absence of moral order, as a stable framework for the transmission of values, contributes to the violent radicalization of young people. However, the parents' financial responsibility is not questioned because most of the young people say their parents help them to cover their needs.

Table 4: Respondents’ organizations receiving support from public structures

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	68	22.7
No	231	77.3
Total	299	100.0

The table indicates that young people are not getting most of their financial resources from public structures. Concurrently, this implies a form of autonomy but still raises the question of the financing aspects of these structures and its possible impact on their ideological orientations and actions. The question of the political commitment of young people and the role that public funding could play in this respect therefore remains to be investigated. As a matter of fact, it will be explained below that the survey did not clearly establish the type of political commitment young people have and the nature of their collaboration with political organizations.

TRENDS AND INFLUENCES OF ZINDER’S RELIGIOUS SUBGROUPS: CONFLICT OR SHOCK OF MODELS?

Originally regarded as a religious city, the city of Zinder abounds with a multitude of religious organizations (Tijaniyya,¹¹ Qadiriyya,¹² Izala,¹³ Malikiyya,¹⁴ Kala Kato¹⁵ and the like) who seek to establish their hegemony over others.

The conflicting environment, or at least the respective mistrust, thus encouraged the development of divergent and often violent positions. Thus, the rise of the *izala* movement contesting traditional Islam and considering itself to be the only current following the “true Islam” is an interesting signal as it pushes for a form of doctrinaire exclusivism that can lead to violent acts against those who have a different religious practice. As early as 1993, the *izala* movements had organized themselves into groups for the “defence of Islamic values” and against “indecent clothing” and accused girls in the city of Zinder for having “easy virtue” because of their clothing. An attitude similar to the Hisba actions, a kind of religious police force, found in Afghanistan and parts of the Middle East. It can be seen here how religious values and symbols can be a catalyst for mobilizing and justifying violent acts.

11 Sufi brotherhoods founded by Sheikh Sidy Ahmed Tijani in Algeria at the end of the eighteenth century, which spread widely in the West Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Today, the movement is closely connected to Morocco, which makes it a tool for influencing diplomacy, particularly in the training of imams and the preservation of a peaceful Islamic model.

12 Sufi brotherhoods founded in Baghdad in the twelfth century by Sheikh Abbd Qadr Qadr Jilani, which spread to West Africa through Mauritania and Mali. In favour of a rather spiritual Islam, this brotherhood was the first one to spread on the continent before going into a clear retreat.

13 From its full name *Izala al-Bid’ a wa iqâmat al-sunnah* (Eradication of heterodox practices and establishment of the Prophet’s authentic tradition), this movement was born in Nigeria with Sheikh El Goumi and inspired the ideology that gave birth to Boko Haram. This movement has a strong presence on the Nigerian territory with a certain domination of the religious space despite the resistance of traditional Islam, from which young people in urban centres are escaping.

14 One of the four Sunni schools of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and in Maghreb. This doctrine is increasingly being rejected by the new generations in connection with Islamic movements, supported in particular by Saudi Arabia, seeking to spread the *Hanbalite* doctrine. The latter is the most rigorous and is close to Salafist orientations.

15 A new Islamic movement in Niger that claims the right not to refer to the texts of prophetic traditions called Hadiths, considering that the only source not leading to discord or doctrine differences is the Koran.

This plurality of allegiances and obedience leads to questioning young people’s appropriation of Niger’s religious heritage, whereas the Salafist movement seem to be part of an ideological offensive against traditional Islam, which was conceived as a guarantee of stability and a shield against extremism.

Chart 6: Representation of the religious heritage of Niger and Zinder (%)

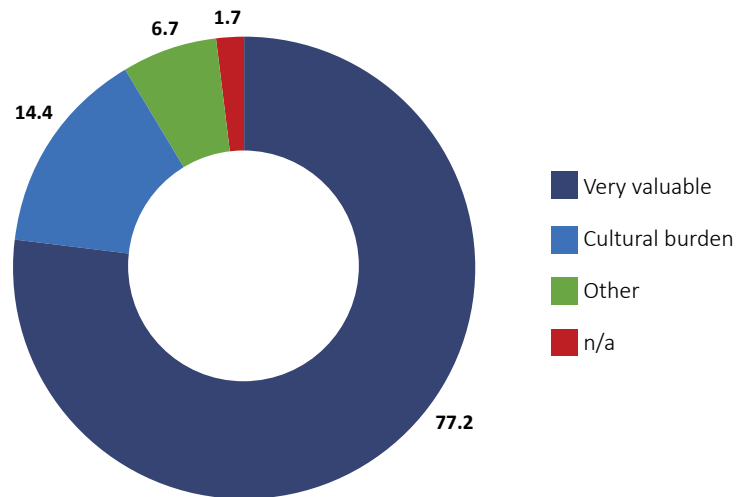


Table 5: Trends that are most representative of Islam according to the respondents

	Numbers	Percentage
Tijâniyya	108	36.1
Qâdiriyya	17	5.7
Izala	56	18.7
Malikiyya	88	29.4
Other	26	8.7
n/a	4	1.3
Total	299	100.0

The breakthrough of *izala* set a duality of the Islamic field in Zinder. This is consistent with the general trend in the rest of Niger. There is, in fact, a traditional Islam marked by the Sufi currents (Tijâniyya, Qâdiriyya and belonging to the Maliki legal school) on the one hand, and on the other hand, a more controverted Islam inspired by the Salafist Wahhabi model according to the Saudi Arabian and Middle Eastern model. The latter fringe group challenges the legitimacy of the country’s Islamic authorities recognized by the State and has an understanding of Islam closer to the Salafists’. It should be recalled that Boko Haram’s original ideology was strongly influenced by this *izala* movement, which was born in Nigeria, although the majority of the movement’s members in Niger reject violence when questioned about this ideological kinship.

This multiplicity of religious movements implies per se a form of social tension that often takes on a religious dimension. Yet, in youth environments, despite this diversity, using violence does not primarily depend on ideological and religious orientations; rather, using violence is part of a more generalized movement linked

to youth contestation. Nevertheless, it has been seen that sometimes this youthful and contesting energy is used or exploited by political (opposition) or religious stakeholders (Islamic groups during the demonstrations to “defend Islam”). The religious groups controlling the mosques, particularly those close to the Salafist groups, have succeeded in giving an organizational framework to express a need to defend “a faith under threat”.

Thus, 78.9 per cent of the surveyed young people declared they already participated in a violent movement. Among the demonstrations mentioned were the riot organized against the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper, school movements such as strikes and student demonstrations, and organized fights with rival gangs or organized groups. This shows the willingness of young people to participate in all forms of violent and extremist demonstrations. This willingness is even stronger when the demonstrations have a religious nature. As explained before, the anti-Charlie demonstrations caused uproar in the predominantly Muslim countries of the region and provided the necessary elements to assess the predispositions of young people to take part in violent actions based on the “religion defence” motive. This overbidding for the defence of “religious values” accentuates the rivalry of religious trends in search of representativeness and legitimacy.

This is especially true given that the preaching role and religious awareness-raising have been decisive factors in the various mobilizations with regard to young people. Despite the media coverage of the *Charlie Hebdo* event, many violent stakeholders who took part in this demonstration remain fully oblivious of the motivations behind the attacks on the French cultural centre, the Catholic and Protestant churches of the city, the Christian and even secular schools, banks and public buildings. Yet all these emblematic places were burned down and ransacked to express a discontent that seemed to have been restrained for a long time.

Therefore, these sudden attacks show a spontaneous nature and also the anchoring of the radical speech, which was able to take root and result in long-term implementation. This means that the indoctrination and enlistment of these stakeholders have been skilfully orchestrated, prepared and organized by people who share the same values as the criminal organizations mentioned above. For some authorities and observers of the Zinder sociopolitical scene, the *Charlie Hebdo* sequence of events proves the existence of a chain of command or at least of a fertile ideological and political ground for the development of violent extremism through the existence and anchoring of a radical movement. The latter, yet to be identified as a structure, could be behind the organization of spontaneous demonstrations and the mobilization of the necessary means to carry out violent actions.

Furthermore, it appears that several retailers and religious leaders would have financially supported the “anti-Charlie” demonstrations. According to a young man convicted following these events, there were financial contributions from some of the city’s retailers, “with millions” redistributed to the young activists who took part in the demonstration. This can be related to the links between *izala* and the most important retailers in large cities where the movement controls mosques and maintains social and economic networks of solidarity.

PRECARIOUS AND MIXED ITINERARIES OF YOUNG ACTIVISTS: BETWEEN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES AND SOCIAL CONTESTATION

In view of the socioeconomic data analysed above and the propensity of religious movements to take charge for young people in difficulty, there could be a link between the economic situation of these young people and the risk of a shift towards violent extremism. The motivation of stakeholders can often be explained by the financial aspect. Therefore, research on this subject must start from the fact that poverty is a factor accelerating the process of indoctrination and rebellion. To corroborate this assumption, the high unemployment rate (87%) that affects the young population, often in conflict with the political system, can be referred to.

