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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a mosque dome, likely the Great Mosque of Timbuktu, with its intricate architectural details and colorful patterns. The dome is partially obscured by the large title text.

RADICALIZATION FACTORS AND PERCEPTIONS OF TERRORISM IN THE GAMBIA

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INTRODUCTION

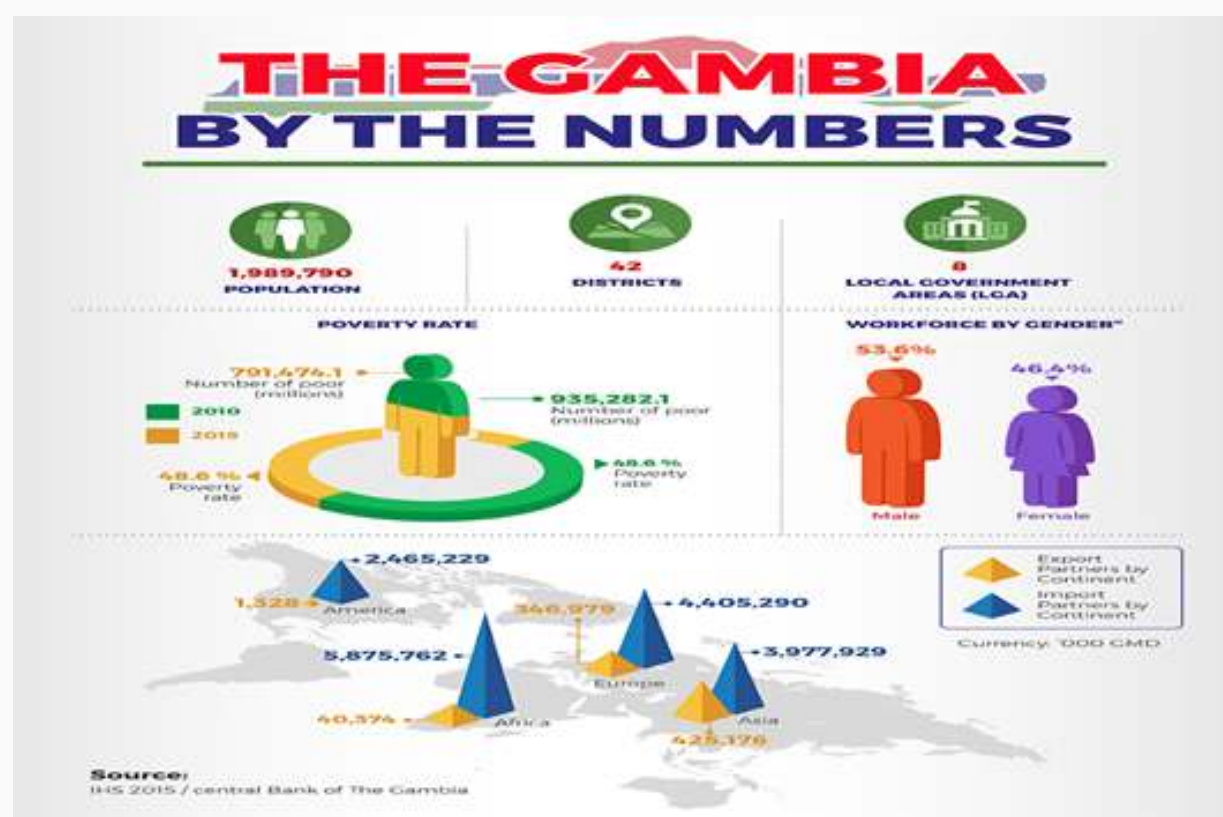
The Gambia has not yet experienced the same religious radicalization or violent extremism that other West African countries are facing. Since the fall of Gaddafi in Libya and then the political-security crisis in Mali in 2011 and 2012, West Africa and the Sahel have seen a steady increase in violent extremist activity. Sahelian countries Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are now dealing with intensifying insurgencies from violent extremist groups, who are taking over vast swathes of territory and even laying siege to regions not far from major cities, which in some countries are still relatively secure areas. The unexpected attacks in Ouagadougou in 2016 and the resurgence of unprecedented violence that spread to Burkina Faso marked the beginning of a regionalization of the threat and an overflow from the Sahelian epicenter of terrorism to coastal countries. Togo and Benin are experiencing increasing attacks, and Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire are bolstering security as attacks increase in Sahelian regions they border.

Senegal and Gambia, on the other hand, have not been attacked and have not experienced any significant radicalization within their borders, which can be attributed to the same factor in addition to a resilience that makes them exceptions despite the age of the absurdity even of prediction in view of the transnationality of the terrorist phenomenon. While The Gambia's physical distance from countries facing increasing religious radicalization and extremism has limited the spread, one cultural value is viewed as most important: tolerance among the different ethnic and religious groups, which is supported by the widespread practice of a predominant Sufi Islam. A clear majority of Gambians see religious diversity as a positive contributor to their country's culture. This prioritization of harmony extends from the general populace to ethnic and religious leaders as well. Leaders often have strong social links to each other and are widely respected by the populace as moderating influences. Thus, tolerance in The Gambia has been a barrier to the forces of radicalization and extremism sweeping the region despite the relative rise in certain forms of intolerance between the different currents of Islam itself.

However, The Gambia is not exempt from radicalization and violent extremism risk factors, especially socio-economic issues. Poverty and lack of social mobility, particularly among youth populations, are known risk factors. As evidenced by the staggering youth unemployment rate, the government is struggling to provide economic opportunities for its predominantly young population. This situation has contributed to the emergence of radicalization factors targeting the government politically and fuelling crime in certain regions. This radicalization could be instrumentalized by extremist religious actors.

In addition, increasing tensions between different Islamic currents threaten to undermine the bedrock of The Gambia's moderation: tolerance. In some West African contexts, radical and extremist groups often take advantage of community grievances to recruit, such as the Katiba Macina in Mali. Although there is no radical influence within the Gambia's borders, there are now relative risks of contagion or online communication strategies that could bring young Gambians into contact with foreign radical and extremist actors. As seen during the Syrian Civil War, foreign radical and extremist actors actively target vulnerable youth populations in other countries for recruitment.

Therefore, the government should act holistically to address its economic and security shortcomings while bolstering tolerance and communal dialogue to safeguard The Gambia from a threatening regional trend.



Picture 1: Population of The Gambia

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

After an exploratory study by the Timbuktu Institute on the phenomenon of rising extremism in the Gambia entitled “Why should The Gambia avoid the mistakes of the Sahel” [1] in 2023, the aim of this study is to analyse the factors behind the radicalisation of the Gambian population and their perceptions of terrorism. It will be based on their knowledge of the issue, their attitudes towards it and any practices they adopt (KAP).

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF THE STUDY

The study covers urban and rural areas in the 8 regions of The Gambia from east to west, as shown in the figure below: Banjul, Kanifing, Brikama, Mansa Konko, Kerewan, Kuntaur, Janjanbureh and Basse.



Picture 2: Map of The Gambia

Methodology

In this study, a mixed approach will be adopted in order to gather varied data on the subject. To do this, it will be divided into a quantitative survey (1) with the administration of questionnaires to a large sample and a qualitative survey (2) with semi-structured interviews with resource persons in the main regions concerned.

[1] Timbuktu Institute, 'Facteurs de radicalisation et perceptions du terrorisme chez les jeunes des zones frontalières du Sénégal de la Guinée et du Sénégal', November 2018, p. 15 Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul, 10/11/2023 supervised by Dr. Bakary Sambe

1. QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

A questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of 400 respondents with a 95% confidence level in order to gather their opinions on the issue and quantify the problem. 15 local interviewers were recruited and trained in the areas concerned by the study. They will live in the area and know the local languages. Stratified random sampling was used, with 3 levels of stratification: age, gender and area (rural/urban). This method is more representative and every individual in the population will have the chance to be interviewed.

	Sample		
	Total	Male	Female
THE GAMBIA	400	190	210
Urban	220	105	115
Rural	180	86	94
Banjul	6	3	3
Kanifing	80	37	43
Brikama	152	74	78
Mansakonko	17	8	9
Kerewan	47	22	25
Kuntaur	21	10	11
Janjanbureh	26	12	14
Basse	51	24	27

Table 1: Distribution of the sample by region and gender

2. QUALITATIVE APPROACH

For the qualitative interviews, between 30 and 40 resource people were interviewed in the capital and in the country's regions. The 'snowball' method was adopted because it allows easier access to the targets. In fact, each individual surveyed gave us a similar profile. 5 Gambian investigators were recruited and trained to carry out this work. This methodological precaution of working with local researchers steeped in the local culture and languages aims above all to avoid the various biases due to differences in perceptions and understanding of the issues and phenomena at stake.

The target group is as follows:

- Religious
- Faithful
- Authorities
- Civil society
- FDS
- Young people
- Women

Research team

The research team is composed as follows:

- 1 senior researcher:
- 1 supervisor:
- 15 interviewers
- 5 junior researchers

Stages

- Literature review
- Development of data collection tools
- Mapping and methodology
- Setting up the data collection platform
- Recruitment and training of interviewers
- Data collection
- Data cleaning and processing
- Report writing
- Submission of first draft

Adopting a comprehensive approach, this study is based on a long-term field survey enriched by qualitative interviews and direct observation, in addition to the rare mobilization of data on this phenomenon of radicalization, which has received little attention in the Gambian context.

This research focused on following main themes:

- The knowledge of the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism,
- Understanding of the causes, actors and areas of extremism in the Gambia
- Understanding the gender dimension of the phenomenon
- Identify possible resilience factors in the face of violent extremism
- Conclusion and Recommendations

UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM PHENOMENON

UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM PHENOMENON

Measuring the level of knowledge among young people on current issues such as the distinction between radicalization and extremism, the diversity of Islamic currents, and the awareness of the existence of armed groups in the sub-region allows for a variety of explanatory perspectives on the security situation. Its interest lies in detecting those who may radicalize because they are convinced of preaching a truthful message after specializing in religious studies, and distinguishing them from those who may be recruited through the mere exploitation of frustrations. Thus, by assessing this level of knowledge, appropriate recommendations could be formulated for better prevention of radicalization

1. DEFINITION: NAVIGATING THE FINE LINE BETWEEN RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND POLITICAL RADICALIZATION

One of the main challenges faced by practitioners in the field of humanities and social sciences regarding the theme of radicalization is the definition of concepts. From a linguistic perspective, the term "radicalization" is derived from the word "radical," synonymous with root. Thus, from a religious standpoint, some label individuals or groups as radical, claiming to adhere to the behaviors and teachings of the early generations of Muslims. As far as it is concerned, "violent extremism," it is often used to avoid the term "jihadism," which refers to jihad, in order to prevent a purely religious interpretation of a phenomenon with multiple factors. [2]

The adults and youth respondents in this survey conducted in several localities in the Gambia, face the same difficulty in establishing a consensus on the definitions of the terms "radicalization" and "violent extremism." Despite the nuances between the two terms, most surveyed respondents struggle to grasp the distinction between the two terms. Thus, when asked, "Do you differentiate between radicalization and violent extremism?", 61 % of respondents were unable to provide an accurate definition of violent extremism and make the distinction between the two notions.

[2] Timbuktu Institute, 'Facteurs de radicalisation et perceptions du terrorisme chez les jeunes des zones frontalières du Sénégal et de la Guinée, November 2018, p. 15

[3] Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul, 10/11/2023

[4] Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul, 11/11/2023

And 39% were able to do so. Among the most apposite responses, it is worth mentioning that a female leader gave the definition that was most aligned with that generally used in academic research, and shows her proper understanding of the phenomenon. *“In my opinion, youth radicalization has to deal with the ways by which young people adopt and engage in extreme beliefs and methods that may involve violence.”*[3] Furthermore, she was able to give concrete examples illustrative of the phenomenon of youth radicalization.

The most intriguing yet informative response comes from an official agent. He defines the phenomenon as “the proactive engagement of young individuals in a comprehensive approach to bring about societal change... it can manifest through various means, including peaceful demonstration or intense advocacy.”[4] The officer’s definition presents the phenomenon in a positive light, perhaps paradoxically equating it with youth engagement. This might indicate a negative perception of youth active and civic engagement against the sitting government, or it could reflect a lack of clear understanding of the phenomenon and its potential for violence.

As examples of radicalization, the official respondent mentioned the so-called ‘three years Jot Na’ a political movement that mobilized public opinion to pressure the sitting President to keep up his election campaign commitment to serve for a transition period of three years instead a full mandate of five year. He also mentioned controversies that mobilized youth in protest actions against authorities. Such categorization of radicalization in the form of peaceful demonstration is an oxymora, that supports the previous comment indicating his negative view of youth protest that he qualifies as radicalization.

Along the same line a Christian cleric also provides an accurate response: *“In my perspective, radicalization involves extreme beliefs, ideologies and behaviors adopted by young people, often leading them to violence and destructive action.”* He added that radicalization ‘can manifest itself in criminal activities, attacks on communities, and other disruptive behavior.’[5]

[2] Timbuktu Institute, ‘Facteurs de radicalisation et perceptions du terrorisme chez les jeunes des zones frontalières de la Guinée et du Sénégal, November 2018, p. 15

[3] Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul, 10/11/2023

[4] Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul, 11/11/2023

It is worth noting that the Pastor also suggests that radicalization can manifest itself through criminal behaviors and violent *‘attacks against the community.’* And when asked to elaborate on observable manifestations of radicalization in the Gambia, he reiterated examples criminal or social violence rather than religiously motivated violence. As root causes for radicalization, he names, like many respondents in the quantitative study, *‘substance abuse, lack of educational opportunities, and feelings of marginalization.’*

It is interesting to note the paradox that young people who do not follow strict religious or moral standards of Islam may, due to unemployment and lack of prospects or hope, join an organization that justifies the use of violence to impose a political order based on a strict interpretation of Islam. This pattern has been observed in other studies and in other countries.

A further interesting definition of radicalization, provided by several respondents from both government and civil society, is the shift in perception from a religious to a political focus. Two perspectives are particularly noteworthy. A university lecturer stated, “In my opinion, radicalization is having an ideology that we force people into accepting. It could also be political thought, like belonging to a political party.” Similarly, a security expert with a government perspective explained, *“It is the indoctrination of young individuals into violent ideologies, compelling them to implement these ideologies aggressively. This includes the forceful imposition of religious or political ideologies, leading to confrontational or combative engagements.”*[6]

perspective explained, “It is the indoctrination of young individuals into violent ideologies, compelling them to implement these ideologies aggressively. This includes the forceful imposition of religious or political ideologies, leading to confrontational or combative engagements.”[6]

The pastor’s and several other respondents’ answers suggest that despite understanding the risks of religious radicalization in the Gambia, they have not observed any concrete manifestations of religiously motivated violence in the country. It is clear from several respondents that they link radicalization with the political arena. Many in the security and civil society sectors perceive a risk of youth becoming radicalized into politically motivated violence as a means to address political grievances related to democratic rights or government accountability. This signals an emerging risk of political radicalization that needs further scrutiny.

[5] Transcript of interview conducted in Banjul 11/11/2023

[6] Transcript of interview with an official security officer, Banjul, 10/11/2023

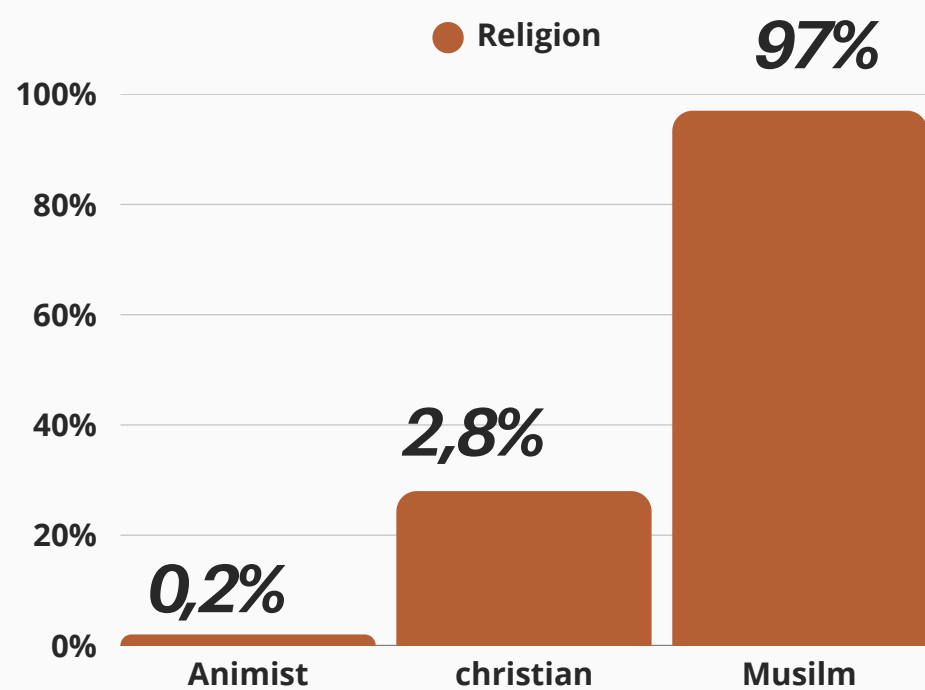
This trend, termed violent political extremism (VPE), has been observed by researchers and analysts. They have characterized certain sociopolitical violent behaviors of individuals or youth groups as radicalization. This includes unconstitutional or insurrectional violence against democratic institutions or engaging in extremely risky irregular migration attempts to EU countries or the United States via Nicaragua, known as the ‘back door’ phenomenon in the Gambia, or ‘Barcelone mba barzakh’ in local Wolof, meaning ‘to see Barcelona or die.’ These behaviors stem from feelings of marginalization, extreme poverty, endemic unemployment, and a lack of professional or economic opportunities, and hope, all exacerbated by rampant government corruption.[7]

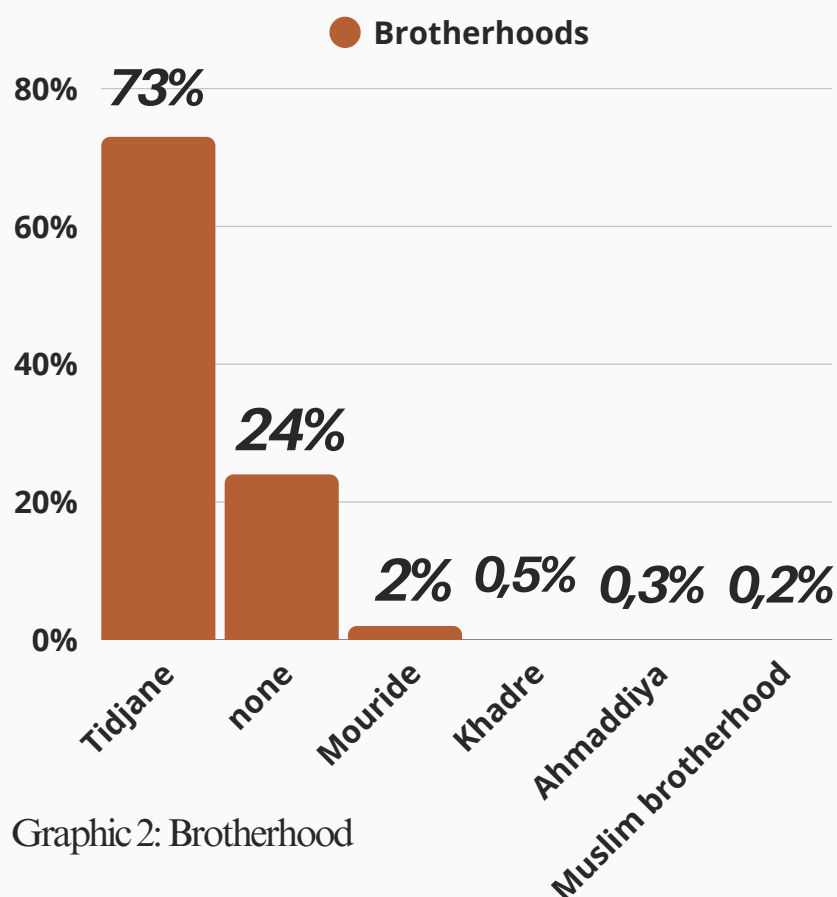
[1] Malal Talla, aka Fou Malade, a famous Senegal rapper and social and political activist, ‘insight on Dakar suburban youth perspective on political participation, deviant behaviors and involvement in criminal or violent political activities, Panel discussion, OSIWA Workshop, May 14-16, 2024, Dakar, Senegal

2. IS THE ANCHORING OF GAMBIAN POPULATION IN MAINSTREAM ISLAM A BULWARK AGAINST RADICAL IDEOLOGIES?

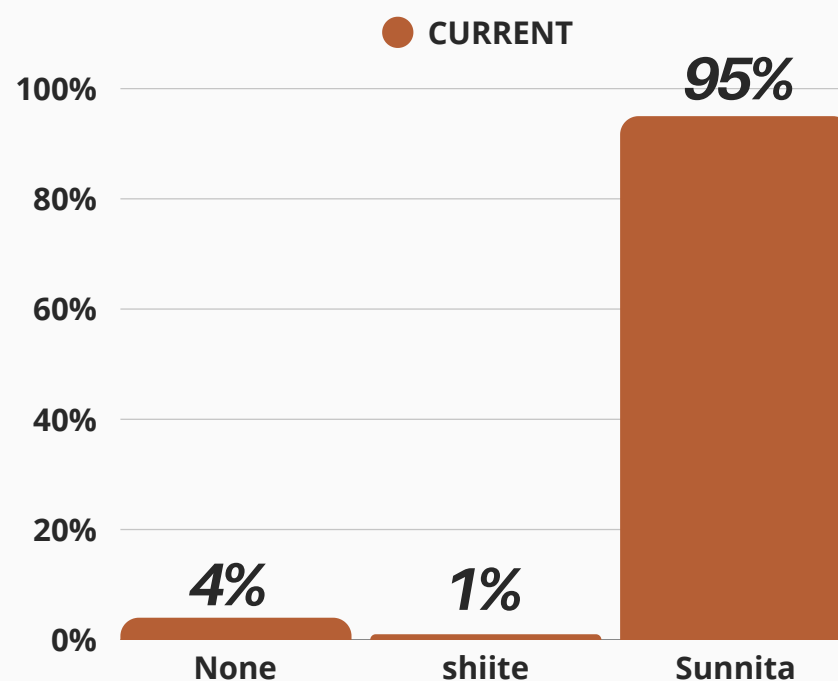
Many researchers see the anchoring of citizens in mainstream Sufi Islam as one of the sources of stability in Senegal and part of the sub-region. Thus, the incident of terrorist attacks on the Timbuktu mausoleums was described by some observers as an assault on this Islamic model by

proponents of religious ideologies imported from abroad.[1] Whilst another research opines that that ideologies that challenge Sufi Islam must be given due attention.[2]





Graphic 2: Brotherhood



Graphic 3: Current

Regarding the Gambian religious landscape that was the subject of this research, it is worth emphasizing that despite the rise of Salafism in neighboring regions and the 'timid progress' of its currents in certain coastal countries, Sufi Islam remains the predominant form.

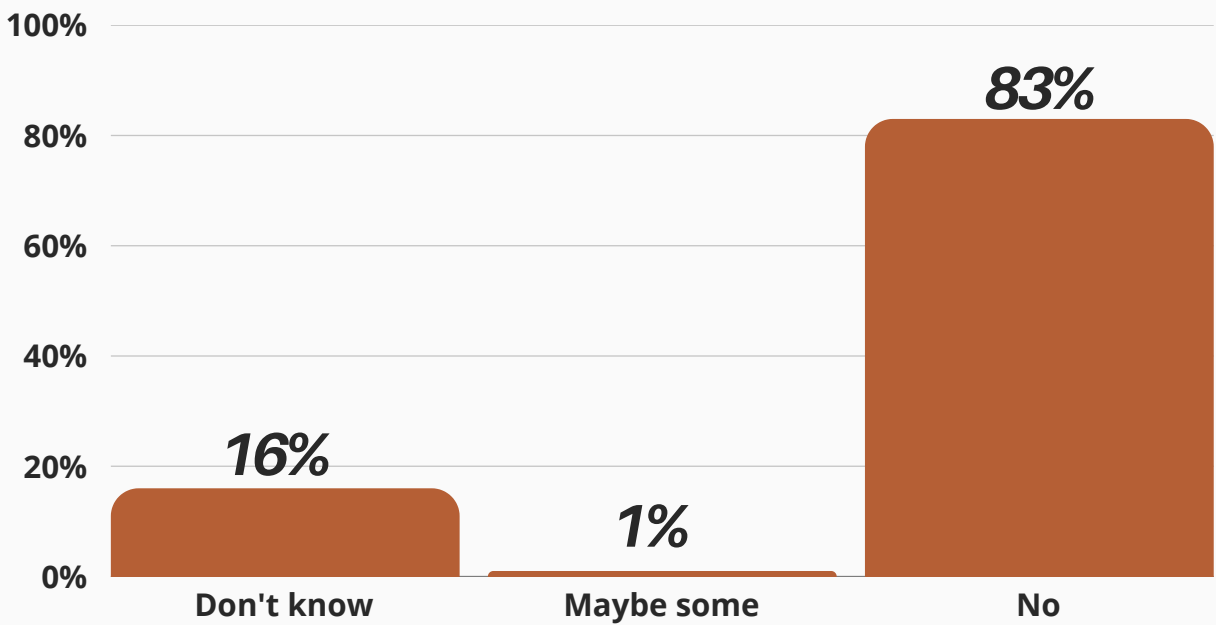
According to the results of the survey, Gambia is a socio-religiously cohesive country. It is characterized by a large majority of Muslim (97%) and a Christian minority (3%). The Muslim population is made of 95% of Sunni and 1% of Shiite, and 4% of other denominations. Among the Muslim majority, the largest sub-group belongs to Islamic Sufi orders, 75.5%, (among whom, the Tijâniyya is the most followed, 73%, followed by the Murid 2%, and the Kadria, 0.5%, whilst 24% of respondents have no brotherhood affiliation, and 0,5 are reformists.

With a strong majority of youth, 78%, affiliated with the country's three brotherhoods, it is evident that they are deeply rooted in the Sufi mode of religiosity. This may bode well for Gambia's resilience against the indoctrination of youth groups with extremist ideologies. Research conducted in several parts of the world has shown that youth are at a higher risk of recruitment by such groups.

Finally, it is worth underscoring that 93% of the youth respondents were educated in the government system, compared to 7% in the traditional Arabic/Quranic system.

3. COMPARING GAMBIAN RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES WITH EXTREMIST GROUPS

Do you think that Gambian religious organizations share the same ideology as these groups?



Graphic 4: Do you think that Gambian religious organizations share the same ideology as these groups?

Asked whether the Gambia religious organizations share the same ideologies as extremist groups, the overwhelming majority of male respondents, 83%, answered negatively, whilst a tiny minority, 1% gave an affirmative answer.

From a gender perspective, a stronger majority of female respondents, 90%, see no commonalities between Gambians and extremist groups.

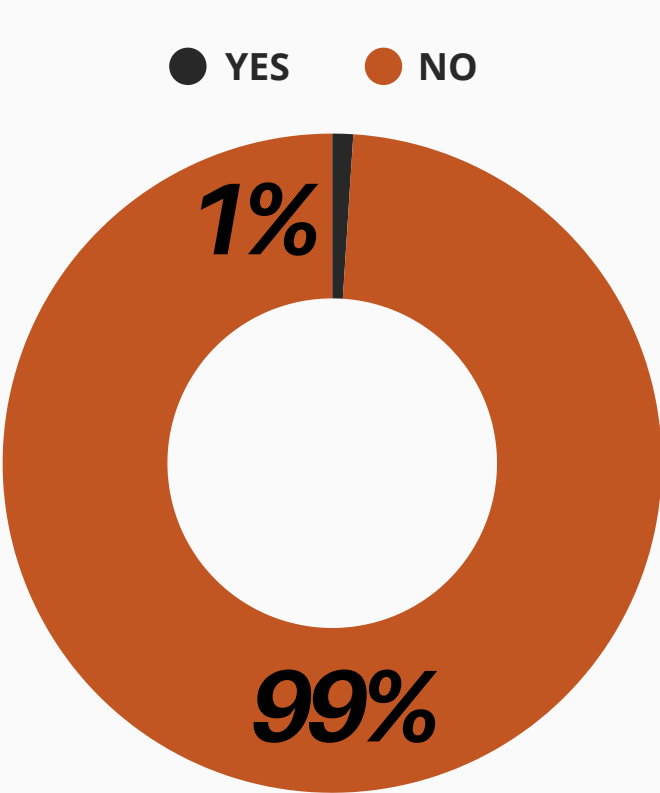
4. PERCEPTION OF THE VALIDITY EXTREMIST GROUPS' GRIEVANCES

In response to the question, "Do you consider the grievances of extremist groups in the region to be legitimate?" 68% of respondents answered negatively, while 26% had no opinion, and a very small number found them justified.

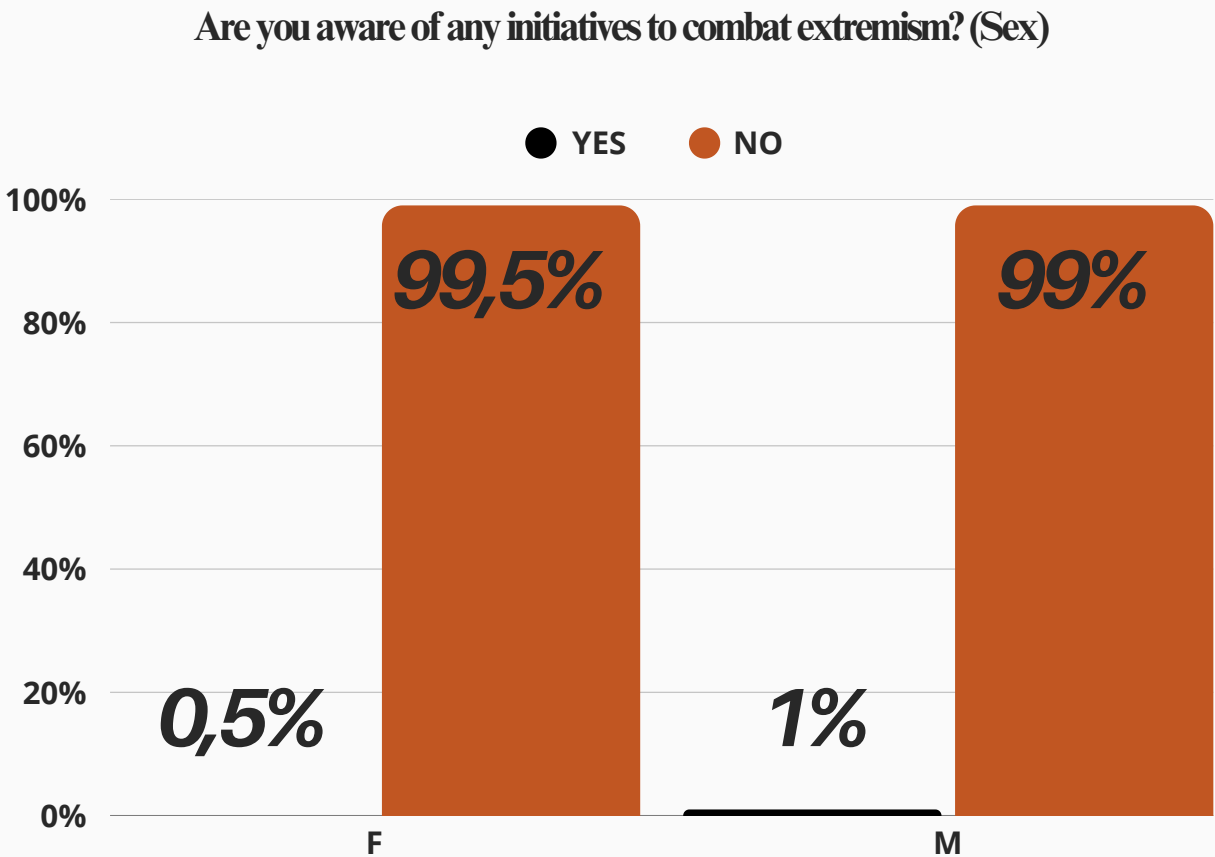
From an intersectional perspective, 64% of men and an even larger percentage of women found those grievances unjust. Similarly, 68% of both adults and youth gave a negative answer. Only a tiny minority, just 1% across all ages and genders, found the grievances of terrorist groups justified.

However, there is a significant discrepancy between urban and rural perspectives: 80% of urban residents found such grievances unjustified, compared to 59% in rural areas. A tentative explanation might be that urban residents, having more formal education and greater access to information, are more informed about these issues, a more critical perspective that less influenced by religion.

5. AWARENESS OF PUBLIC STRUCTURES DEDICATED TO COUNTERING TERRORISM



Graphic 5: Are you aware of any initiatives to combat extremism?