As a result, violence is seen as one of the many ways young people use to respond to or to send a warning, as they are facing social and economic marginalization. In the same way that violence is directed against the State, its symbols and representatives, it also exists in the different interactions between groups of young people themselves.

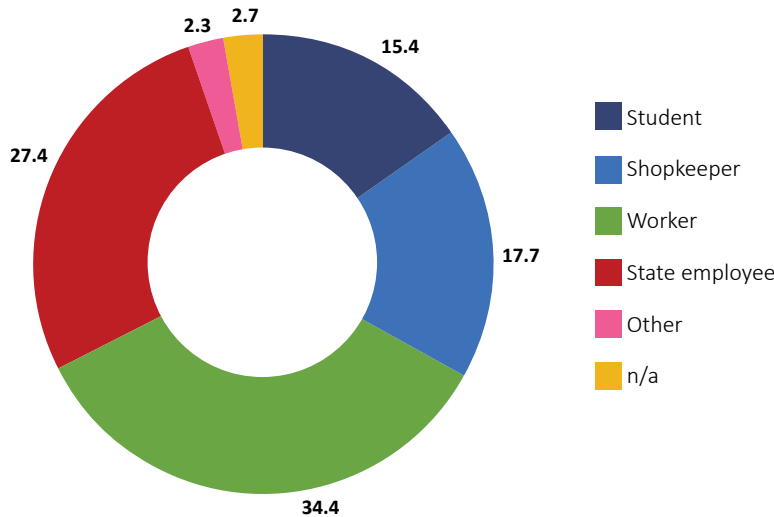
Thus, this climate of institutional violence feeds social unrest and transforms violence into a legitimate means of affirmation and conquest. Pitched battles between rival gangs can lead to violence and result in the death of young people. Out of the 299 individuals surveyed, 72 (that is about 30.5%) admittedly took part in organized fights, proving the extent of criminality in the districts of the city of Zinder. These young people – some of whom are paid to kill, injure, torture or vandalize an individual – are a target for jihadist recruiters. Many are lured by Boko Haram with financial incentives or the purchase of a motorcycle, particularly in areas of the Lake Chad Basin. In Zinder, for example, seven murders were ordered between 2015 and 2017. Hence, the question whether taking part in demonstrations or violent acts would be a matter of individual will or an influence from religious or political organizations can be raised. Thus, there is a mixed itinerary in the sense that the “activist” commitment of young people depends on several variables and has various motivations. This ranges from a simple religious conviction for the defence of a “cause” to be a member of organizations as the *fada* or *palais* or in relation to a given socioprofessional category.

Table 6: Participation in the anti-Charlie demonstration in January 2015

	Numbers	Percentage
Participated	157	66.5
Did not participate	79	33.5
Total	236¹⁶	100.0

¹⁶ The question “Did you participate in the anti-Charlie demonstration in January 2015?” was asked to 236 of the 299 participants who responded that they had previously participated in a violent movement.

Chart 7: Distribution of the respondents who took part in a violent demonstration according to socioprofessional categories (%)



The studied population is distributed over several organizations, depending on their motivation. As part of this research, it was considered important to classify these actors according to their organization’s type. This method helps determine the source of their motivation and to justify their violent behaviour. The study identified four distinct types of groups.

First, out of 299 extremist individuals, 88 (that is, 29.4%) work in political organizations. Zinder, being considered as the stronghold of political opposition, seemingly builds up all forms of protest in Niger. Moreover, in order to politically use people’s frustration, opposition parties seize every opportunity to criticize what they call “bad governance”, “autocracy” and “violation of democratic principles”. Young people, who are economically and socially vulnerable, become potential targets to be manipulated and used as activists for the stigmatization power. The political parameter is therefore a determining factor in explaining violent extremism.

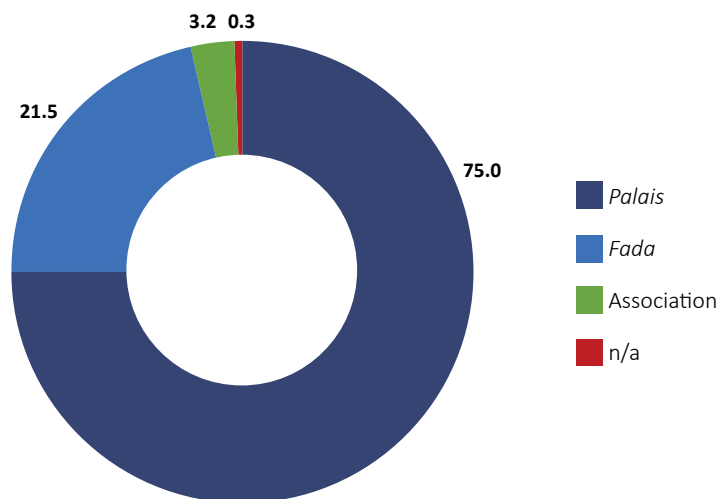
Second, 82 of the 299 respondents say they belong to a religious organization. These organizations usually convey the values and principles of their respective groups and their speech reflects, in many respects, the ideological orientation of the movement they claim to be part of. The large “anti-Charlie” demonstration rallied many young extremists with their attitude and vision of religious issues, conveying fundamentalist messages rejecting traditional Islam, the predominant practice of the country. Thus, Boko Haram flags and other signs symbolizing death were used during these demonstrations in January 2015, and many of the messages and slogans chanted during this march explicitly referred to the assassination of Christians and atheists.¹⁷

Thus, the religious factor also seems to stimulate violent extremism. These two explanatory aspects of violent extremism are reinforced by the fact that the young people surveyed belong to several criminal organizations specialized in drugs trade. Out of 299 respondents, 66 individuals (that is, 22.1) are running drug networks in

¹⁷ For radicalized young people, the term “atheist” is a vague concept because it refers to any other form of religiosity in opposition to the one they adopt. This is the phenomenon of doctrinaire exclusivism characteristic of religious extremism and the backbone of the rejection of others.

Zinder but admitted they took part in the “anti-Charlie” demonstrations to “defend religion”. This would support the link between violent extremism and religious, sociocultural and economic factors.

Chart 8: Distribution of respondents according to the type of organization



YOUNG PEOPLE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: MIXED PERCEPTIONS AND UNCLEAR MEMBERSHIP LOGIC

It is sometimes difficult to analyse the degree of radicalization from the field, as objective indicators and analysis tools are still lacking in this field. When faced with a security issue, emergency response often outweighs prediction and conceptualization. This is reflected in the difficulty of analysing youth statements and attitudes in this study.

There is, in fact, a paradox between the sometimes-strong statements made by some young people about their real endorsement of radical theses and the distrust shown by other respondents. Therefore, the question is whether the violent extremism phenomenon is deeply rooted in the society itself, or there are still forms of resilience not visible with the initial observation.

Violent extremism itself is not perceived equally by all actors. There is a gap between the understanding of this concept within the international community and that of some local populations who regard acts of violence perpetrated in the name of religion as a “defence” of the religion. Based on this perception rarely taken into account by analysts, many young people believe that acts committed by extremists are the result of normal behaviour or self-defence on the part of persecuted communities. As a result, they come to the conclusion that the dangerous aspects of such behaviour are insignificant compared to the injustice situations these communities suffer.¹⁸ Thus, 212 individuals (that is, 70.9%), out of the 299 surveyed persons, share this common vision of violent extremism as a reaction to injustice.

¹⁸ It should be assessed whether the injustices or other mentioned acts of domination are those experienced by the communities of these young people or refer to external situations in Niger. It is known that the Palestinian issue, for example, is very often mentioned as the main source of “solidarity” positions. It is often used in addition to other conflicts such as Chechnya or even Bosnia to create an imaginary victim who can rally young people in search of the ideal of justice.

53 individuals (that is, 17.7% of respondents) find it is dangerous and constitutes a threat or an abnormal situation that should be rectified.

Therefore, it is alarming to note the relative indifference of young people to the consequences of violent extremism. Many respondents felt that violence was even a means of social demand, and only 53.2 per cent disagreed.