Graphic 6: Are you aware of any initiatives to combat extremism? (Sex)

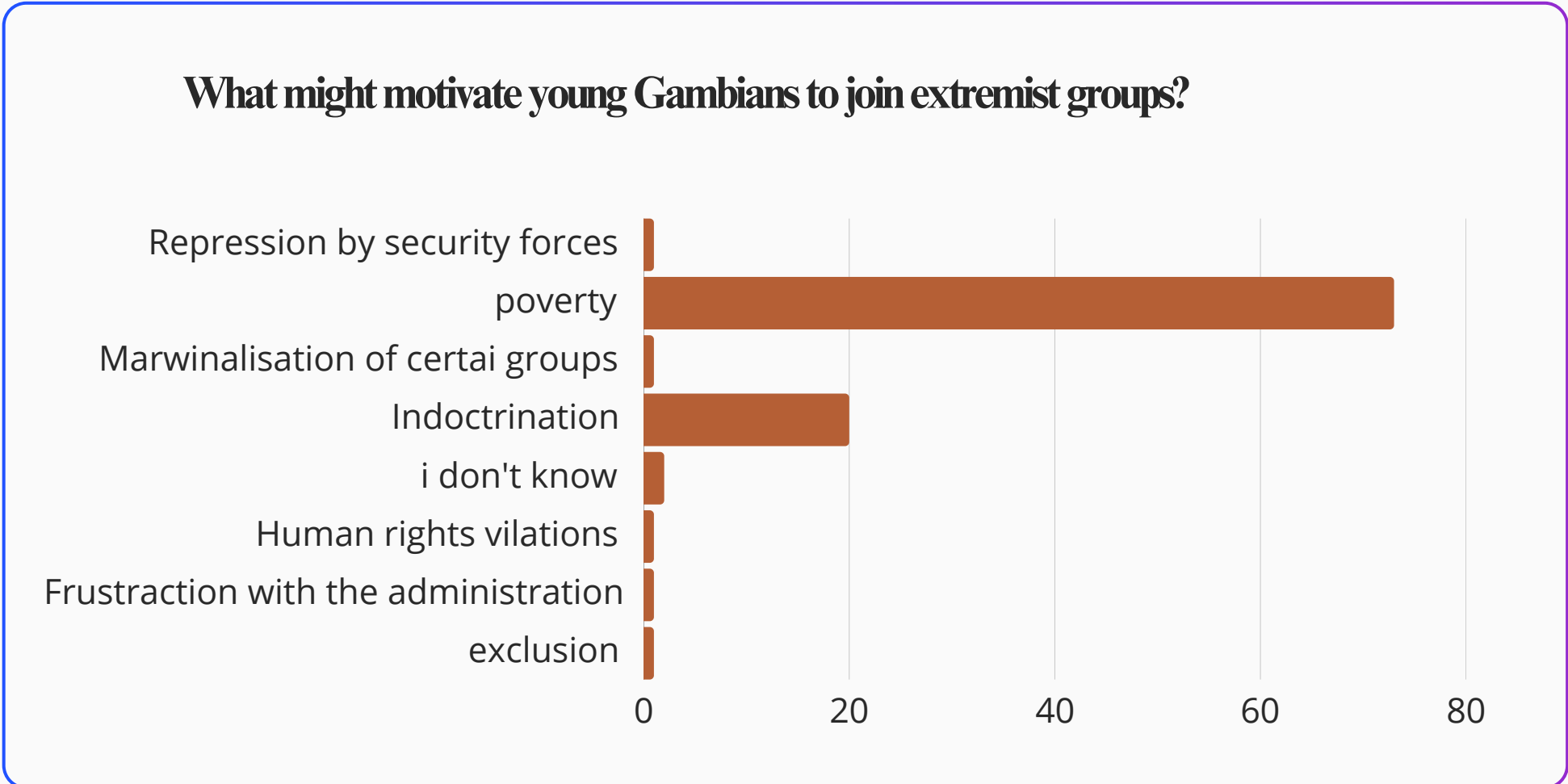
An overwhelming 99% of respondents reported a lack of awareness of initiatives to prevent extremism, across all variables such as age and sex. This clearly indicates that no government or civil society extremism prevention initiatives have been rolled out in the country. At best, a few respondents mentioned some advocacy activities conducted by non-governmental organizations, such as those organized by the UN Peace Fund or attended by government officials or the Red Cross.

The survey showed that there have been no government-led prevention initiatives, or if there were, they remained unknown to the relevant target groups. This points to a strategic gap that needs to be filled as soon as possible. However, to effectively run prevention and public awareness campaigns, it is essential to understand the factors and root causes of radicalization

UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAUSES, ACTORS, AND AREAS WHERE SIGNS OF EXTREMISM APPEAR IN GAMBIA

UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAUSES, ACTORS, AND AREAS WHERE SIGNS OF EXTREMISM APPEAR IN GAMBIA

Perceptions on Radicalization Drivers: The Dominance of Precariousness Over Internet Influence



Graphic 7: What might motivate young Gambians to join extremist groups?

Beyond the difficulty posed by the conceptual consideration relating to the distinction between radicalization and violent extremism, young people point to a number of social realities that may carry the seeds of long-term religious radicalism. The trilogy of "unemployment-poverty-social exclusion" in several studies of the radicalization factors, including in this one, is striking, and at the same time raises the debate on the effective implementation of existing public policies. In effect, 73% of respondents in the current study name poverty as main motivation for Gambian youth to join a jihadist group, compared to 20% who cited indoctrination.

Indeed, the socio-economic frustrations faced by African youth, contribute greatly to their radicalization, which is initially a means of giving meaning to an existence that is little valued by most systems of governments in place, before the externalization of this frustration through violence.

Furthermore, the progress made by information and communication technologies in recent decades, particularly the Internet, have facilitated the spread of terrorist groups on the web. This is to a lesser extent a channel for radicalization, recruitment of "jihad" candidates and, ultimately, terrorism.

1. PRECARITY AS A DRIVER OF RADICALIZATION: UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, EXTERNAL INFLUENCES IDENTIFIED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

At first glance, the question of factors leading to radicalization is fundamental to better understand the phenomenon. International, regional, and sub-regional organizations, as well as states and research institutes, have grasped this and are increasingly focusing on these factors. An external perspective might identify religious fanaticism, lack of education, ignorance, among others, as explanatory arguments without delving into the role socio-economic determinants might play. This is the view of this prominent religious leader from Vélingara, Senegal, who believes that "the ignorant are more exposed to radicalization than others,"[1] an argument supported by an administrative official who criticizes ignorance as "the cause of radicalization and itself the driving element." [2]

However, on closer inspection, radicalization is, according to a self-reflective view of young people, a means of expressing socio-economic frustrations. At least that's what young people often assert when questioned about this issue. The urban malaise of African centers (unemployment and poverty), as noted during the survey whereby an overwhelming majority of youth respondents, 76%, compared to 61% of adults, name poverty as the main driver of radicalization. This is congruent with findings of research conducted by UNDP, in Ghana.

In effect, despite, Ghana strong democratic credentials and a relatively peaceful process, weak local governance, corruption, clientelism, as reflected in a UNDP report, relate to the growing frustration of young people, moving towards radicalization. (*Vulnerability Assessment on the Threats of Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Northern Regions of Ghana*, 2023)

[1] Timbuktu Institute op.cit. p 4

[2] Ibid.

There are common features between the Gambia and Ghana. Having a relatively peaceful political and socio-economic process and a seemingly progressive democracy does not dismiss the legitimate concerns of citizens in the face of radicalism and extremism. Although the perspective uncovered in the course of a data collection on radicalization in the Gambia is not in the extreme, political forms of radicalism remain highly visible among youth. The vulnerabilities that exist among communities and young people can be seen as potential drivers of radicalization and extremism. The same survey revealed common theme expressed by participants emphasizing the prevailing governance challenges that failed to address the plight of young people in the country. [1]

It is interesting to note that, with regard to radicalization a large number of respondents in the survey tend to associate it with all behaviors considered or simply perceived as deviant by society, including radical political protest, criminal activities or even irregular migration. The assumption appears to be that all disadvantaged and marginalized youth who engage in uncivil behavior or outright criminal activities may at be at risk of recruitment or drifting into religiously motivated violent extremism. This can be interpreted as a fact that violent extremist manifestations and weak signals have yet to observed in the Gambia, and therefore does not raise security alarm among the population, as is the case in many neighboring countries.

Regarding the nexus between unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, marginalization and risk of radicalization, this study shows that insufficient job opportunities within the country is a significant factor contributing to radicalization.

Furthermore, such circumstances can lead youths to form gangs as they resort to engaging in various criminal activities to secure financial resources. Specifically, a considerable number of young individuals take it upon themselves to generate income through any means necessary, driven by the perception that government is not sufficiently addressing their needs, forcing to navigate survival on the streets.

An additional illustrative example pertains to migration, as many perceive that achieving independence and self-reliance is contingent upon migrating to Europe. Furthermore, the inherent lack of a developmental framework that has failed over the years to provide a panacea for spiraling youth unemployment, a common phenomenon singled out by participants as a key criterion for the radicalization of young people. Government policy in the past and present has failed to pay dividends in providing young people with much-needed skills, and there is a general feeling that young people are left to make their own choices and fend for themselves. These choices, in some cases, are in the extreme form of taking the route via sea to reach Europe, a common journey described as the 'backway.'

2 . NEXUS BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND RADICALIZATION

The enduring enigma of unemployment in The Gambia has defied resolution by successive governments since gaining independence under the leadership of its three presidents. Research has identified unemployment as a pivotal driver of radicalization, embedding this issue as a persistent and intricate challenge for policymakers.

The 2018 Gambia Bureau of Statistics Survey (GBOS) alarmingly placed youth unemployment at 41.5%, a staggering statistic considering the demographic makeup of the country's youth. Despite this, government initiatives persistently produce policy documents aimed at addressing youth unemployment. These include the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) from 2003 to 2008, the National Employment Policy spanning 2010 to 2014, and an integrated midterm development strategy as part of the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Development (PAGE) between 2012 and 2015 (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

The overarching objective of these policy documents is to stimulate growth through development and enhance youth employment. Under the current government, The National Development Plan (NDP) from 2017 to 2021, serving as The Gambia's development blueprint, has guided the government during this period. Furthermore, the National Employment Policy (NEP) spanning 2020 to 2024 is still operational until its scheduled expiration in 2024.

The effectiveness of these measures in ameliorating acute unemployment remains uncertain, evident in the palpable failure to alleviate the overwhelming unemployment crisis. The economic situation continues to deteriorate, as highlighted by recent Afrobarometer data[1] indicating a significant decline, exacerbating the frustrations of the youth. In the three-phase data collection, public sentiment regarding the country's direction escalated from 28% in 2018 to 60% in 2021, reaching a substantial 79% in 2022.

3. INDOCTRINATION BY FOREIGN RELIGIOUS GROUPS SECOND PERCEIVED DRIVER OF RADICALIZATION?

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected in the context of this report pinpointed indoctrination, notably by foreign groups as the perceived second major risk of radicalization of youth in the Gambia. That was the opinion of 20% of respondents. In terms of channels or means of indoctrination, most respondents opined that the Gambia being geographical far afield from Sahel and other West African countries confronted with terrorism or violent extremist groups' recruitment activities, youth are more at risk of indoctrination by way of online or social media platforms, rather than through physical contacts with radical Islamist propaganda operators.

In addition to unemployment, poverty, and marginalization as critical drivers of radicalization, many respondents provided anecdotal evidence of youth radicalization manifesting as violent protests. These protests were particularly directed against the authorization of private economic activities by foreign investors that negatively impacted the environment and potentially the livelihoods of local communities.

Several respondents[1] cited the incident known as the 'fish meal factories' as a prime example. According to local contacts, several Chinese-owned fish meal factories have caused significant environmental damage. Additionally, local residents accused Chinese companies of overfishing, polluting the environment with fish meal processing plants, and land grabbing. These accusations have led to severe unrest, with incidents where angry protesters burned down a police station in the village of Sanyang and completely vandalized a Chinese-owned fishing and fish processing factory in Nessim.

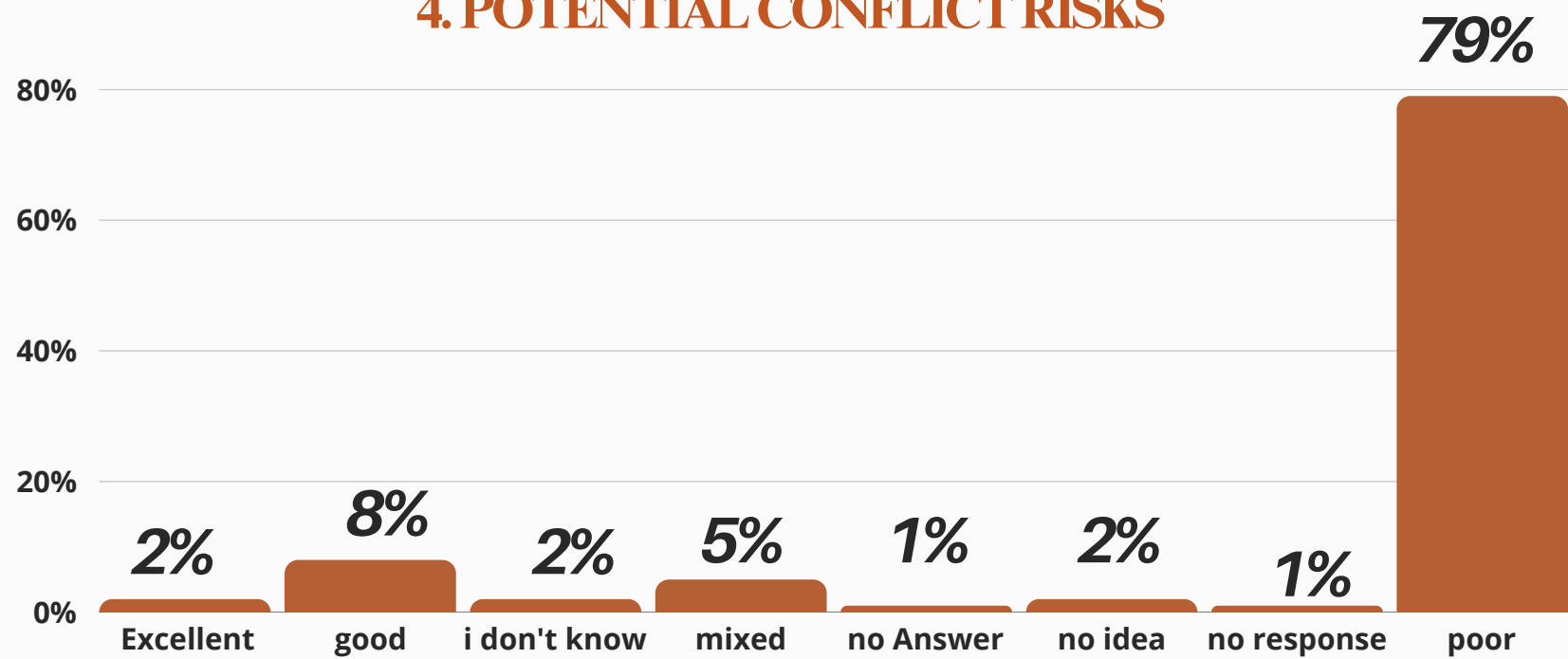
[1] Afrobarometer (2018)

[1] Interview of a local witness of the event, May 2024

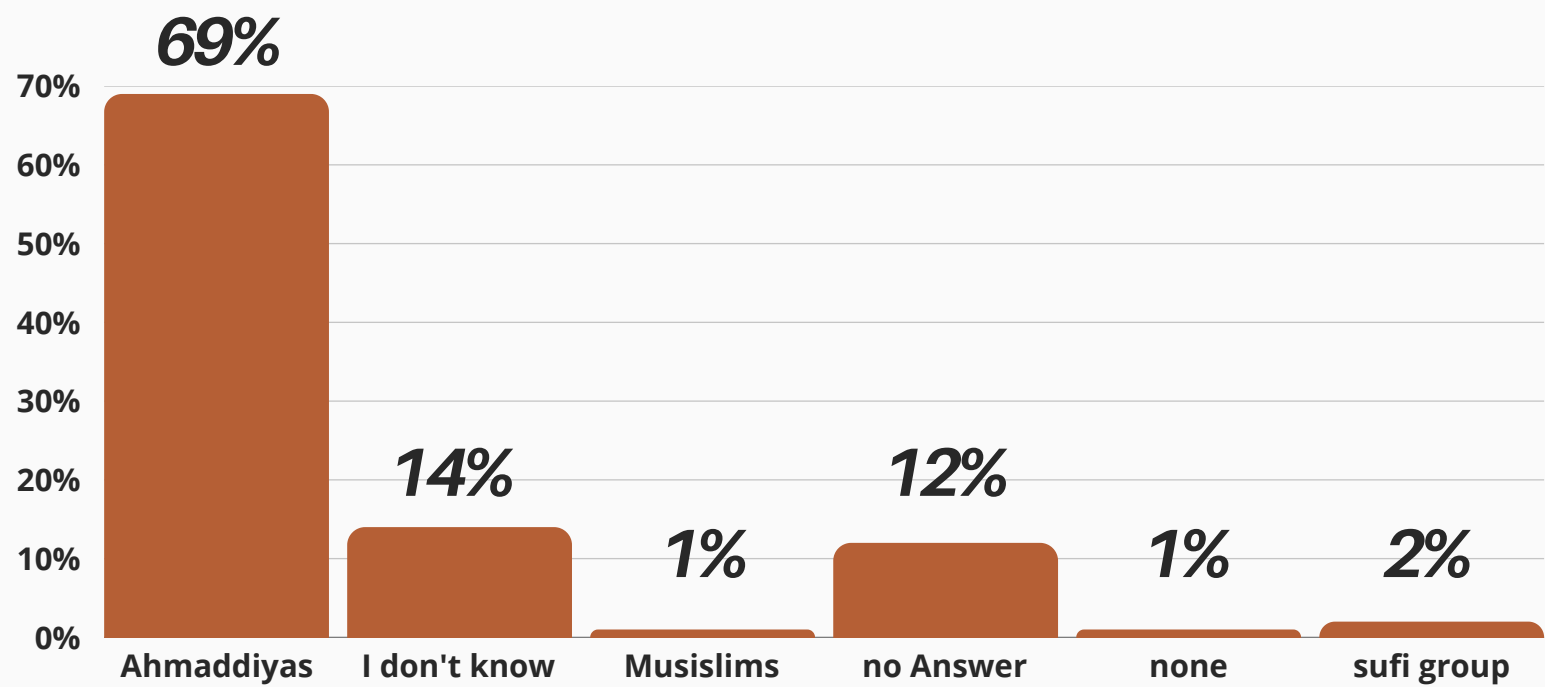
[1] Interview with local Gambian journalist, May 2024

Finally, although it is marginal, 1% of respondents identified human rights violations, particularly by security forces, as a potential driver of radicalization. This perspective is worth considering, especially in light of situations experienced elsewhere in West Africa. In these regions, systemic corruption or the excessive and unlawful use of violence by defense and security forces, including customs officials or park rangers, has fueled youth radicalization. This radicalization often manifests in the form of armed resistance against perceived illegitimate violence. Surveys conducted by the Timbuktu Institute in other West African countries have evidenced this trend.

4. POTENTIAL CONFLICT RISKS



Graphic 8: What is the relationship between the Ahmaddiya Movement and other religious groups in the Gambia?



Graphic 9: Which religious trend could be at the root of violent extremism?

While The Gambia has enjoyed relative peace for decades, recent findings from the Global Peace Index (GPI) suggest the need for increased vigilance. Traditional relationships between ethnic groups and clans have contributed to the country's peacefulness, but contemporary challenges are emerging. Issues such as social media misuse, religious extremism, and verbal violence are on the rise. The lack of regulatory frameworks to manage conflicts fueled by social media is particularly concerning.

Religious intolerance and disrespect for interfaith relations, especially within Islamic groups, present potential sources of tension. Some religious groups have started adopting and spreading radical ideologies, moving towards fundamentalism in their preaching and interpretation of Islamic texts. This shift mirrors characteristics often associated with terrorist networks and could radicalize young Islamic scholars, pushing them towards extreme forms of violence. This trend indicates a worrying potential for increased radicalization and conflict in The Gambia.

The contentious relationship between the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and Sunni Islamic scholars has been identified as a significant potential trigger for conflicts in the country. Prominent scholar Imam Fatty and other Sunni scholars refuse to recognize Ahmadiyya legitimacy within Islam and have shown hostility towards them. Fatty's rhetoric, including urging followers to learn martial arts and attack the Ahmadiyya, has been deemed hate speech.

During the proceedings of the Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (TRRC), lead Council Essa Faal found himself in conflict with Imam Fatty on the same subject during Fatty's testimony before the commission. Scholars aligned with Imam Fatty seem unwilling to reconsider their stance towards the Ahmadiyya, even though the Gambia is a secular republic.

This issue within the Islamic community has been identified by respondents as a significant trigger for conflicts in the country.

In an interview with the Fatu Network, Fatty went further to draw comparisons with the viewpoints of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the Arab world, asserting that these entities oppose the existence of the Ahmadiyya

He emphatically emphasizes this point, as reported by The Fatu Network in 2022. Following the release of the TRRC report, the commission's recommendations aimed at promoting tolerance and respecting the rights of religious minority groups were not well-received by many Sunni scholars, including Imam Fatty. In fact, Fatty launched ferocious attacks against the Ahmadiyya, urging his followers to learn martial arts and be prepared to attack the Ahmadiyya if given such orders (Malagen, 2022). According to Malagen, these statements and rhetoric by Imam Fatty, who is also a former Imam of the State House, constitute hate speech. This hatred and radical inclination are detected by participants during the process of data collection and one respondent understood it very well.

“I see young people in the country, taking extreme right-wing position, especially anchoring such position on religious practices and religious values. Rather than taking a big-level approach or being liberal, they tend to take the extreme fashion, the extreme interpretation of issues and they often want to push that position that is what the religious text and practices said anybody that is not following it is actually not a religious practitioner or adherent of that”

Conflict on the political spectrum in The Gambia is rooted in historical animosities, exacerbated by leaders like Yahya Jammeh. This has resulted in enduring ethnic and political rivalries, notably between supporters of the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC). These tensions are particularly evident in the Jola-dominated Foni region, where the APRC retains influence despite Jammeh's departure from power. The complexities of these interwoven dynamics pose significant challenges for sustaining peace and stability.

To strengthen peace and stability in the country, the endorsement of tolerance must stand as a fundamental principle shaping democratic governance. It is crucial to ensure that the exercise of individual rights does not infringe upon the rights of others. Political and religious figures should instill and protect these criteria, aiming for a more profound state of peace within the country.

[1] Transcript of interview with a Banjul male resident, November 2023

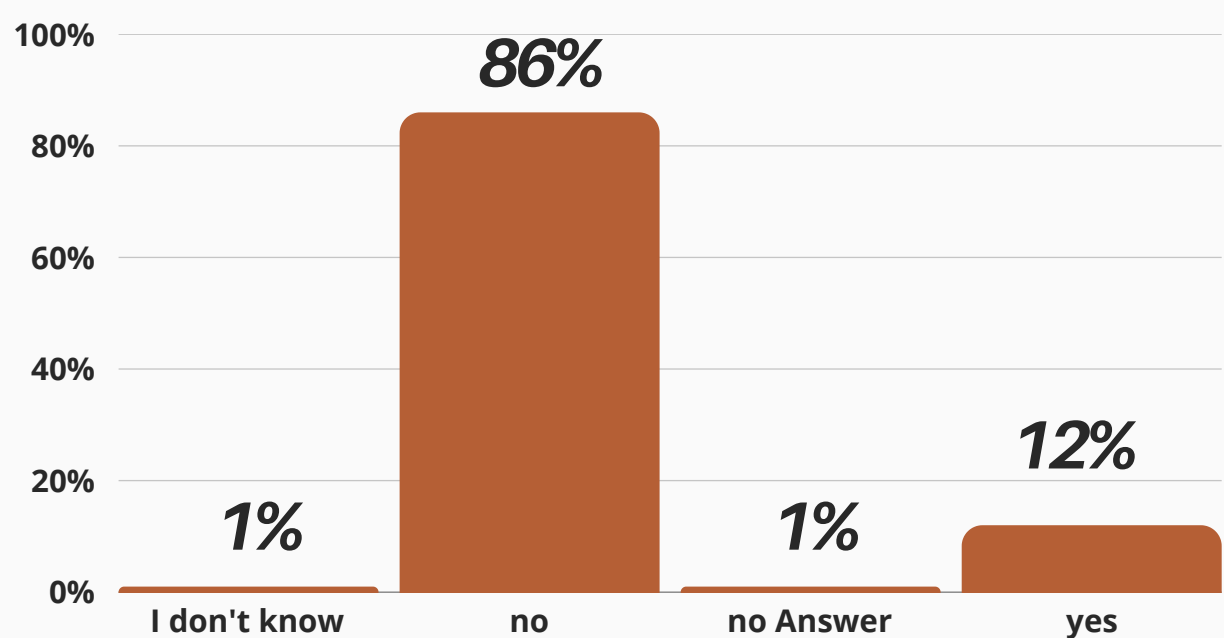
[1] Interview with a Banjul male resident in November 2023

The qualitative survey highlighted contentious relations between the Ahmadiyya Islamic group and local Islamic groups, which is strongly corroborated by quantitative survey findings. When asked which religious trends could be at the root of violent extremism, 72% of male respondents and 69% of female respondents cited the Ahmadiyya group. Conversely, only 1% named Sufi

orders. An overwhelming majority of respondents view members of certain groups as potential sources of violent extremist activities or intercommunal conflicts.

However, it is significant to note that regarding the perception of tension and risks of intercommunal strife, 92% of women and 82% of men perceive no actual risks of intercommunal confrontation. Beyond intercommunal conflict risk factors, respondents were questioned about other general structural causes: 62% identified ignorance, 25% cited ideology, and 5% pointed to foreign interference.

Have you noticed any tensions or clashes between different religious communities in the Gambia?



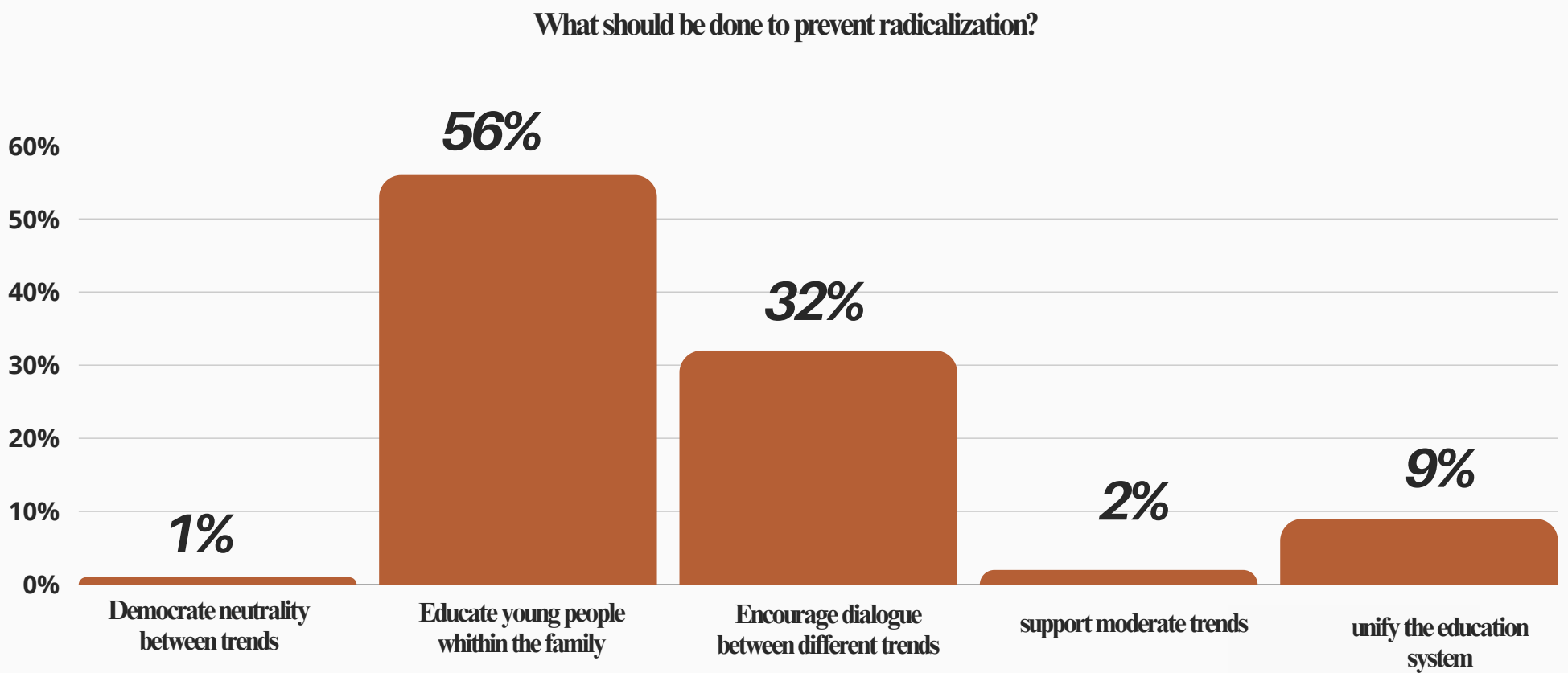
Graphic 10: Have you noticed any tensions or clashes between different religious communities in the Gambia

There is an overall peaceful intercommunal coexistence in the Gambia. Asked if they have noticed any tensions or clashed between different religious communities in the Gambia, 86 of respondent in the quantitative survey supplied a negative answer. However, a few respondents, mentioned isolated conflicts between Muslims and Christians. These conflicts often involve Protestant Nigerians running church services in Serekunda, the biggest and most populated town in The Gambia. During their services, they sing and play loud music. In one instance, Muslim residents in Tallinding attacked church worshippers, accusing them of being loud and disruptive during Muslim prayer times. The conflict was peacefully resolved.

For instance, in May 2022, an arson attack occurred in Kerr Mor Ali village in the Central River Region near the Senegal border[1]. The incident targeted a religious subgroup, resulting in the burning of a place of worship and several houses. Police attributed the attack to inter-religious tensions between different religious groups with varying practices, highlighting lingering intolerance. A Senegalese national, Sagarr Ceesay Seck from Kerr Mane village in the Kaffrine region, was accused of being the ringleader behind the arson. Fourteen other men initially pleaded not guilty during their first court appearance in June 2022 and were remanded in custody pending further police investigations. The mastermind of the incident belongs to the Baye-Fall, a subgroup of the Senegal-based Mourid Sufi order, which sometimes practices Islam in heterodox ways.

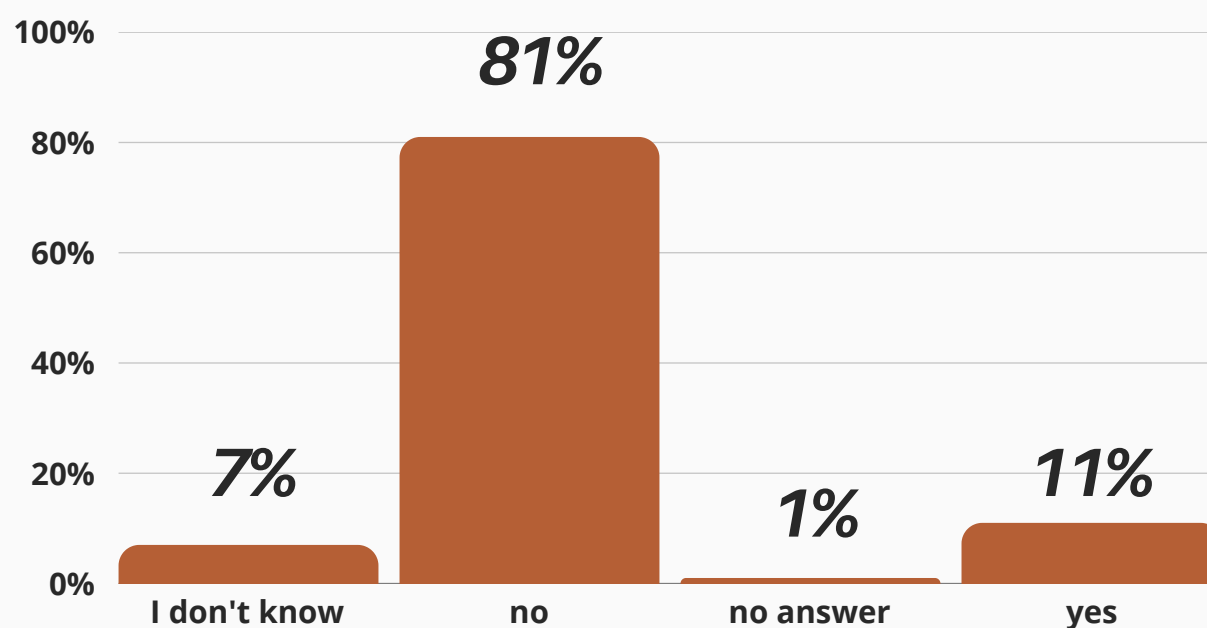
It is important to emphasize that these few rare cases of interreligious incidents pit local populations against foreign religious groups with differing socio-religious practices. These incidents often find swift local solutions to continue peaceful coexistence and do not seem to pose a serious risk of major conflict or radicalization leading to violent extremism.

All these dynamics must work together to strengthen peace and stability in the country. Tolerance should be a fundamental principle shaping the nation's democratic governance, ensuring the exercise of individual rights does not infringe on the rights of others. This commitment to tolerance is essential for fostering a profound state of peace within the country.



[1] Interview with a local resident, May 2024

Graphic 11: What should be done to prevent radicalization?