Chart 9: Youth perception of violent extremist acts

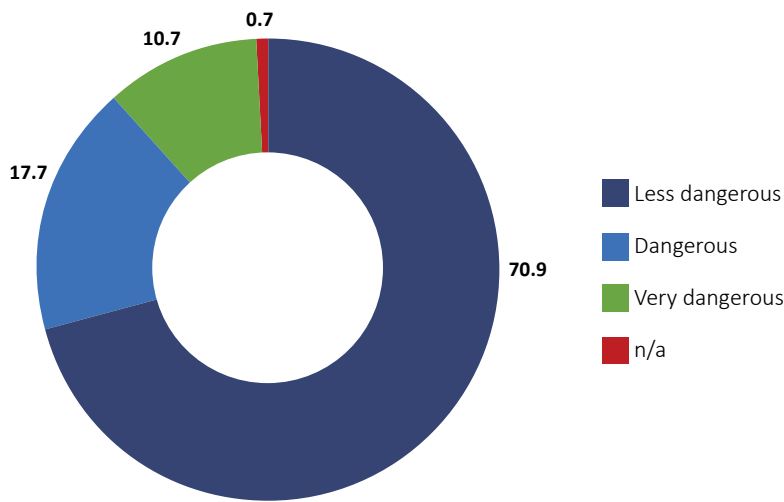
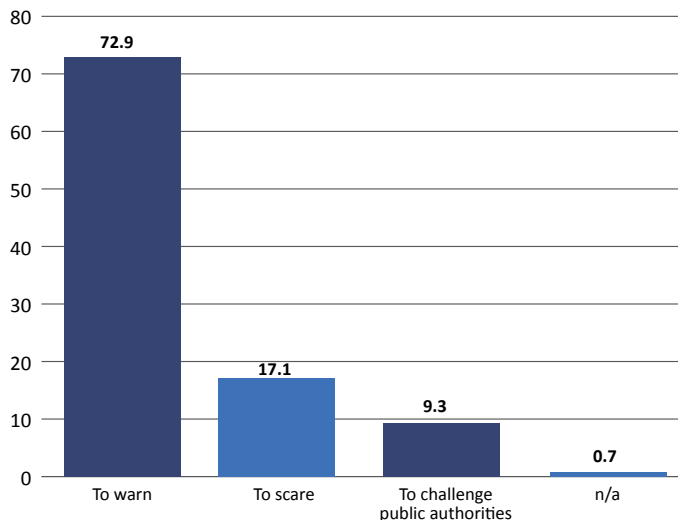


Chart 10: The role of violent extremism as perceived by young people



Violence, in its various forms of expression, thus becomes a means of pressure and assertion. It ensures, for these young people, several functions including, among others, to warn (72.9%) on their living conditions and their daily challenges, to “scare” (17.01%) the authorities and to a lesser extent (9.3%) to challenge public authorities.

These young people’s view of the State is worrying on a number of counts and essentially raises the question of the “republican pact”, collective solidarity and responsible citizenship regularly mentioned in the speeches of the political class

in Niger. In fact, many of the young people surveyed (42.1%) consider the State as a repressive body, and 21.1 per cent are indifferent to it; that is, they do not even know the role of the State. This culture of renunciation of the political order allows incivility in all its forms and encourages the proliferation of illegal and subversive practices. The State and political order distrust can be seen as a form of rejection exposing these young people, sometimes because of defiant motives, to extremist movements or those rejecting this type of order.

Furthermore, the survey highlighted the fact that young people have relative knowledge and sometimes a positive view of terrorist organizations. This vision is all the more important if the state of mind of young people is considered in a perpetual search for role models and “heroes” who can reinforce their distrust of the political order. Young people’s awareness of terrorist organizations operating in the Sahel is sometimes linked to the geographic proximity or to the available information through the media.

The most popular extremist organizations are Boko Haram, considering the proximity to the area of intervention of this movement, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO),¹⁹ AQIM and Ansar Dine.²⁰ Of the respondents, 260 (that is 87% of young people) declare having a good knowledge of Boko Haram and its political and religious agenda, while 17 per cent claim to know the MUJAO. The 12 per cent say the same for AQIM, while 2.3 per cent of respondents say they have a good knowledge of Ansar Dine.

Of course, it would be interesting to verify if this declared knowledge is in line with the reality of these movements and their modus operandi or rather a perception through the acts relayed by the media. The high rate of respondents claiming to know Boko Haram is naturally explained by the proximity of this group’s operations, and also by the widely broadcast regional news. Boko Haram is active in the Lake Chad Basin and neighbouring Nigeria, while the second MUJAO operates mainly in northern Tillabéri. According to the understanding of the young people interviewed, these movements are often presented as defending a religious order or seeking to repair social injustices. Faced with the violent extremism phenomenon, these groups of young people often have fairly strong convictions, ranging from rejection to support the challenging of a system perceived as unfair. They therefore mistake the commitment to an extremist or violent movement with the defence of principles of “general interest”. The term general interest is to be understood, in this sense, as the real aspiration of the people, which would be different from what the policy of the State viewed as inadequate. As a result, these movements arose from the contestation of the State and political authority, which were considered “unfair” to the point they had to replace it with other forms of organization that met their expectations and aspirations.

Organized in formal structures, the young people met in Zinder do not have the same perceptions and attitudes about the many issues linked to violent extremism. This divergence of ideas and opinions offers the possibility of a better understanding of expectations and also of the perceptions from which actors build their reasoning and whether or not they can accept frameworks for dialogue or exchange.

19 Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa is a terrorist group created following the split of sub-Saharanans and AQIM. This movement has merged into the new unified organizations operating in the Sahel.

20 Terrorist group founded by the Malian Iyad Ag Ali during the occupation of northern Mali in 2012 by jihadist groups. The founder of this movement is now at the head of the new group called Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimin (Support group for Islam and Muslims).

Taking into account these divergent perceptions and opinions also allows to initiate effective strategies to anticipate the outbreak of possible conflicts that feed on the same perceptions or the radicalization of a youth feeling marginalized. In this comprehensive methodological approach, the level of knowledge and positive assessment of the actions of criminal organizations revealed by this study are worrying for more than one reason. These perceptions continue to influence young people's attitudes towards the political order or to shape their opinions about public institutions and policies.

Such perceptions can even lead to a form of self-identification with these extremist movements whose action is perceived as challenging a system that leaves no room for young people and their aspirations. Many young people say they feel comforted after an attack. Among this population of young people who find themselves in these forms of cruel actions and seem to approve of terrorist attacks in Africa, some encourage or positively appreciate the outbreak of this kind of crime. 5.7 per cent of them positively appreciate terrorism, while 12.7 per cent say they are satisfied with the scenes of atrocities committed by terrorist organizations. Thus, it can be conceded that the security situation in the region is closely monitored in Zinder by young people who, at first, seem fascinated by acts of violence. Such a rapid transformation of mentalities caused by geopolitical stakes, and also by the spread of the mass media, has encouraged a greater support of extremist ideals by these young people.

It is within these practices and attitudes change dynamic that the following facts should be understood, knowing they also reflect the effects of transnationality: a total of 48 people, that is 16.1 per cent of the 299 individuals surveyed, consider it "normal" for extremist religious organizations to behave in ways that go against social tranquillity and peace. These young people believe that "international injustices" and "organized genocide"²¹ condemned in often virulent sermons justify the violent behaviour of some stakeholders through a politicization of the faith. Out of the 48 individuals who showed signs of radicalism in their statements, 11 or 22.9 per cent said they were fascinated by the bombings, 3 or 6.3 per cent positively appreciated the scenes of atrocities produced by young extremists, and 17 or 35.4 per cent supported preachers who advocated hatred, intolerance and holy war.

From these various considerations, it is worth noting that this part of young people who are in favour of terrorist acts or strongly appreciate the attacks perpetrated by these groups can be presented as a potential pool of individuals for recruitment. Their statements and attitudes presuppose that they are either prepared to join terrorist organizations in neighbouring countries, such as Nigeria and Mali, or to create the same conditions of insecurity in their own areas. Transnationality and mobility across porous or socially non-existent borders can greatly facilitate junctions and new networks. In the light of this latest data, the hypothesis that connects the variable of religious conflicts in the border areas and the behaviour of young people in the town of Zinder deserves further investigation.

This potential tipping point in violent extremism thus reveals an ideological foundation, although in the recent evolution of the movement in the Lake Chad Basin, this aspect tends to give way to rather socioeconomic motivations. But in the region of Zinder, however, the perceptions mentioned above, as well as the

21 The young people explain this term in reference to the killings in the Muslim world, the wars in Iraq and the situation in the Middle East, particularly in the Palestinian Territories.

“distance view” of the Boko Haram movement in correlation with the hardening of religious speech through preaching, still allows for maintaining the hypothesis of an important ideological dimension. Listening to the preachers of Boko Haram actively participated in the indoctrination and radicalization of these young people. In fact, 112 out of 299 or 37.5 per cent of the individuals surveyed say they regularly listen to preachers led by leaders of terrorist movements, in particular Boko Haram, whose speeches are the most accessible. Of the young people surveyed, 42.9 per cent find Boko Haram’s religious speech to be “sincere”, and 33.9 per cent are satisfied with the religious commitment contained in these sermons. Only 9.8 per cent of these young people find Boko Haram’s preachers more or less extremist and dislike them. The following data presented show the perception of terrorist acts and speeches by Zinder’s youth.