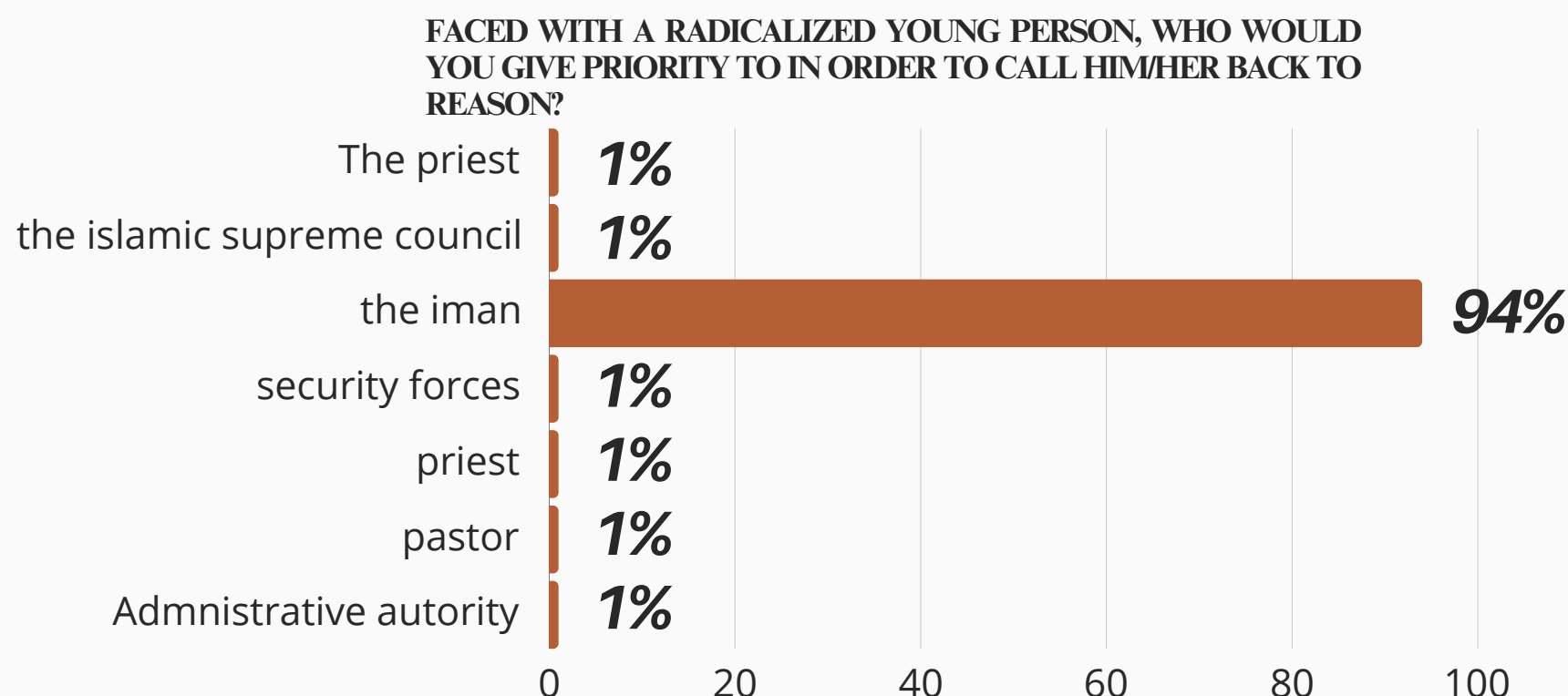


Graphic 11: What should be done to prevent radicalization?

Regarding strategies to prevent radicalization, 56% of respondents interviewed in this survey stated that educating people within their family would be the best approach, whilst 32% opined that dialogue between different trends of Islam would be the solution. It is worth noting that 9% suggest that unifying koranic and state-controlled school would serve the purpose.

As far the security approach is concerned, 80% of surveyed citizens, don't believe that defense and security forces are adequately equipped to combat violent extremism.

Key Actors for prevention of individual youth radicalization: The Imam is the first point of reference when dealing with a radicalized youth.



Graphic 13: Faced with a radicalized young person, who would you give priority to in order to call him/her back to reason?

Questioned about who they would prioritize to call to reason a person being radicalized, 94% of respondents cited the Imam, while only 1% indicated the Superior Islamic Council or administrative authority. This underscores the pivotal role of the Imam in addressing both individual and collective instances of radicalization. This role is even more significant in rural areas, accounting for 97% of the effort compared to the broader religious institution represented by the Islamic Supreme Council.

In broader terms, the fight against radicalization and violent extremism involves key actors such as governmental bodies, religious and traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and community leaders. The government's pivotal role lies in formulating policies to address the root causes of radicalization, particularly youth unemployment, despite past shortcomings in translating policies into meaningful employment opportunities.

Vocational and skills institutions are essential in enhancing the capabilities of young individuals. However, addressing the disparity between graduates and job opportunities is crucial to prevent behavioral inconsistencies among youth. The National Development Plan (NDP) has been criticized for neglecting youth priorities, contributing to their radicalization. A holistic policy vision focusing on skills development, job creation, and strengthening law enforcement capabilities is necessary.

As highlighted by quantitative data, religious leaders, especially Imams and Pastors, command significant respect and trust in the country. They could more proactively play a crucial role in combating radicalization through positive messages promoting peace, respect for institutions, unity, and harmonious coexistence.

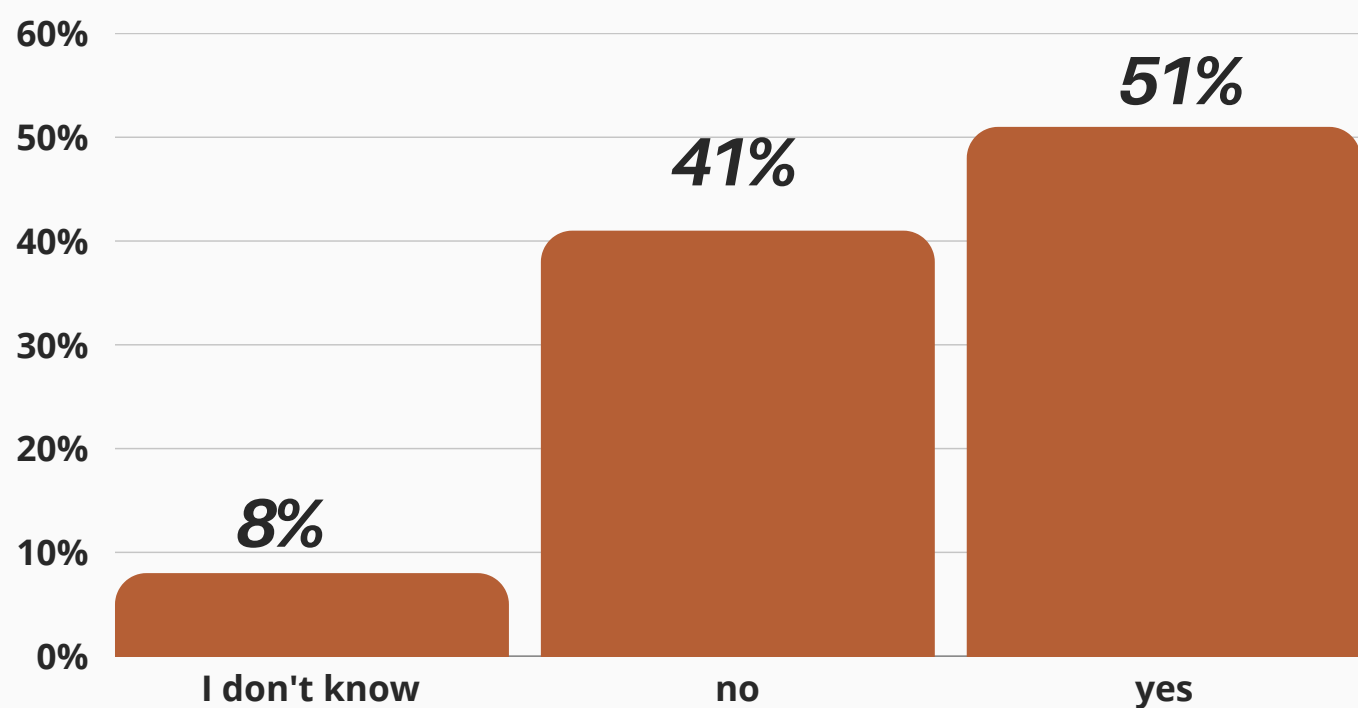
Traditional leaders also have substantial influence in instilling cultural values of peace, particularly among young people. Civil society organizations advocate for peace, lobby for youth interests within the government, conduct community outreach and sensitization programs, and advocate against irregular migration.

These combined efforts are essential to effectively combat radicalization and promote stability within the country.

UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE PHENOMENON

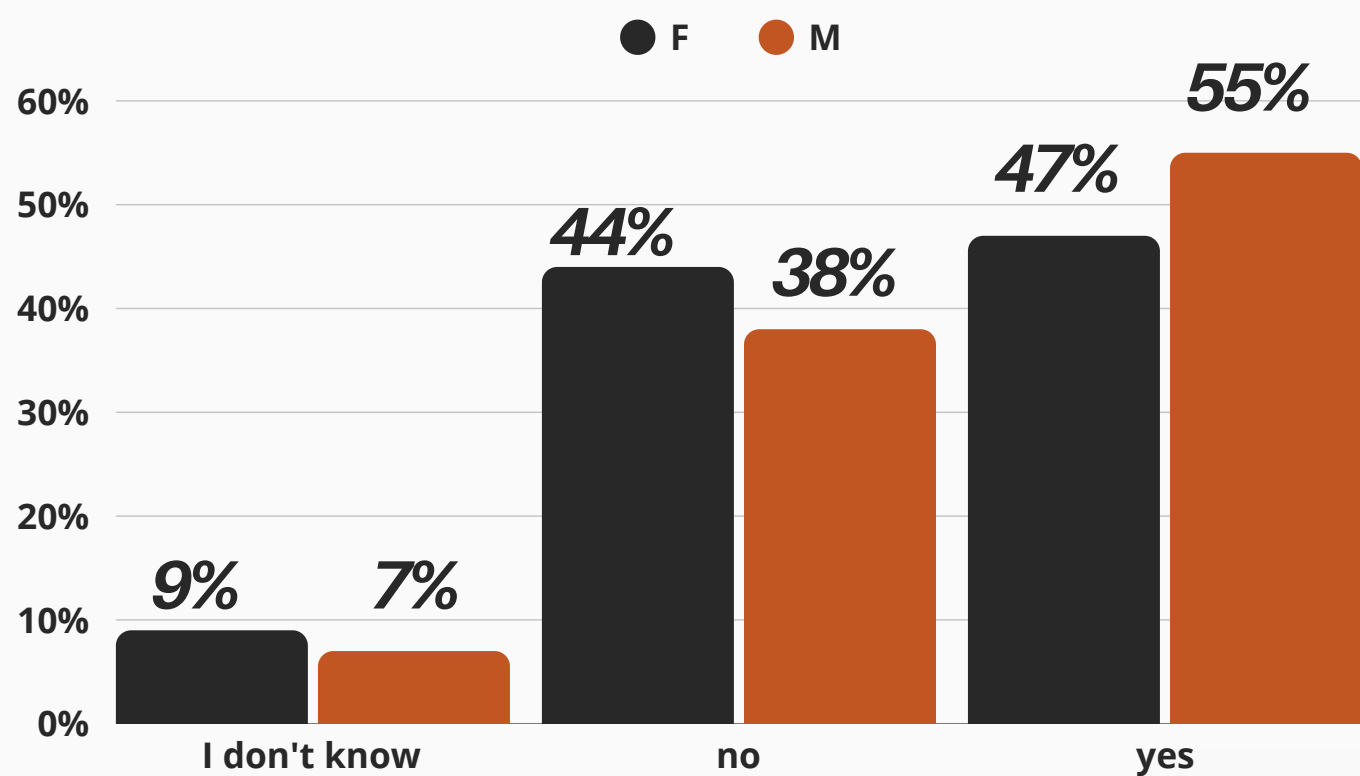
UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE PHENOMENON

Do you think men and women have the same rights?

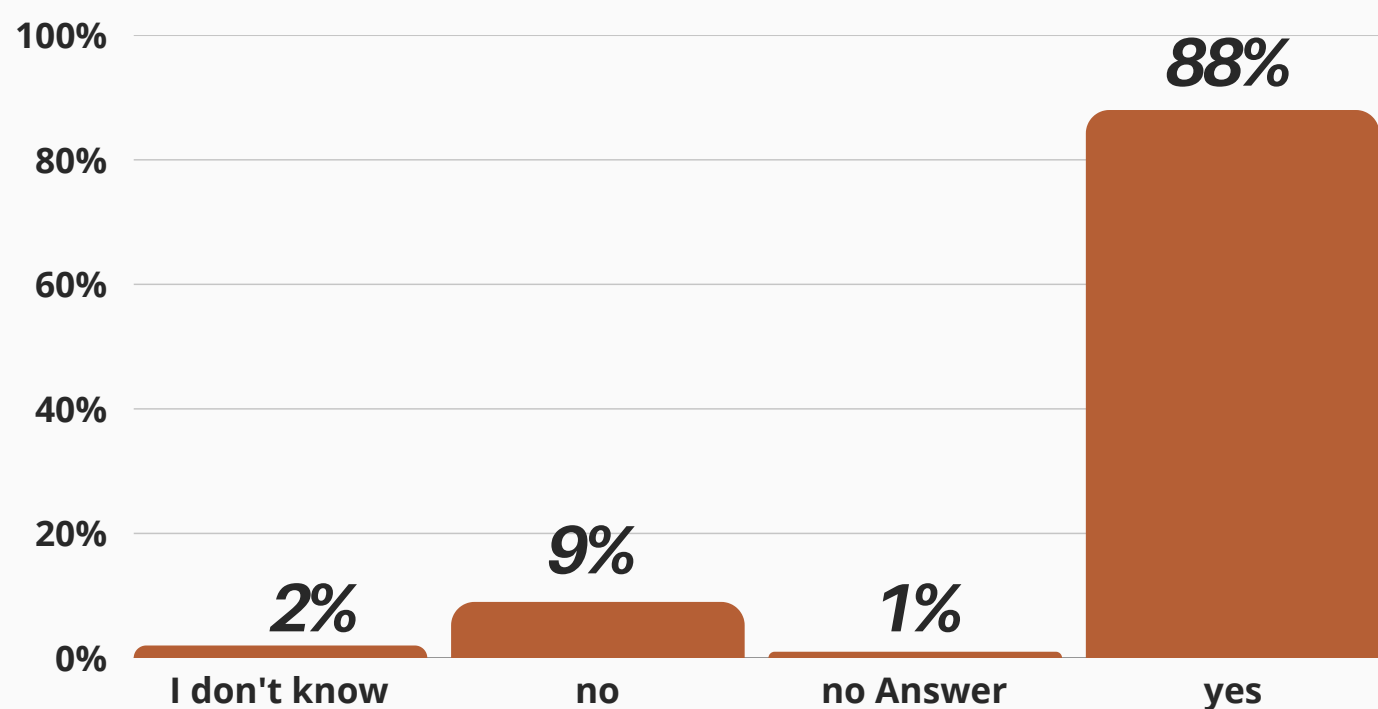


Graphic 14: Do you think men and women have the same rights?

Do you think men and women have the same rights? (Sex)

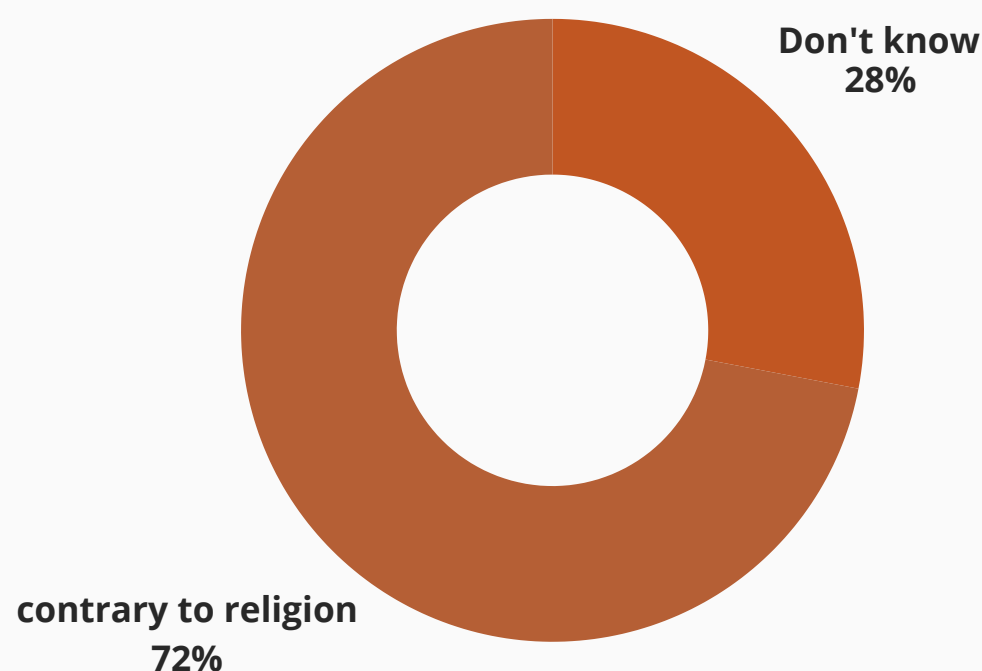


Graphic 15: Do you think men and women have the same rights? (Sex)



Graphic 16: Can women play a positive role in preventing radicalization?

In your opinion, is violence against women:



Graphic 17: In your opinion, is violence against women

Addressing the gender dimension in the fight against violent extremism in general and in the Gambia in particular is essential in promoting peace, security and development in the country.

By recognizing the unique experiences and roles of women and girls, and ensuring their meaningful participation in prevention and peacebuilding efforts, relevant authorities work towards a more inclusive and sustainable approach to countering violent extremism.

In effect, UN Security Council Resolution 1325[1], emphasizes the need to mainstream gender perspective in all peace security initiatives and highlight the importance of women's rights and empowerment in building sustainable peace.

When asked whether they think that men and women have the same rights, a slight majority of respondents, 51%, answered yes, while 41% gave a negative answer. A majority of men, 55%, compared to 47% of women, gave a positive answer. Interestingly, 55% of men answered positively, while 44% of women, compared to 38% of men, believed that both sexes do not have equal rights.

[1] The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000, is a landmark resolution that recognizes the important role of women in peace and security processes.

From an inter-generational perspective, there is a significant gap in views on gender equality. Specifically, 55% of youth, above the general population rating of 51%, believe that women and men have the same rights, compared to only 35% of adult respondents. There is also a notable geographical discrepancy, with 65% of urban residents, compared to 35% of their rural counterparts, believing that men and women have equal rights.

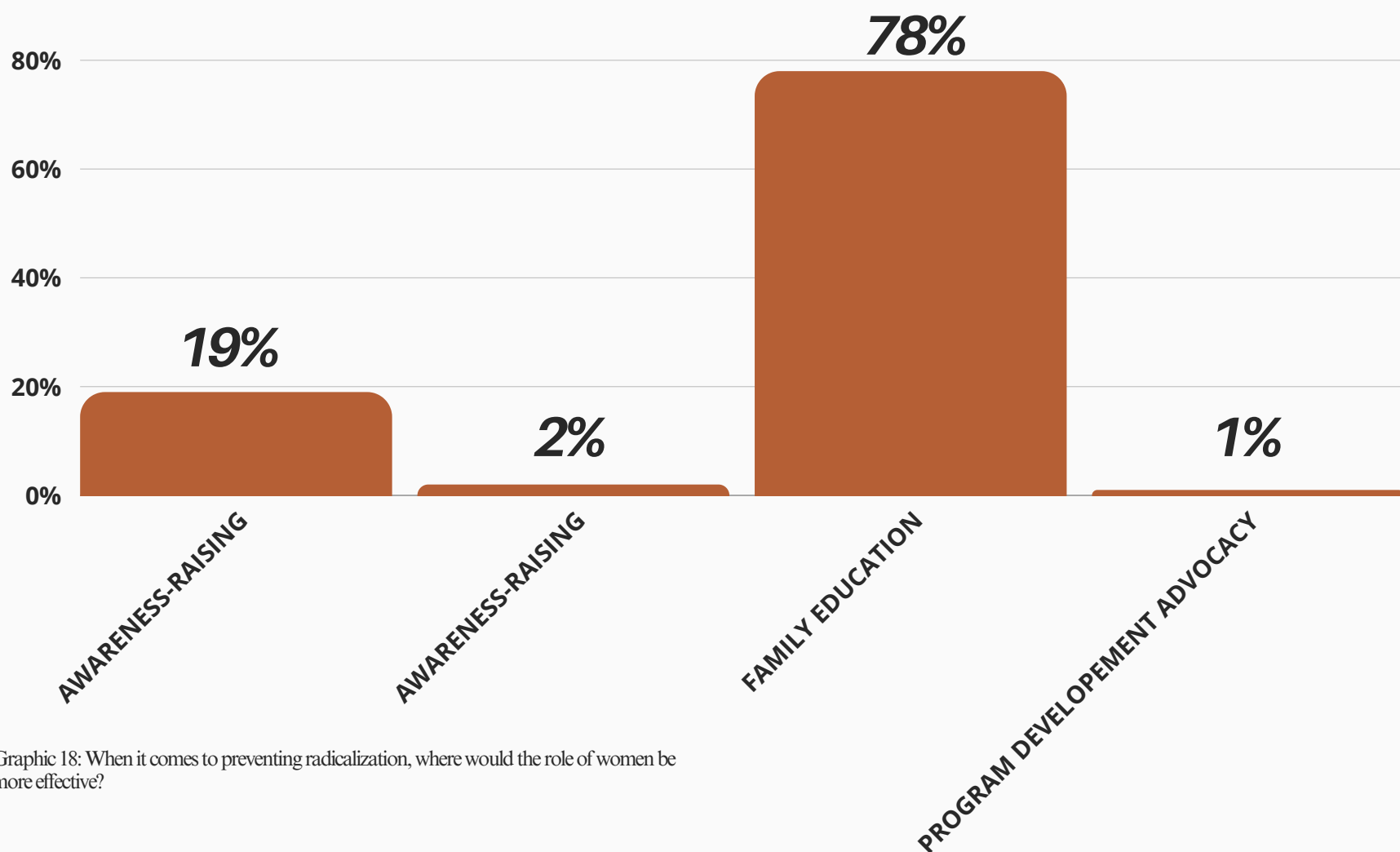
One caveat may be that the answers, especially from the 44% of women who opined that men and women do not have equal rights, may reflect the perception of existing social realities rather than philosophical ideals that posit all genders are entitled to equal rights

Interestingly, if one considers the age variable, a majority of youth, 55%, the highest percentage, across socio-demographic variables, consider that men and women have equal rights, the percentage is down to 35% among adult respondents.

[1] The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000, is a landmark resolution that recognizes the important role of women in peace and security processes.

Empowering Women: The Key to Preventing Radicalization

When it comes to preventing radicalization, where would the role of women be more effective?



Graphic 18: When it comes to preventing radicalization, where would the role of women be more effective?

When asked whether women can play a more important role in preventing violent extremism, an overwhelming majority of respondents answered positively. Notably, despite the majority belief among men that men and women don't have equal rights, an overwhelming majority of both men and women, across all variables, firmly believe that women could play a positive role in the fight against radicalization.

Regarding the specific roles women could play, 78% of respondents indicated the education of children and youth at the family level, suggesting a recognition of women's educational skills that might be effectively leveraged in the family context from an early age. According to the survey, 19% of respondents also suggested that women could play a critical role in awareness-raising and public enlightenment activities.

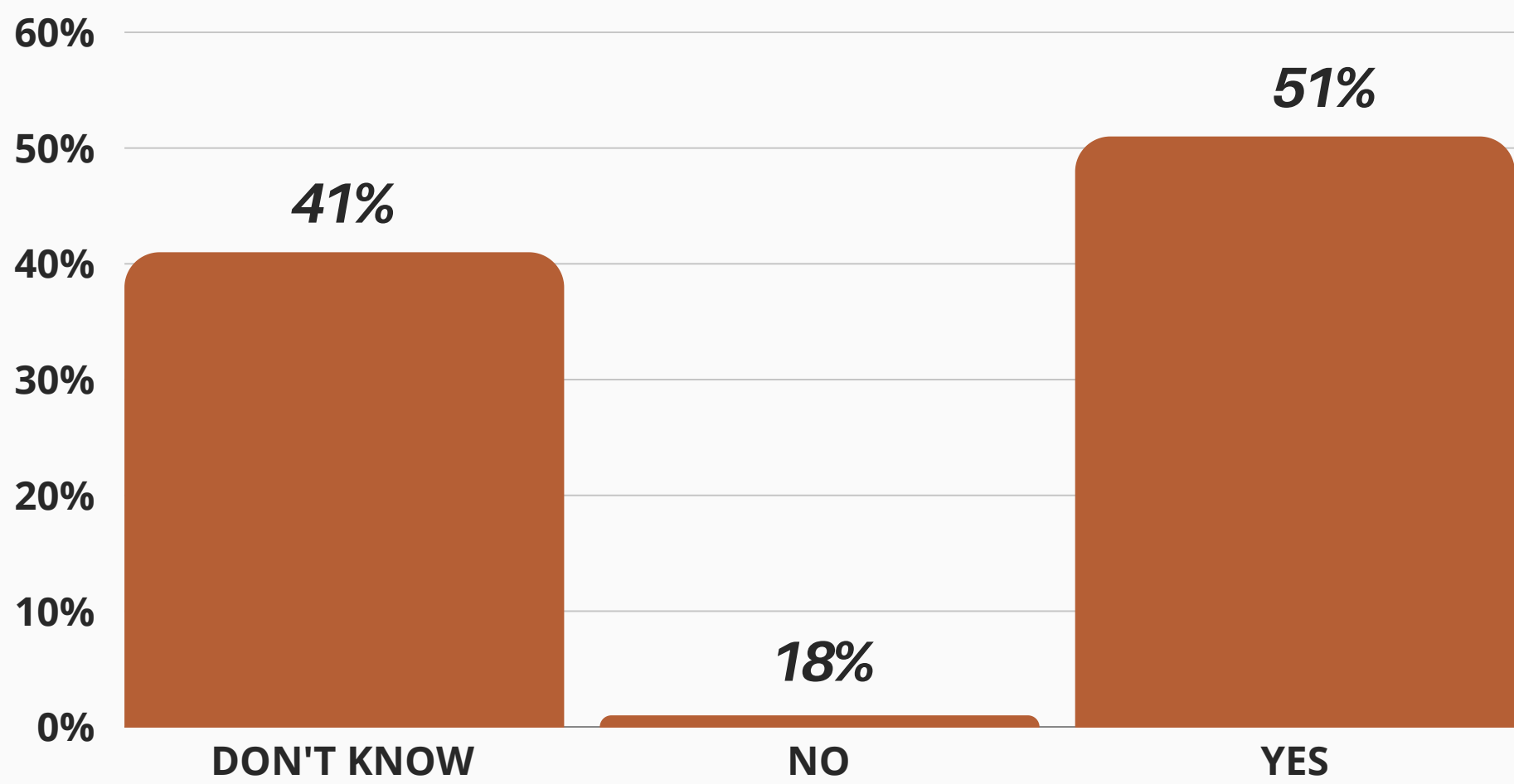
However, despite recognizing the key role women can play in the fight against radicalization, 61% of respondents consider men more effective, whereas 20% expressed the view that men and women are equally effective.

As respondents see great potential in empowering women in the fight against violent extremism, a large majority, 72%, expressed the view that violence against women is contrary to Islam. This percentage is much higher among urban residents, at 92%, compared to 55% in rural areas. Urban residents, who are usually more formally educated than their rural counterparts, can be assumed to have been exposed to information about gender-based violence (GBV) and influenced by their better familiarity with laws punishing such offenses.

IDENTIFYING POSSIBLE RESILIENCE FACTORS AGAIN VIOLENT EXTREMISM

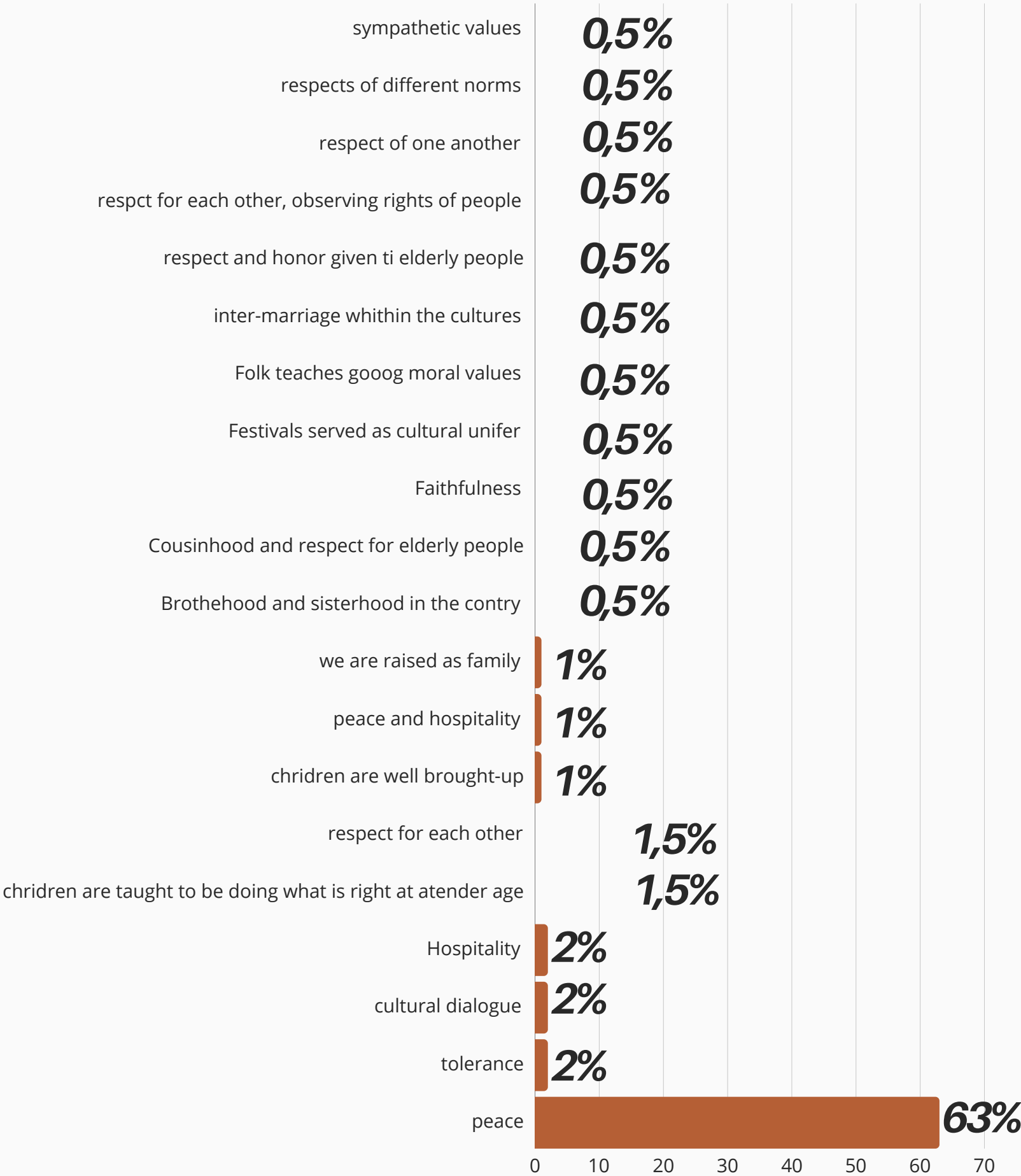
IDENTIFYING POSSIBLE RESILIENCE FACTORS AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Are there any cultural values in The Gambia that could protect against violent extremism?



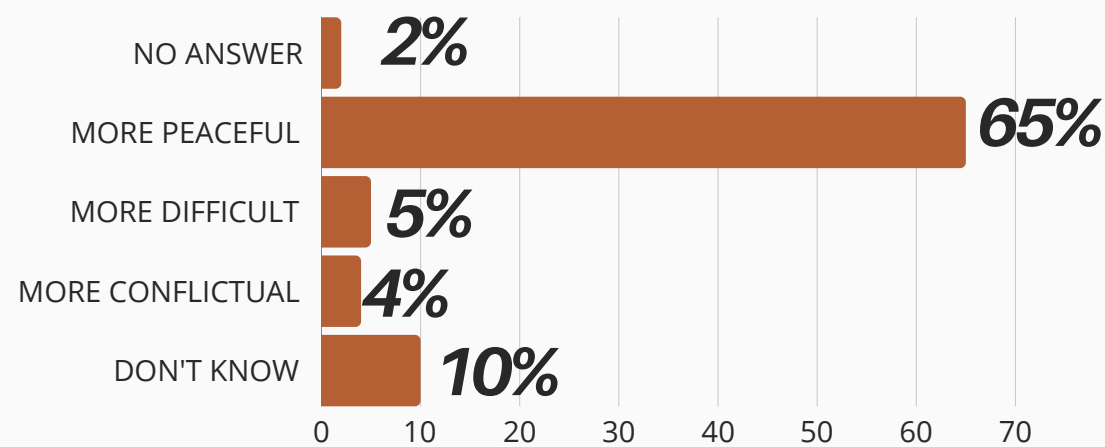
Graphic 19: Are there any cultural values in The Gambia that could protect against violent extremism?