Chart 11: Respondents’ perception on violence perpetrated by terrorist organizations (%)

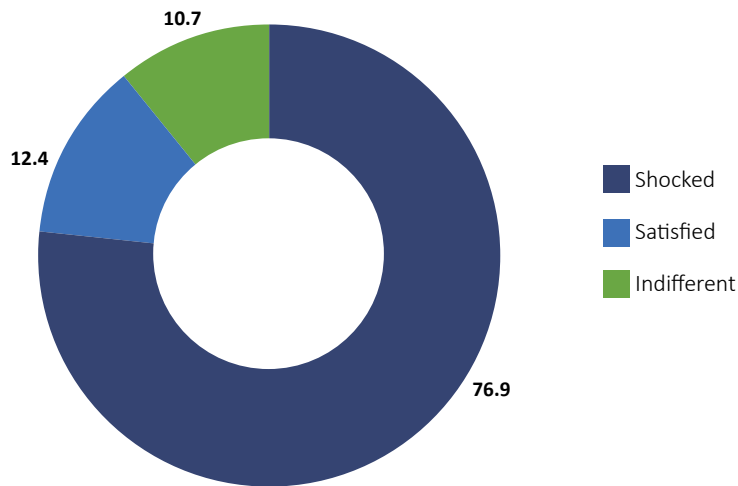
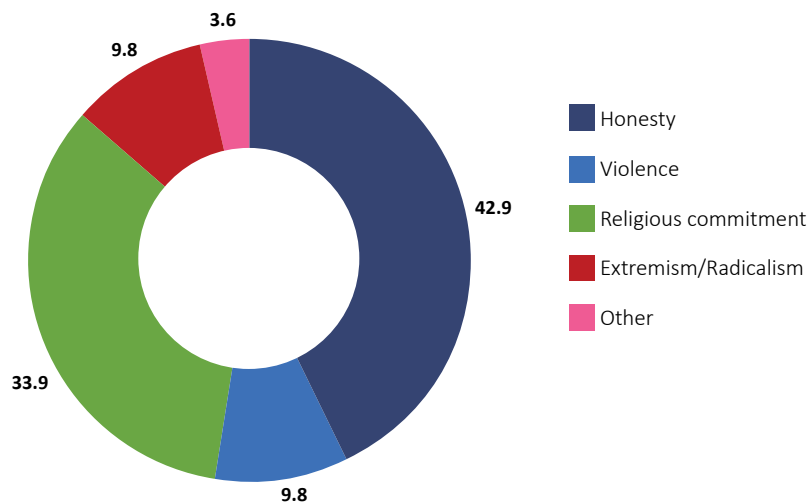


Chart 12: Appeal factors of sermons delivered by terrorist organizations according to the respondents (%)



YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN IDEOLOGICAL OFFENSIVE AND THE APPEAL OF THE EXTREMIST SPEECH: RISKS OF CONTAGION?

Another source of concern is the fact that this young population positively welcomes the rigorist new practices of Islam proposed by the large organizations promoting radical Islam and active in the region. Through videos and audio sermons, young people opened to this type of speech develop an excessive passion for ideas that can lead to indoctrination. The most important extremist religious leaders – mainly Abubakar Shekau and Bin Laden, to a lesser extent – are cited as references by these young people, who follow their opinions on issues considered essential. The public school, for example, is almost considered to be an institution for the “unbelievers” and would participate fully in the Westernization of the traditional society. Considered as a political and religious ideal, the rejection of school is at the heart of the extremist indoctrination of young people by extremists and based mainly on extremely sexist practices. In this conception, women in general can only gain access to knowledge or any other economic activity if they are not Muslim.

This new extremist ideology, found in the various radical movements, confines women to subjugation and domestic chores. The issue of women’s rights is entirely disregarded in favour of a new form of domination, justified by cultural or religious motives. These characteristics and points of view reflect exactly those advocated by the founding ideology of Boko Haram. It contains the theses of the rejection of modernity and the democratic model, as in the original Yusufiyya, which are the doctrines developed by Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram. This movement took further this conception of the “Westernization” of society, through schools and the infiltration of society by the West through the promotion of women’s rights, and turned it into a dogma. One of the best examples of this state of mind is certainly the abduction of more than 200 high school girls in Chibok, Nigeria, by Boko Haram in April 2014.

In Zinder, the creation of “cells” or of a critical mass of highly radicalized people can be seen through the perception that young people have of the ideals conveyed by extremist organizations. Fifty-seven (57) of them, that is 19.1 per cent of the surveyed, consider Boko Haram’s ideals to be fully grounded. To the question of whether religion really has a social function, the answers are rather significant of a vision probably encouraged by recent events. Thus, religion has gradually become the only instrument of social regulation. It now substitutes the State and acts for many of these young people as a sanctuary against the State, against the alleged “Westernization” of the society and against modern law and even secularism. The preachers’ use of the religious factor turns it into a malleable and usable factor, for all types of argumentation, from public policy challenges to the justification of violence. The religious matrix thus becomes a stimulating ingredient for the rise of identity crises in Zinder, towards rejecting basic social norms and values, replaced by “Islamic” values. The manipulation of the religious factor is at the heart of the development of the extremism rhetoric, even though it is known that socioeconomic determinants also play a very important role.

Two major concerns are therefore gradually emerging in perceptions. First of all, violent extremism among young people could get out of control and encourage local populations to create an insurgent model based on political and religious orientations in order to meet socioeconomic, political and religious needs. Second, it is likely that

young people with a propensity for violence and an openness to radical ideals will be used and framed by terrorist networks operating in the subregion and beyond.

These major concerns are growing as North Mali, the Libyan, Chadian, Nigerian and Nigerien borders have become sanctuaries for various jihadist and extremist organizations. The charts and tables that follow present young people’s opinions on the ideals of extremist movements, religious traditions and their role.

Chart 13: Perception on ideas conveyed by extremist organizations (%)

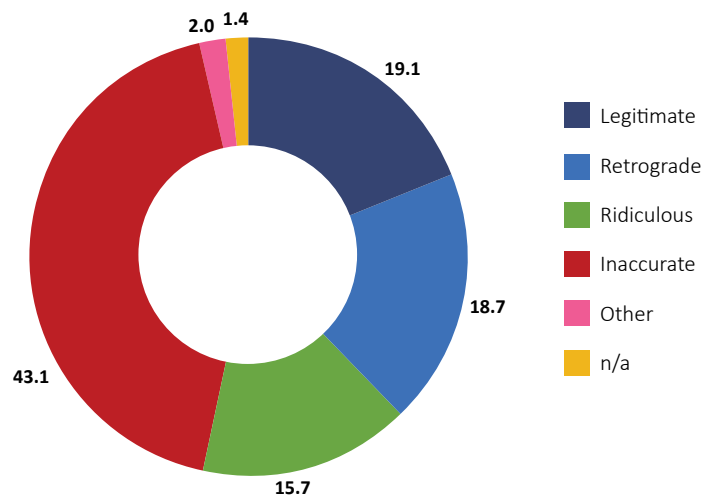


Table 7: Willingness to join violent extremist organizations

	Numbers	Percentage
Willing	28	9.4
Unwilling	242	80.9
May be willing	27	9.0
n/a	2	0.7
Total	299	100.0

This data shows that we are approaching the 10 per cent threshold of young people saying they are willing to commit to a violent extremist organization, not to mention those who are hesitating (9%). This information calls for vigilance while facing statements made by political and religious actors on the fact that such a potentially massive commitment is not a possibility in Zinder. It is noted in several Sahelian contexts that political authorities generally minimize the degree of influence of extremist or violent ideologies, particularly for economic reasons. This is done in order to safeguard the image of a safe country, to attract foreign investment or to develop and boost tourism.

Meanwhile, it is rarely taken into account that Sahelian societies have been affected by the latest incidents affecting countries such as Nigeria. The cultural and socioreligious community shaping this cross-border region of Niger and Nigeria supports the circulation of ideologies, as well as the feeling of disaffection with the governance models that have led to the socioeconomic difficulties conducive

to the rise of extremism. Thus, following the same pattern leading to idealizing the religious model, which claims greater commitment to the values of “justice” in particular, young people come to understand that a system more imbued with religiosity would be better than the one governing their society:

Table 8: Perception on the ideal model of governance policy for Niger

	Numbers	Percentage
Secular system	135	45.2
Sharia	157	52.5
Other	6	2.0
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

The above statistics confirm some of the initial hypotheses regarding the circumstances that could lead young people to be inspired by radical ideologies or even tempted to join groups advocating for the use of violence. In this type of environment, the reasons cited as the root causes of extremism and its development always oscillate between bits and pieces of constructed realities and perceptions that shape speeches and attitudes with respect to a multidimensional phenomenon with complex factors.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND FACTORS EXPLAINING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: BETWEEN REALITY AND PERCEPTION

In this part, the study tries to show how young people analyse the factors that lead to violent extremism. This allows for better understanding and to explain their motivations and ways of support.

Table 9: Perception on whether there is a link between extremist violence and the social environment

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	227	75.9
There is no link	71	23.7
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

Data in Table 9 shows that the majority of respondents (75.9%) believes that there is a close link between violence and the social environment, while 71 respondents (23.7%) do not agree with this statement.

This analysis highlights the important role that social environment variables play in the violence issue in the city of Zinder, and supports the findings of several researchers on the impact of social environment on the violence genesis. Thus, the prevention of violence in the city of Zinder should involve measures for the social environment. In this context, two variables are particularly emphasized by the young people surveyed, namely unemployment (43.5%) and social precariousness (42.5%).

Chart 14: Perception on factors pushing young people into violent extremism (%)

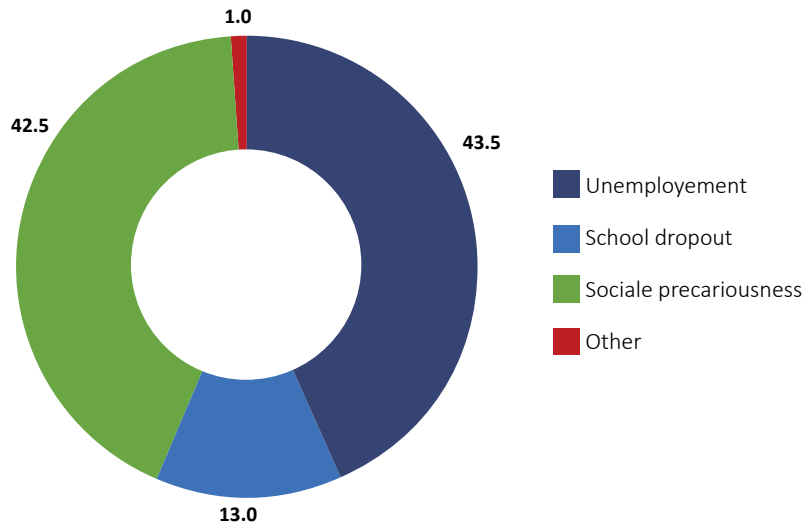


Table 10: Perception on whether there is a link between violent extremism and poverty

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	205	90.3
There is no link	22	9.7
Total	227	100.0

Table 11: Perception on whether there is a link between violent extremism and social exclusion

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	100	44.1
There is no link	127	55.9
Total	227	100.0

Table 12: Perception on whether there is a link between violent extremism and social injustice

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	159	70.0
There is no link	68	30.0
Total	227	100.0

Table 13: Perception on whether the phenomenon of violent extremism is linked to social disorganization

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	23	10.1
There is no link	204	89.9
Total	227	100.0

As shown in the tables, four main variables affect the social environment of the city of Zinder according to the respondents: poverty, social exclusion, social injustice and social disorganization.

Poverty: This variable comes first for respondents, with 205 respondents out of 227, or 90.3 per cent, who consider that there is a link with the development of violent extremism. The city of Zinder is characterized by a young and relatively idle population. This inactivity is most noticeable in neighbourhoods known for violent acts such as Kara-Kara. The phenomenon also seems to be more acute in certain neighbourhoods, such as Garin Malam and Toudoun Jamousse. This raises a series of questions for social work actors, on the State actions or its policy to overcome these inequalities denounced by the population feeling on the margins of sociopolitical life.

Social exclusion: This is the second most common variable for respondents, with 100 out of 227, that is 44.1 per cent, linking violent extremism to social exclusion. In the city of Zinder, the number of young people experiencing social exclusion is increasing. This may be explained, to some extent, by the growing poverty of parents themselves. From a certain point of view, the phenomenon of violence in Zinder is also due to the failure of basic social services provided by the State, the main employment provider. In fact, most of the young people from violent neighbourhoods claim to be victims of social exclusion because of the State's social policy, not necessarily addressing the real concerns of Zinder's districts. With urban development plans, these populations were originally displaced to areas where they are isolated because of their disabilities (most of them were lepers, blind people and deaf people). As a result, these neighbourhoods where people in great socioeconomic hardship are confined, suffer a stigma and have difficulties overcoming this social marginalization. This must be added to the lack of water, school and health facilities. Thus, it goes without saying that in order to effectively combat violence in these neighbourhoods, it is necessary to rehabilitate them. In all aspects of the analysis, there is a form of social injustice against this population, expressed in different ways, but each time referring to the question of fair governance.

Social injustice: This variable, which is no less important in terms of incitement to violence, ranks third among the four variables cited by respondents. These populations consider themselves to be on the margins of an economic and political system leaving no room for them. The inhabitants of these neighbourhoods systematically claim to be excluded from opportunities for social rise that other inhabitants of the city may seize. It is therefore, in their view, a form of injustice that needs to be addressed. Talking about this issue, 159 out of 227 respondents (70%) confirmed that social injustice has a negative impact on youth behaviour. This social injustice affects the whole population in general, but is felt even more by people with disabilities, who should, in theory, be given preferential treatment.

Social disorganization: This is one manifestation of the social regulation systems' crisis experienced by traditional societies. Social conflicts between the authorities and people, which used to be managed on a communal basis, degenerate and lead to violence as a means of expressing a scission between governors and governed people. This disorganization is due to the lack of a commonly accepted and recognized social regulation system. In the specific case of the city of Zinder, this situation does not yet seem to be taking an alarming turn. The study results show that out of

the 227 respondents, only 23 believe there is a link between disorganization and violence while 204, that is 89.9 per cent, hold the opposite view.

This social disorganization did not spare the parental authority, which was one of the stabilizing elements of traditional societies and which eventually eroded under the poverty effect. This can be seen in the responses collected from respondents when it comes to establishing a logical link between family poverty and the lack of parental authority.

Table 14: Perception on whether there is a link between poverty and lack of parental authority

	Numbers	Percentage
There is a link	249	83.3
There is no link	50	16.7
Total	299	100.0

As shown in the table, 249 respondents out of 299, that is 83.3 per cent, think the parents have no power of decision over their children because of poverty.

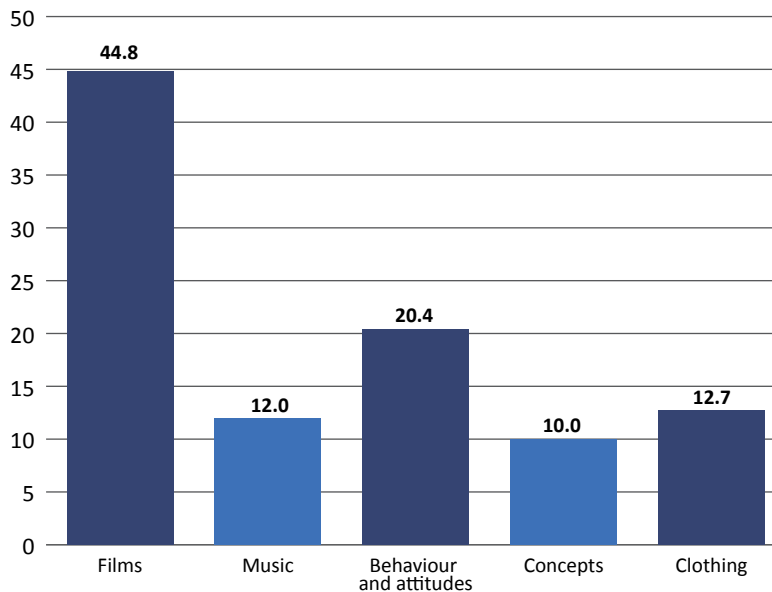
IMPACT OF THE MASS MEDIA AND INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Literature on the impact of mass media in the advent of violence is significant, as shown by a recent study (Pauwels et al., 2014) on the role of new social media in the formation of violent extremism. These authors show that the youth virtual lifestyle must be taken into account, for example the sites they visit and the sermons they listen to. To analyse this impact in the context of Zinder, questions about jihadist movements, the media and the cultural transfer to young people in *palais* and *fadas* in the city of Zinder were asked.

Media such as Radio Bonferey, under the control of the *izala* movement, help the circulation of religious ideas and amplify the effect of the *Waâzin Kassa*, these great ceremonies of subregional preachers involving sheikhs from Nigeria. The Zinder region, bordering Nigeria, is quite affected by this phenomenon and its financial implications as described below by Moulaye Hassane (2006):

In terms of education and instruction, the use of the media is becoming a common practice for organizations. It is financed by some retailers (zakat, donations...) whose majority follows the *izala* movement: Bon Ferey (*izala* radio) also organizes debates on topics affecting the daily life of believers (political debate related to religion, burning issues such as the prophet cartoons, the American position in relation to the Muslim world, Nigerian democracy...). The "*waâzin kassa*" requires important financial and human resources for a consistent organization. The funders of this type of activity are ordinary members, wealthy retailers, members of the association or organizing associations, Islamic non-governmental organizations, or else the solidarity of personalities or associations not directly concerned. Participation is discreet and free, and can be in kind but is more often in cash (p. 52).