Cultural values in The Gambia that could protect against violent extremism



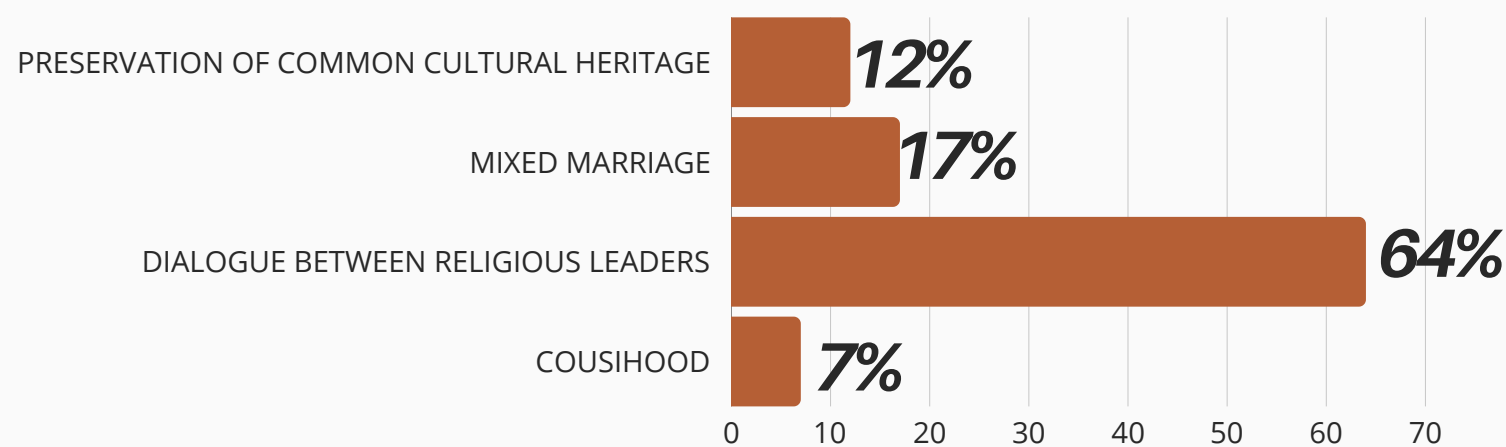
Graphic 20: Cultural values in The Gambia that could protect against violent extremism

For you, Gambia's cultural/ethnic diversity is:



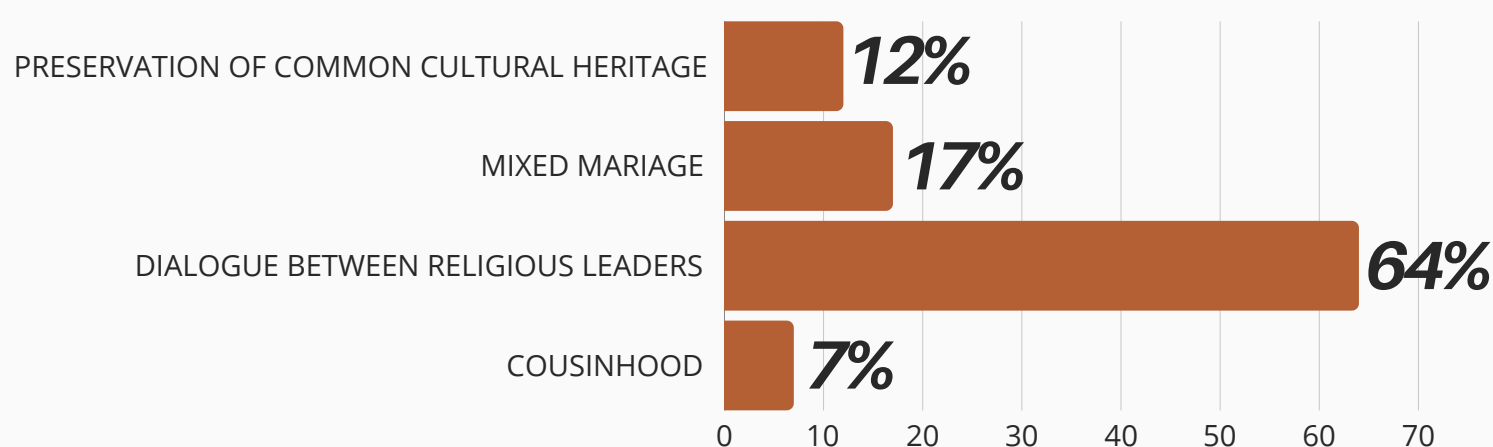
Graphic 21: For you, Gambia's cultural/ethnic diversity is:

In your opinion, in the next 5 years, will inter-religious relations in the Gambia be:



Graphic 22: In your opinion, in the next 5 years, will inter-religious relations in the Gambia be:

In your opinion, what can prevent the emergence of ethnic or religious conflicts?



Graphic 23: In your opinion, what can prevent the emergence of ethnic or religious conflicts?

Although the perspectives uncovered during the data collection on radicalization in The Gambia are not extreme, political and economic forms of radicalism remain highly visible among young people. The vulnerabilities within communities and among young people in The Gambia can be seen as potential drivers of radicalization and extremism. The research revealed a common theme among participants, emphasizing prevailing governance challenges that have failed to address the plight of young people in the country.

The spillover effects of radicalization and violent extremism, as seen in other parts of the Sahel region, may not have taken a foothold in The Gambia yet. However, the data analysis suggests that perhaps the opportunities to connect with radical networks have not yet penetrated Gambian society to the extent they have in countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and Niger

One participant stated, “I think radicalization is not a problem in The Gambia because we have not seen its manifestation. But the state is sitting on a time bomb, particularly because of the environment. Mali, and the rest of them. The CSOs also need to pay particular attention to issues of radicalization and extremism. And we need to do more education and sensitization.”

The reasons for this could include The Gambia's geographic positioning and its security enclave by Senegal on all fronts. Furthermore, the prevalence of radicalizing and violent extremists may be slowed down due to limited cross-border activities with already exposed countries.

Nonetheless, given the high crime rates and the inability of security forces to mitigate crimes, interviewees expressed the belief that radicalism is already occurring, albeit at a slow pace. While The Gambia has enjoyed relative peace for decades, recent findings from the Global Peace Index (GPI), ranking 60th globally and 12th in the subregion among 163 independent states, indicate a need for vigilance. Religious and cultural coexistence, symbolized by traditional relationships between ethnic groups and clans, has historically contributed to the country's peacefulness.

When queried about resilience factors against violent extremism and intercommunal strife, the majority of participants identified several pertinent factors. Regarding awareness of positive cultural values, 51% of respondents expressed affirmation, while 41% indicated uncertainty with the response, "I don't know." The latter respondents may intuitively be aware that such values exist but are unable to identify them. In contrast, 1% of respondents gave a negative answer.

Regarding specific values, 63% and 22% of respondents named peace and tolerance, respectively, as core values of Gambian society that protect the country from violent extremism and intercommunal strife. Furthermore, 72% of respondents view cultural diversity as an asset, compared to 2% who perceive it as a source of conflict. In addition, 64% of participants in the study believe that dialogue between religious leaders can prevent violent extremism.

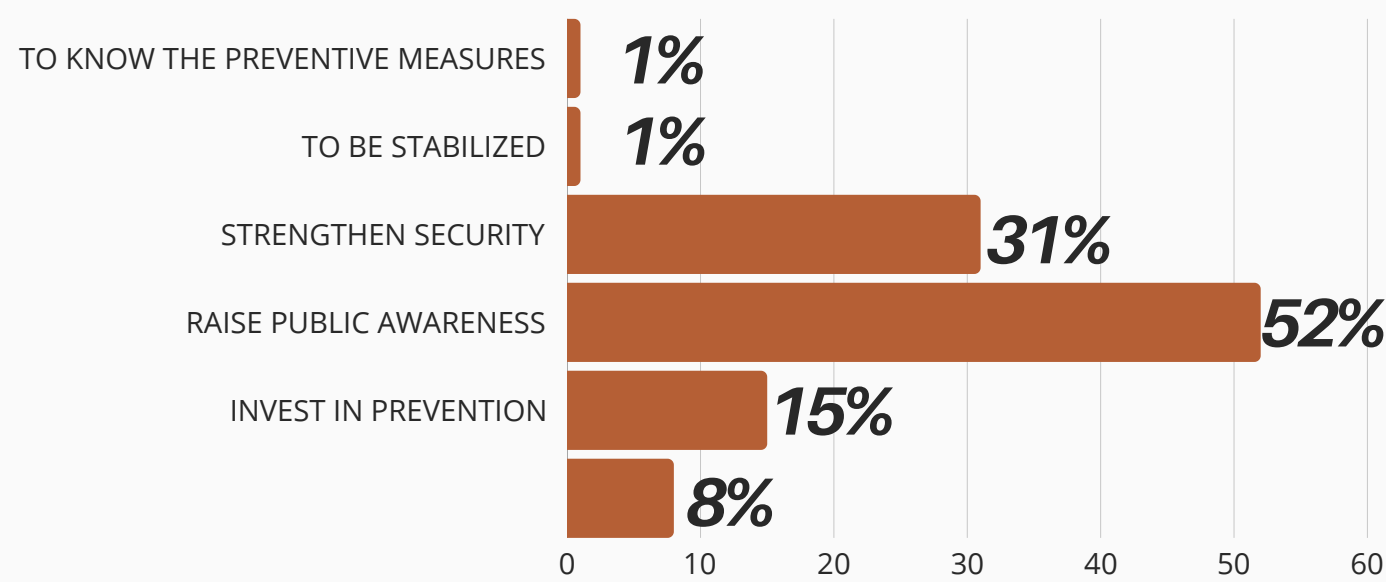
In terms of outlook, 65% of respondents expressed the view that interreligious relations in The Gambia will be more peaceful, compared to 5% who believe the contrary. This optimistic perspective is congruent with the perception of respondents interviewed during the survey, who opine that there is a context of tolerance and religious freedom in The Gambia to practice the religion of one's choice. Also, the fact that The Gambia is predominantly a Muslim country doesn't mean there is no room for other religious groups.

Moreover, culturally and technically, both religions in The Gambia—whether Muslims, including Ahmadis, or all the different Christian denominations—have excellent coexistence. Due to the important role played by both the Supreme Islamic Council and the Christian Council, there is rarely any source of conflict emanating from the different religious groups.

STRATEGIES AND ACTORS FOR PREVENTING ALL FORMS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

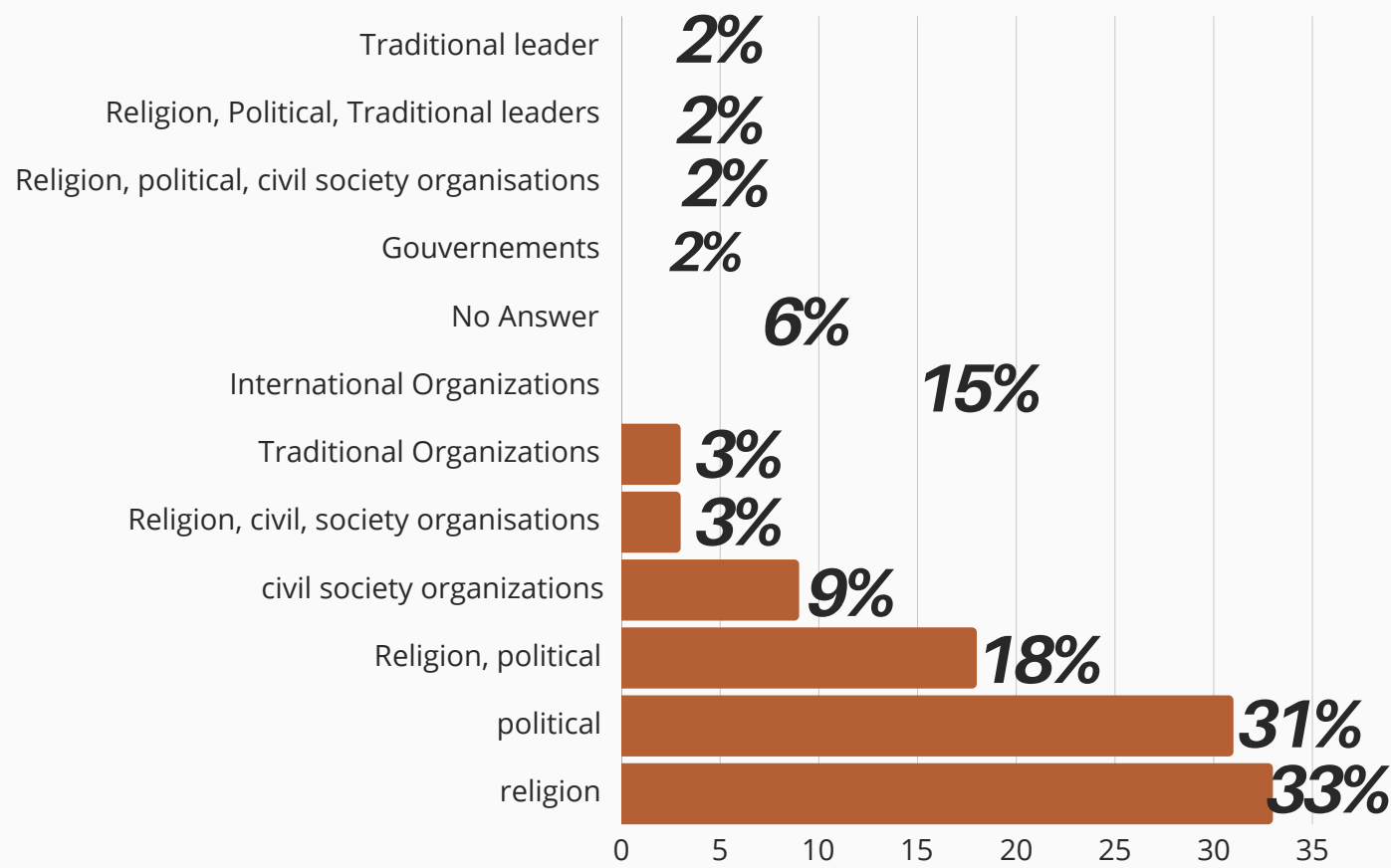
STRATEGIES AND ACTORS FOR PREVENTING ALL FORMS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In your opinion, what needs to be done to prevent all forms of violent extremism in The Gambia?



Graphic 24: In your opinion, what needs to be done to prevent all forms of violent extremism in The Gambia?

Name the players you consider important in the fight against Extremism in The Gambia



Graphic 24: In your opinion, what needs to be done to prevent all forms of violent extremism in The Gambia?

In the ongoing battle against radicalization and violent extremism, certain key actors play indispensable roles, including governmental bodies, religious and traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and community leaders.

The government holds a pivotal role in formulating policies to address the root causes of radicalization, especially concerning unemployment among young people. Past government policies, as illuminated by research, have fallen short in translating into meaningful employment opportunities. Despite the establishment of Technical and Vocational Skills and Training (TVET) institutions like the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI), Management Development Institute (MDI), Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Board (GTHI), Charmen Technical Training Center (CTT), Insight Training Center (ITC), and Soma Scout Training Center (SCTC), the challenge remains: a saturated job market with limited employment prospects. The correlation

between skills enhancement and job creation, a primary governmental responsibility, requires a comprehensive vision in policy interventions and overall development strategy.

Although vocational and skills institutions play a crucial role in enhancing the capabilities of young individuals, it is imperative to delve deeper into the dynamics of job availability in the country. The disparity between the number of graduates and the existing job opportunities has significantly contributed to the emergence of behavioral inconsistencies among the youth, a phenomenon extensively examined in this study. The need for a comprehensive understanding of this relationship underscores the importance of addressing not only skills development but also the creation of a competitive job market to ensure the successful integration of graduates into the workforce.