For respondents, cultural influence is explained by the fact that young people tend to view images and practices of the virtual world as part of a reality that needs to shape their daily lives. Among the cultural elements perceived as having a link with violent extremism, films come in first place with 44.8 per cent positive response from respondents, followed by behaviour and attitude (20.4%) and clothing (12.7%).

Chart 15: Is there a link between cultural transfer of values and extremist violence? Of what kind?

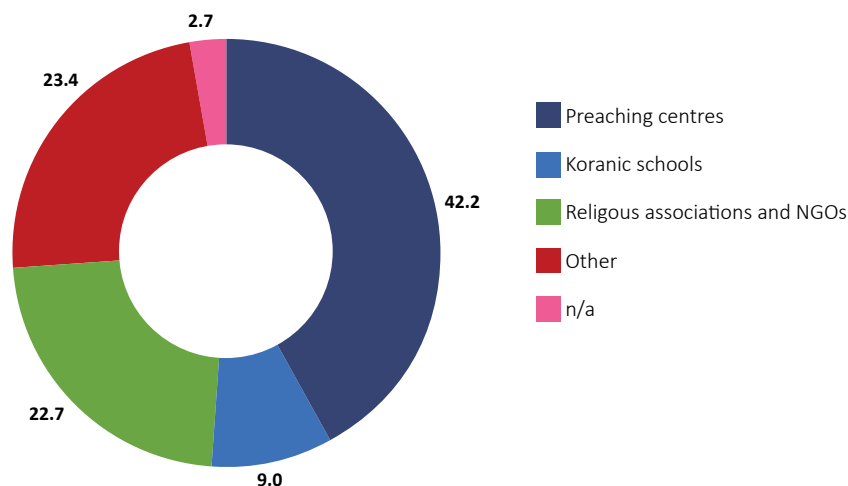
Dress codes are part of the process of claiming allegiance and differentiation from a society considered as not yet truly believing. It has often been found in young people who are breaking the links with their communities of origin. Their support to new types of religiosity is accompanied by a change in clothing to better resemble the supporters of an “authentic Islam” which must be reflected in clothing. Among the concepts accompanying this significant change in religious socialization, there is the *Zayy islâmî* (Islamic dress code). It is symbolized by wearing a tunic called *dishdâsh* (from the Gulf countries), shorter trousers to avoid dirt and impurities and a cap imported from the same regions. This marks an attitude of differentiation with the religious community of origin and a sign of rallying and support to a new type of religious practice considered “authentic” compared to the majority of believers who are still in the “blameworthy innovations” expressed by the *bid’a* concept. By adopting this dress code and supporting new concepts, one becomes a *multazim*, a believer in his own right “committed to the cause of Islam”.

Table 15: Perception on whether social networks are considered vectors of extremist ideologies

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	236	78.9
No	62	20.7
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

The results in Table 15 clearly show that young people recognize the impact of social networks in spreading extremist ideologies.

Chart 16: Perception on structures that expose young people to the phenomenon of violent extremism (%)



One of the hypotheses of this research is to prove the link between religion and violent extremism in the city. However, in order to prevent young people from joining extremist groups, it is necessary to better understand the structures that convey these extremist ideas. This hypothesis is based on the geographical position of the Zinder region, which borders the Diffa region to the east and Nigeria to the south, where the Boko Haram movement was born. In addition, this city is a transit point for migrants, smugglers and drug traffickers. Looking at the chart's results, it appears that for 42.2 per cent of the respondents, the preaching centre²² is the main venue for extremist ideas exhibition, followed by religious associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), conveying these ideas according to 22.7 per cent of the respondents.

It can also be noted that 9.0 per cent of the respondents think that Koranic schools²³ are centres for the dissemination of ideas that can lead to violence. The same opinion is visible when it comes to preaching centres that have a different pedagogy, with a more modern image but using techniques of indoctrination largely supported by rigorous religious references. This pre-eminence of the preaching centres is not surprising, knowing that several religious leaders and preachers from Nigeria travel to Zinder for the *Waâzin Kassa* or national sermons, and the *Waâzin kassa da kassa* or international sermons. Their important role in the transmission of religious values and their sometimes strongly committed nature, as they speak out on political and international issues, was discussed earlier.

22 Called *Markaz Da'wah*, they generally include school structures and mosques where courses in religion are given, most often in the form of participative conferences. These centres are often places for socialization in the neighbourhoods where they are located. This phenomenon developed in the 1990s when the states were neglecting the education sector at the time of structural adjustment policies.

23 This opinion should be tempered, by distinguishing between the traditional Koranic schools called *makaranta* and the new Koranic schools often held by rigorist movements close to the *Salafiya*.

Table 16: Perception on whether religious leaders and politicians play an important role in the manipulation of young activists

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	212	70.9
No	87	29.1
Total	299	100.0

When asked whether religious and political leaders play a role in manipulating young people, 70.9 per cent responded positively, compared to 29.1 per cent who said the opposite. In addition to the violent religious extremism described above, there is also a violent political extremism, Zinder being perceived as the stronghold of the opposition by the State authorities.

The in-depth analysis of the data in this part of the study shows that the variables defining the social environment of young people have a structural link with the outbreak of violent extremism signs. These variables are: (a) poverty; (b) exclusion and social injustice; (c) social disorganization; (d) cultural importation; and (e) the ideology vectors (preaching centre, Koranic school, religious associations and NGOs, as well as political leaders). In addition, this violent extremism is disseminated through the media, particularly social networks and mobile phones.

Similarly, it is interesting to see how the religious factor could be subject to a recuperation by political actors using the sense of belonging of young people. Therefore, political recuperation consists in assigning young people a political mission, by playing on their sensitivity in relation to the religious question.

This can also be done for money, even if these young people do not necessarily share the convictions of political organizations. However, the latter consider that bonuses can rally young people and lead them to challenge the laws of the Republic of Niger. The danger of developing such practices is its similarities with the modus operandi of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram around the Lake Chad Basin. The manipulation of the youth by political organizations would inevitably lead to an almost definitive break in the social pact and a continuous fragmentation of national unity. The survey reveals that 156 out of 299 respondents, that is 52.2 per cent, receive financial support from political organizations. Without any doubt, these political parties engage these young people in a form of political claims without any legal basis. The political involvement variable would determine the rise of violent extremism in youth circles. As a matter of fact, 8 out of 299 individuals, that is 2.7 per cent, admit they receive funding to organize violent demonstrations, and 6 respondents, 2 per cent, say they are paid to disturb the peace. Further, 211 respondents, or 70.6 per cent, are paid to run the election campaign while 36 people, or 12 per cent, receive money to participate in meetings of political parties. Only 33 respondents, that is 11 per cent, would engage in politics for ideological convictions.

This allows to confirm the hypothesis that political involvement through a financial profit-sharing scheme can be a dangerous factor if such a practice is accepted. Terrorist groups are inspired by these practices to recruit unemployed young people. When it comes to political and religious education, there is a strong need to engage in offensive actions to address the communication deficit in order to get these young people to change their misperception of politics and its implications. This is necessary because these young people don't see the difference between

politics and religion, and extremism and religion. For example, 131 respondents out of 299 (43.8%) associate politics with the use of violence as a form of protest. The 96, or 31.2 per cent, believe that a religious commitment should necessarily lead to a toughening of positions, particularly in the “defence of Islam” as during the “anti-Charlie” riots. This confusion, which is well anchored in mentalities, would also justify the temptation of young people to support the Ulemas and their somewhat radical speech and to attend sermons advocating violence.

This fascination can also be seen in the dreadful images shared on Whatsapp, Imo and other social networks between young people, in the violent sermons delivered by extremist leaders and the signs and symbols representing these extremist organizations.

The tables and charts that follow describe how young people, already involved in violence, are receiving financial support from parties.

Table 17: Respondents receiving financial support from political parties in relation to any religious organizations

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	156	52.2
No	142	47.5
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

Table 17 shows a complex aspect of the study, which reveals the proximity of some religious movements to political groups in the country. This could be explained by the interplay of political patronage, which leads some political stakeholders to focus on their immediate electorate interests by neglecting the long-term vision, and in particular the credit they give to these religious groups. The latter thus become legitimate in the eyes of the population, who consider them to be essential actors in sociopolitical life, with the danger this entails in terms of possible propagation of extremist religious ideas. Table 18 shows that political parties approach young people in particular during demonstrations and elections.

Thus, it is a game of mutual manipulation that sets in and makes it increasingly complex to analyse the relations between politics and religion in an environment marked by tensions and influences that may come from neighbouring countries such as Nigeria.

Table 18: Occasions when youth were approached by politicians

	Numbers	Percentage
Demonstration	8	2.7
Unrest	6	2.0
Electoral campaign	211	70.6
Meeting	36	12.0
Other	33	11.0
n/a	5	1.8
Total	299	100.0

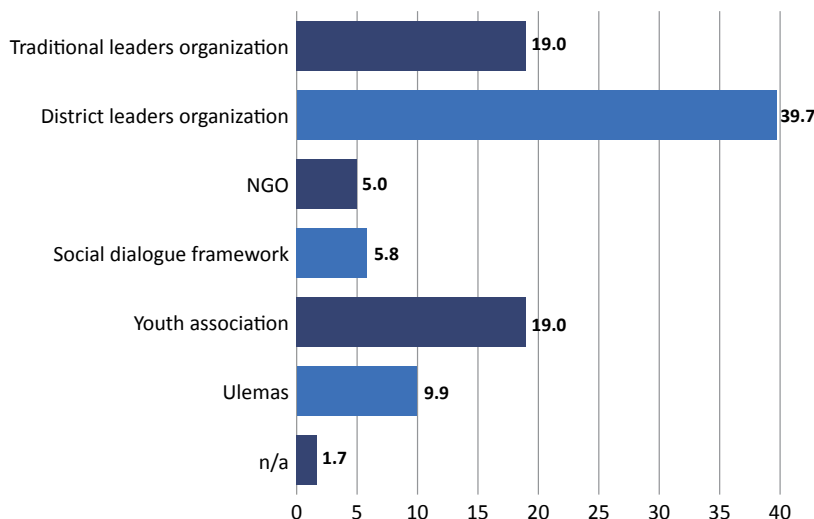
While giving full importance to the issue of youth participation or their relationship to political structures such as parties, the study did not establish a direct link between youth political ideology and violent extremism. Further, many of these young people claim not to identify themselves through a given political vision. Their collaboration with political organizations only takes place during election campaigns. However, this low involvement of young people in the political sphere is one of the factors of their exploitation by political actors. Thus, as shown by Pauwels et al. (2014), specific training in improving their political skills with regard to radicalization and violent extremism could be useful from an early age, hence the important role of schools, teachers and citizen socialization structures.

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: WHICH ACTORS AND MEANS DO YOUNG PEOPLE ADVOCATE?

Despite the persistence of worrying factors, young people seem to be identifying levers that can be used in mediation to ease tensions in a city marked by the recurrence of violence in a tense subregional context.

Given this situation, characterized by the rapid rise of violent extremism, the civil society in Zinder is initiating actions to reverse this violent action. Thus, NGOs, donors and the State sponsored the creation and implementation of several organizations whose main mission is to create a framework for dialogue and consultation between the society, the State itself and these violent young extremists. There is a public anchoring of these mediation institutions, such as the Inter and Intra Religious Committees (Comités Inter et Intra Religieux (CIIR)) established in all the districts of the city of Zinder. However, even though 121 people, that is 40.5 per cent of the respondents, have already contacted these institutions, 167, or 55.9 per cent, are unaware such institutions even exist. This shows that these institutions must engage in lobbying, outreach and advocacy work in order to make themselves known to the public and be accepted as a reliable framework for dialogue. There are now 121 operational institutions, the nature and distribution of which are described in the following chart.

Chart 17: Distribution of preferred dialogue frameworks according to their nature



It is noteworthy that despite the distrust previously mentioned with regard to political institutions, the State is perceived by young people as the institution that must be at the forefront of all strategies to combat violent extremism. This view is largely shared by these young people who are already members of organizations using violence, 53.2 per cent of whom believe that the State can effectively combat violent extremism. In addition, 24.4 per cent believe that religious leaders are competent in this area, and only 2.7 per cent believe that international institutions are effective in the fight against violent extremism (see Table 19).

Among the prevention and control measures perceived as effective by these young people, “strong safety measures” ranked first, supported by 40.8 per cent of respondents. Moreover, 30.4 per cent of participants would like initiatives against violent extremism to focus on education, and 15.4 per cent believe that the spread of religious speech based on tolerance and acceptance of the other would ease the rise of violent extremism among young people. Finally, 10.4 per cent of respondents suggested that “cultural activities should be increased to keep young people busy”.

These proposals coming from the respondents themselves show that these young people are truly aware of the real consequences and implications of violent extremism. By proposing these initiatives, they are invariably expressing their predispositions to support efforts to combat violent extremism.

These young people have a fairly clear understanding of the intervention of NGOs, regional and subregional organizations and Western and Asian countries with which Niger is developing partnerships. According to 20.7 per cent of them, the United Nations could bring a major contribution to the fight against violent extremism. However, the Economic Community of West African States is seen as the most empowered body to intervene in the fight against violent extremism by 26.4 per cent of respondents. The African Union or countries such as France, the United States of America and China can also support initiatives to combat violent extremism. Nevertheless, 23.4 per cent of these young people believe that Arab-Muslim countries are the most credible nations in the fight against violent extremism.

Table 19: Institutions and stakeholders that can effectively combat violent extremism according to the respondents

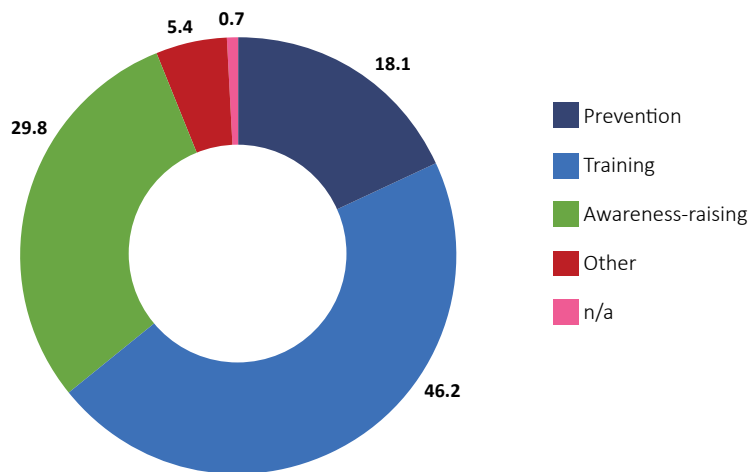
	Numbers	Percentage
The State	159	53.2
Religious leaders	73	24.4
Civil society	20	6.7
Sultan	38	12.7
International organizations	8	2.7
n/a	1	0.3
Total	299	100.0

Despite its failures on many fronts, there is some confidence in the State and its institutions to effectively fight violent extremism. However, it should be questioned whether putting the State forward is a matter of trust or rather an expectation. It is also worth noting the credibility placed in traditional structures such as the Sultanate. This trend is similar to observations in other regions of Niger, which benefit from being able to rely on effective and meaningful mediation relays at

the population level. This is one of the most interesting aspects of observing the phenomenon of violent extremism in this country, where the breakthrough of a protesting Islam coexists with the persistence of levers that can facilitate the construction of community resilience.

With regards to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization is perceived by the young people interviewed as a “credible” institution able to actively participate in the fight against and prevention of violent extremism in a youth environment. Among the respondents, 68.2 per cent believe that the IOM and its partners can target strategic areas of intervention to stem violent extremism in youth environment. Prevention, training and awareness-raising are the pillars on which the IOM can build solutions. Thus, 46.2 per cent of the respondents recommended continuous training for young people and actors in the field, while 29.8 per cent opted for awareness-raising campaigns and 18.1 per cent advocated prevention as an effective way of fighting the phenomenon.

Chart 18: Perceptions on IOM intervention methods against violent extremism



CONCLUSION

The assessment of the difficult sociopolitical climate prevailing in the Zinder region reveals once more that there are factors that contribute to the rise of violence in general and violent extremism in particular. That is, as discussed earlier, the low level of education, the religious intolerance, the persistent poverty and lack of basic social services. Different explanations of the rise of extremism also include the corruption and political fragmentation linked to the failure in fairly implementing the law. In the city of Zinder, in addition to these problems, there are vulnerable borders, criminal activities organized by local actors and a breakthrough of the extremist ideas with messages and people exchanges facilitated inside the country, as well as with neighbouring Nigeria.

Undeniably, the issues inherent to the analysis of violent extremism vary according to the historical and sociopolitical context. It is important to note in this conclusion that the ideological matrix plays an important role in the formation and evolution of the extremist movement. It provides substantial information on the motivations, the causes and the operating methods of terrorist actors. Based on the rejection of the innovations and social or political developments, religious extremism is hostile by nature to the democratic system and open society, and thus to the efforts of Niger in that direction. It claims to offer a new direction with the political ambition to regulate the interfaith and ideological relations.

This study, the first of its kind, based on the perception of the actors themselves, offers a cross-reflection on the issue of violent extremism and the variables shaping it.

The socioeconomic dimension brings substantial light on the motivations and expectations of the surveyed individuals. For the most part, it is noteworthy that poverty is often identified by these young people as an essential motive that pushes them to accept ideological offers from political and religious organizations. In some identified cases, these young people lead violent actions in exchange for cash, in order for the religious and political organizations to reach their goals. Essentially, it is acknowledged that the poverty situation of these young people predisposes them to fall into violent extremism. It clearly appears that this use of young people by political and religious organizations actively participates in fixing a culture of violence, rebellion and opposition in these young people's consciousness. As a matter of fact, we found that young people are often used by these organizations to challenge the State or mobilize the largest number of people during political protests.

On quite a different matter, Niger is surrounded by countries affected by the jihadist phenomenon and already relatively threatened by criminal organizations of various kinds. Among these countries, Nigeria is marked by the presence of the Boko Haram sect, which caused a deep change in the religious practices and the acceptance of religious diversity. The media coverage of this conflict has etched a feeling of hatred and contempt towards the State and its partners in young people's mind. Boko Haram thus created a new religious and political model based on rejecting and renouncing to modern values such as democracy, school and science in general. Several young Nigeriens already joined this cult, especially in the Lake Chad Basin. Boko Haram became a job and resources provider and played an important role in the new orientations and religious views of young people, based on the socioeconomic precariousness of these regions.

The scenes of atrocities, perpetrated by this sect and the hate speech of its leader, are positively welcomed by a part of young people from Zinder as shown in this study. Some of them (almost 9% of respondents) have openly admitted being ready to join these jihadist sects or to share their extremist beliefs.

All these facts combined, established by the investigation conducted in this study, show that the phenomenon of extremism is still difficult to identify in a comprehensive manner, and that more localized approaches are needed in order to better understand the different dynamics. This multidimensional phenomenon is still crawling into an array of other phenomena, and the difficulty is to isolate it as a phenomenon “on its own”.

Admittedly, the limit is still not very clear, and for methodological precautions, it is too early to draw global conclusions on links between forms of conventional violence and the phenomenon of violent extremism. But the phenomenon of extremism does exist in Zinder as witnessed since the 1990s. The phenomenon showed a massive and organized form during the “anti-American” and the “anti-Charlie” violent demonstrations, with a presence of young people from all social backgrounds.

In addition, the study found many relevant indicators, allowing to understand the shifting risk of young people in Zinder in view of their vulnerability, as well as the capacity of mobilization of the religious speech compared to the political structures.

Therefore, the researchers were able to perceive the ability of the ability of religious stakeholders to produce speeches inciting violence and having a capacity of mobilization that can surprise the security forces. This shows a predisposition of the population to shift towards a form of violence justified by religious grounds. This phenomenon seems to be deeply rooted in Zinder, especially as religious actors using the same modus operandi as Boko Haram or as the Taliban are able to transform mosques into forums to influence the evolution of values and most importantly, to impose a society model with strong religious connotations. This explains why provocative sermons resulted in women being attacked and humiliated because of their clothing perceived as Western and indecent, in order to substitute the republican system by a religion-based system, through the use of violence.

If the strong preference of the respondents for the Sharia law to replace the actual legal system is added to the rate of nearly 10 per cent of young people openly declaring themselves as ready to join a violent extremist organization, there is no doubt that the current developments in Zinder deserve more attention and, above all, urgent preventive measures.

This raises the essential question of raising awareness on the violent extremism phenomenon among local and national stakeholders. The same goes for the technical and financial partners whose vision of the phenomenon remains, for the time being, focused on the security approach, which has so far failed to stem the breakthrough of extremism threatening the social balances of the various countries in the region.

It will be necessary for the various actors to carry out urgent actions taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the Niger’s sociocultural framework in terms of building community resilience, and also prevention policies through awareness-raising and training on the challenges of a phenomenon that is widespread, multifaceted, changing and unpredictable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the study and when formulating the recommendations, it is important to see to what extent local assets could be strengthened with more sustained measures taken by the State, the civil society, the religious and traditional leaders, as well as Niger's international partners.

A NEED FOR AN INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE: A "DIALOGUE COMMITTEE" FOR PREVENTION

Zinder's situation deserves the strengthening of the Dialogue Committee (*Comité de dialogue*) as part of local initiatives. One of its tasks would be to show that Islam is not limited to its radical version and that it has a historical, civilizational and cultural dimension that cannot be reduced to violent acts. While the radical version of religion attracts young people, it is above all their lack of religious knowledge that leads them to legitimize this ideological and political identification as the only valid version of the religion. It is therefore necessary to work on a "counter-speech" to show the risky and unfounded nature of this extremist version that will deter part of this youth. This solution must be part of a long-term process with every effort deployed to ensure that the link between society's hatred and religion is not systematic, which is a link precisely supported by the lack of religious knowledge of these young people. To discourage young people returning from conflict zones, or the indoctrinated ones, from supporting these forms of religious extremism, it is necessary to involve families with religious leaders and representatives of the State and local authorities. The testimonies of former extremists, with which other young people can identify, can help, at least for some, to prevent them from going down this deviant path.

The strengthened committee should be comprised of young people (men and women) concerned by the issue, political and administrative authorities, as well as religious leaders. It would be possible to plan the implementation of this committee by empowering some young members of the *fadas* and *palais*, through job creation or by empowering them within a prevention framework.

A NEED FOR THE STATE AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS' PARTICIPATION

In order for religious leaders to fully play their part, a specific State intervention is necessary. Achieving this implies a greater mobilization of local authorities and a strong presence of public and private institutions in the sensitive districts of Zinder. A system of assistance and social measures should be set up to accompany religious leaders in their mediation mission, especially imams and preachers representing the moderate movement. The State could thus support a genuine mediation policy for pragmatic responses to crisis and conflict situations.

Its policy must first be attached to a local approach. It is a question of moving towards greater proximity, coordinating public action in an optimal way, acting locally and transversally with all the concerned stakeholders. The policy of the city of Zinder must be designed as an integral part of a global fight against exclusion and

as part of an extensive project for the development of deprived or sensitive districts and urban rebalancing.

The State must also help religious leaders to federate in associations that develop projects for social and cultural actions and position themselves as reliable interlocutors, in a context where young people reject the politics. The authorities and the security forces must work to pacify the social space before introducing the necessary measures for professional integration and cultural activities. Religious and traditional leaders can play a major role in this process.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

Beyond these broad outlines on timely actions based on the overall trends of the study, the following recommendations to the various stakeholders are given.

To IOM and international partners

- Carry out awareness-raising campaigns with local and national authorities on the issues of violent extremism and the sensitive developments in the Zinder region. Such actions could take the following forms:
 - Training sessions on strategies to prevent and combat violent extremism for the heads of *départements* in Zinder, the police forces and also the religious and traditional leaders (sultanate);
 - Workshops for inclusive and intergenerational dialogue, bringing together the different actors of the city to create a permanent dialogue framework: elected officials, police forces, youth organizations, women leaders;
 - Cultural activities for young people in difficult neighbourhoods in order to recreate socialization frameworks conducive to easing tensions in the city.
- Carry out, in collaboration with youth organizations, “general assemblies” with thematic discussions and exchanges on the dangers of violent extremism in order to prevent participation in violent extremist groups;
- Implementing socioeconomic integration projects such as vocational training for young people excluded from the formal school system in collaboration with chambers of trades (*Chambre des métiers*) and local NGOs active in this field; and
- Advocate with political, traditional, religious and women’s leaders and religious authorities to consider awareness-raising and prevention of violent extremism in the Zinder region, including holding a national conference on preventing and combating violent extremism in Niger’s border areas.

To the State

- Develop an effective policy to combat poverty, taking into account local circumstances and the cultural specificities of the Zinder region;
- Reorganize the public services responsible for the youth by integrating the participatory dimension in public action, and also the trust-restoring process between young people and political structures;

- Develop and strengthen civic education and citizen awareness in educational programmes, and also through cultural actions;
- Fulfil the commitments made to create community development training centres by introducing recreational activities that create social links;
- Ensure a fair implementation of conflict resolution laws by banning corruption practices that lead young people to reject public policies in general;
- Start the implementation of training and vocational centres in all neighbourhoods perceived as difficult with the aim of promoting skills learning to better fight social marginalization;
- Support young people leaving training centres towards entrepreneurship and the creation of income-generating structures for young people with minimum training;
- Introduce the “prevention of violent extremism” dimension in national actions to raise awareness on violence.

To the authorities of the regional council and the city

- Take immediate measures to limit, as part of the land policy, the chaotic sale of public spaces to offer young people a framework for development and secured places for play and leisure;
- Provide training for social workers on approaches and outlines of non-violence policy and preventive methods against violent extremism; and
- Promote de-radicalization processes through the immediate insertion of former violent individuals and the promotion of spaces for intergenerational dialogue.

To the heads of neighbourhoods

- Defuse crises between families and their children through regular meetings on the role of parents, the place of the family while allowing young people to express themselves freely on their expectations and concerns;
- Provide these young people with open self-expression frameworks on their ambitions and difficulties and help them approach the NGOs that assist young people in difficulty;
- Organize and promote radio and television programmes on the challenges of violent extremism and the dangers it poses to social and community cohesion;
- Provide youth-friendly explanations, through targeted programmes, of the issues at stake in the republican pact and the role of the State in ensuring security for people and their property in collaboration with educational stakeholders (such as school, education and sports).

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