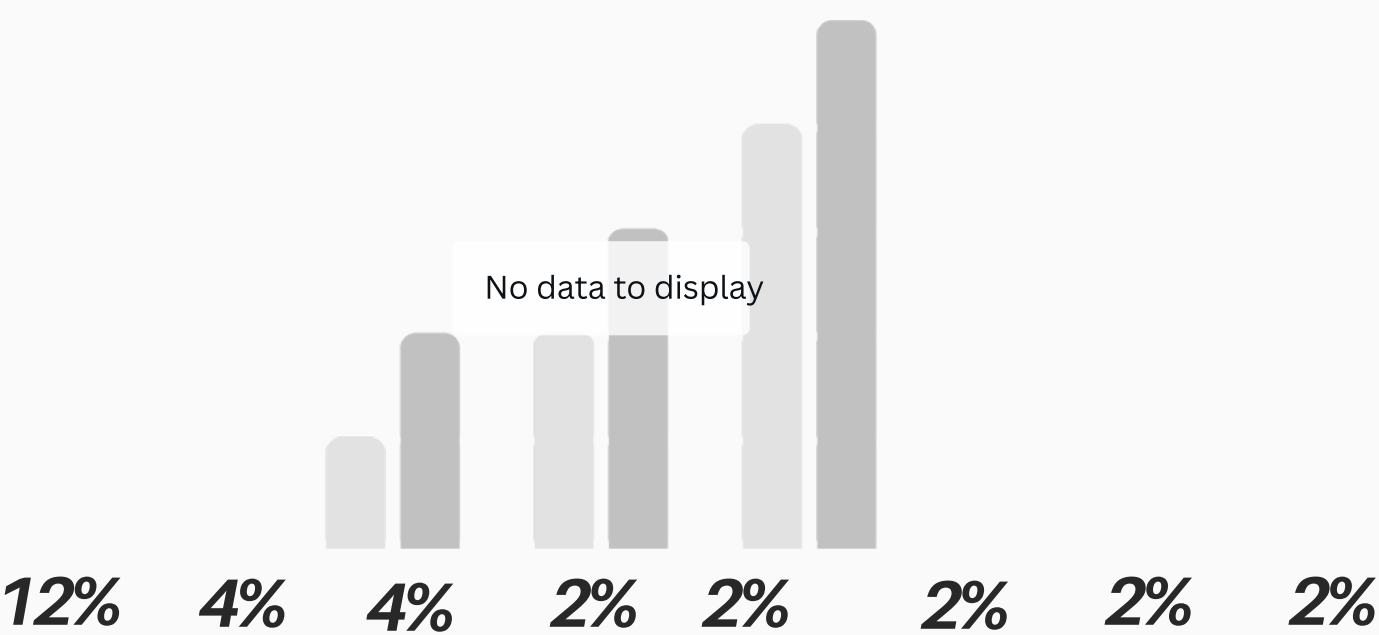
The National Development Plan (NDP) of the past five years, which guided the country's development, is criticized for neglecting and marginalizing the key priorities of the youth. A perceived isolation of young people by the government has contributed to their radicalization, particularly regarding migration and, in some instances, violence. Addressing these issues necessitates a holistic policy vision, focusing on skills development and job creation for the youth. Additionally, strengthening law enforcement capabilities is essential to mitigating crimes and maintaining overall security. The government must instill trust in the security forces by providing the necessary tools and promoting professionalism for effective intervention.

As emphasized in a previous section, religious leaders, particularly Imams and Pastors, enjoy the highest level of respect and trust in the country, as evidenced by Afrobarometer data. With 85% of respondents considering religious leaders trustworthy, their influence is substantial. Traditional leaders also command significant support, standing at 71% (Afrobarometer, 2018). Both religious and traditional leaders are crucial in combating radicalization and extremism. Their ability to reach the majority of the population through sermons and gatherings positions them to deliver positive messages, advocating for peace, respect for state institutions, and promoting unity and harmonious coexistence. Their role extends to instilling cultural values of peace, especially among young people.

Civil society organizations play a paramount role in advocating for peace. Their oversight responsibilities include lobbying for the interests of young people within the government, ensuring that government policies align with the needs of the youth. Advocacy efforts extend to community outreach and sensitization programs, encouraging young people to refrain from violent behaviors. Furthermore, civil society groups can advocate against irregular migration by highlighting its dangers. Government support for empowerment and meaningful job creation is crucial in aiding these efforts.

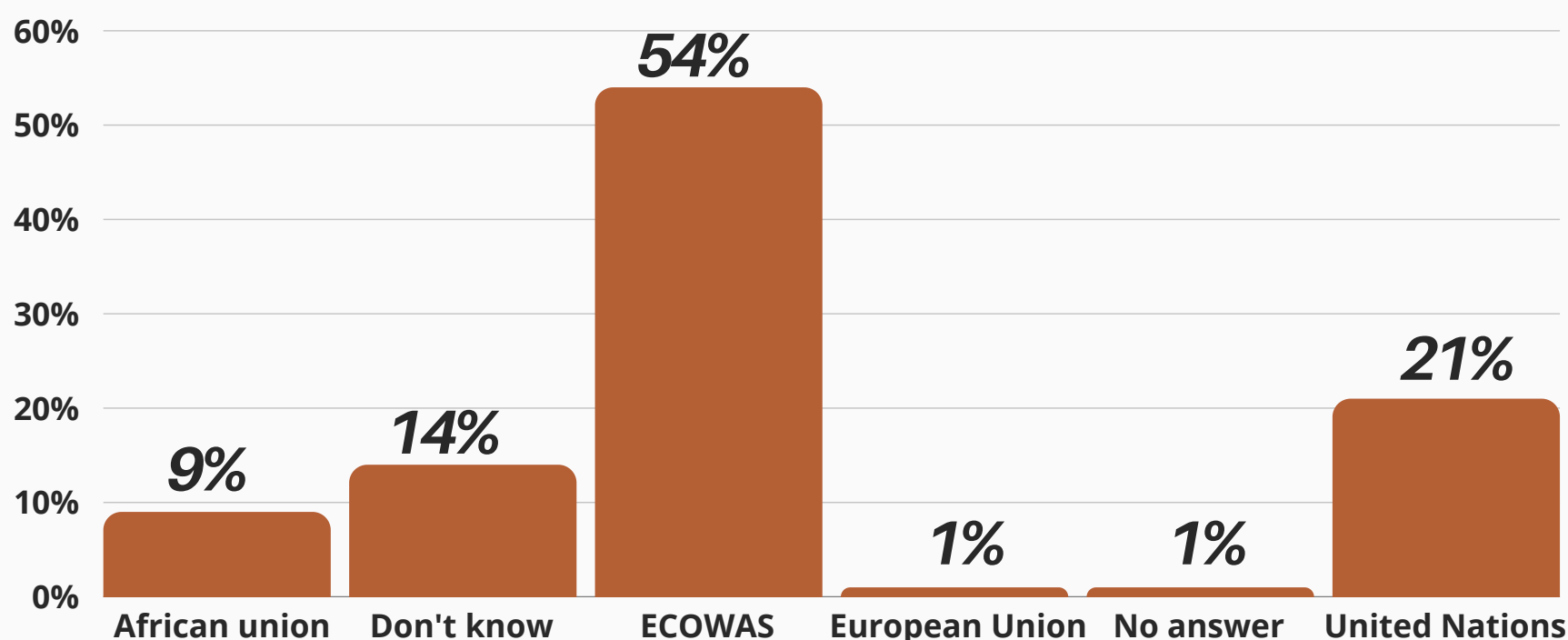
Which countries could work closely with The Gambia to prevent violent extremism

96,9%



Graphic 25: Which countries could work closely with The Gambia to prevent violent extremism?

In the context of international cooperation, with which organization should the State should rely to prevent violent extremism ?



Graphic 26: In the context of international cooperation, with which organization should the State should rely to prevent violent extremism?

The strikingly high perception of Senegal as a major security partner in fighting terrorism can be explained by several geographical and historical factors. Geographically, The Gambia's only neighbor is Senegal. Neighbors may often be perceived as a source of threat or insecurity. However, historical events have reinforced the view of Senegal as a key security ally for the Gambia.

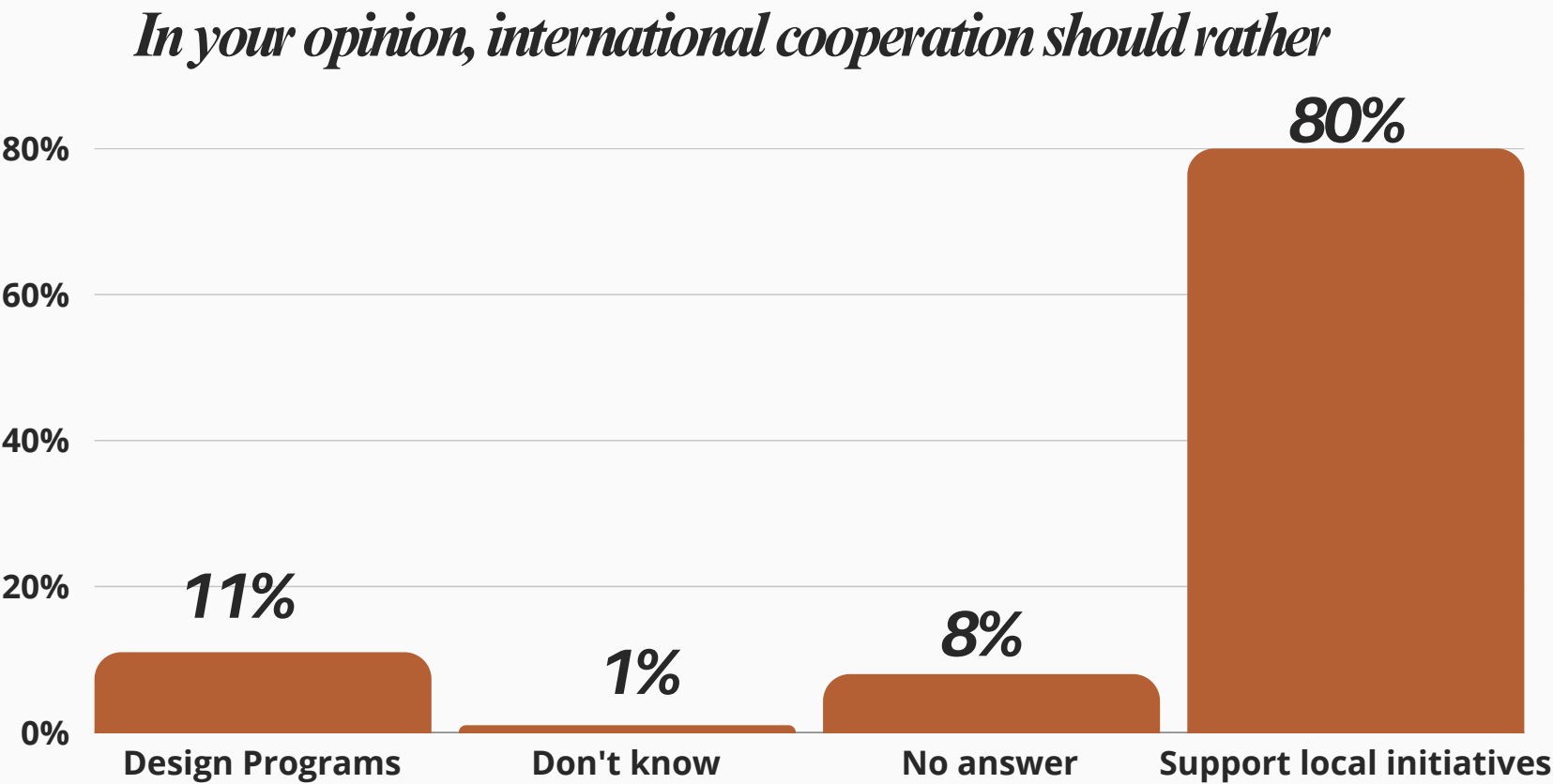
In 1981, Senegal launched 'Operation Fodé Kaba' to thwart a military coup in The Gambia, successfully restoring President Dawda Kairaba Jawara to power. More recently, in 2017, Senegal spearheaded the ECOWAS military intervention after President Yahya Jammeh refused to hand over power followed his defeat in the 2016 presidential election. The threatened military intervention forced Jammeh into exile.

President Barrow requested 2,500 ECOWAS troops to remain for six months to help establish order. This mission has been extended multiple times, with ECOWAS forces continuing to support Gambian security as of June 2023.

These historical and ongoing security collaborations have undoubtedly shaped the perception of Senegal as a reliable security partner, especially in the fight against terrorism.

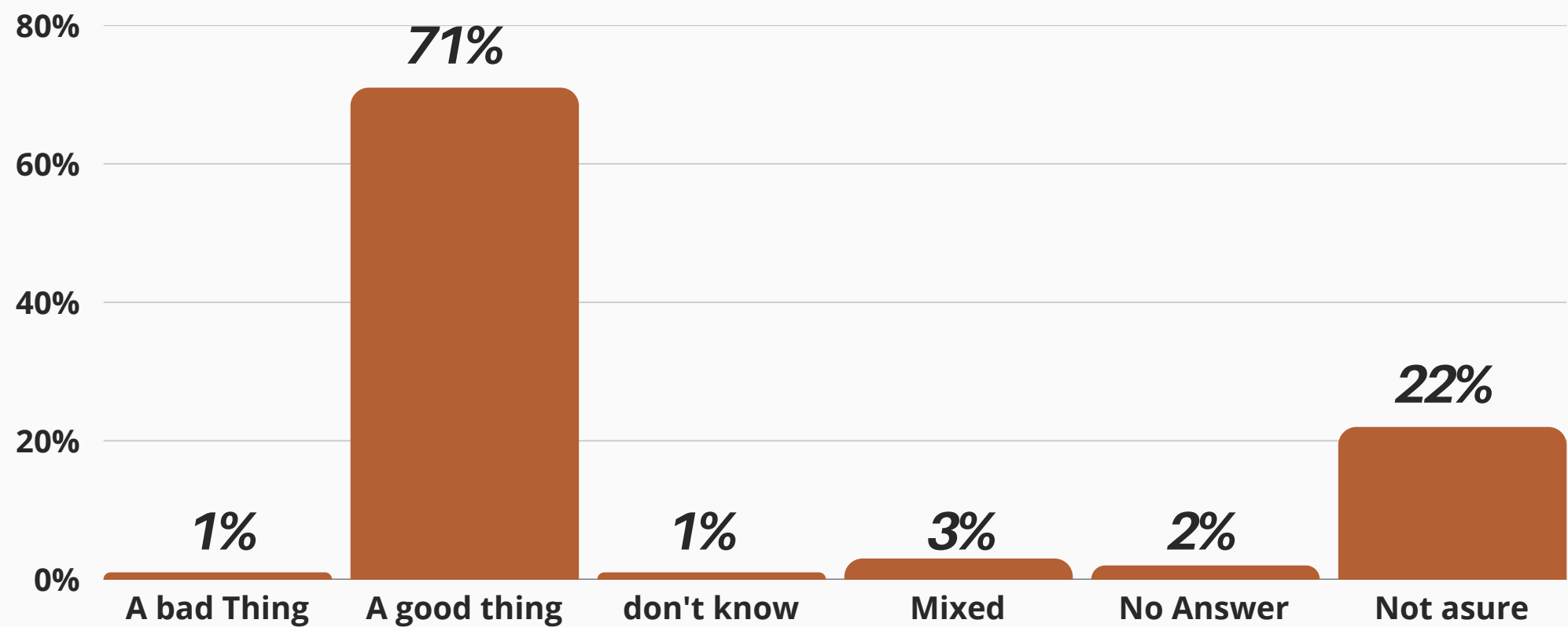
ECOWAS is perceived as the second most preferred security partner, for similar reasons given for Senegal. Surveyed respondents expressed doubts about the capacity of national defense and security forces to protect the people from potential terrorist organizations. When asked, "In the context of international cooperation, which organization should the State rely on to prevent violent extremism?" 54% of respondents cited ECOWAS, followed by 21% citing the United Nations, and some mentioning the United States. None of the respondents named the EU or Russia.

Regarding the perception of international cooperation, 55% of respondents viewed it favorably, while only 1% expressed negative views. Finally, 80% expressed the view that international cooperation should support national initiatives, with only 11% believing that international organizations should design programs. This positive perception of international cooperation, which ideally focuses on supporting local initiatives, indicates the need for local ownership of assistance and the development of local strategies instead of imported ones.



Graphic 27: In your opinion, international cooperation should rather:

In the fight against terrorism, is cooperation between security forces and the population:



Graphic 28: In the fight against terrorism, is cooperation between security forces and the population

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The rise of radicalization among Gambian youth is a growing concern, particularly in the context of a regional struggle with the spread of violent extremism. Research has identified a series of factors, including democratic governance failures, security challenges, and increased religious tensions, contributing to the vulnerability of young people. Lack of economic opportunity is leaving youth struggling for purpose, increasing the likelihood of their radicalization. Along with this, A lack of trust in law enforcement, particularly the police, due to perceived corruption and untrustworthiness, has led to a rise in petty crimes among radicalized youth. Security forces, including the immigration and navy departments, face challenges in handling irregular migration. Lastly, increased tensions between certain Islamic trends raise the possibility that radical and extremist foreign actors, along with co-opted domestic ones, exploit the situation to chip away at the tolerance that underpins Gambian society.

To address these circumstances, the government must focus on existing vulnerabilities, holistically addressing key drivers of radicalism and extremism. The NDP must prioritize investments to create economic opportunities for the youth to lessen The Gambia's primary vulnerability. Initiatives should also include robust TVET programs translating skills acquisition into job opportunities. The education system and policies should standardize learning to curb dropouts, providing avenues for continued education through TVET institutions. However, due to the constrained job market, the focus must be ensuring opportunities for the youth to apply their skills. In addition, the government should invest in the security forces, prioritizing effective training and community engagement. Civilians want the security forces to actively promote stability, but they do not trust its intentions or effectiveness. Therefore, the government should rework training doctrines and create local engagement programs to combat this perception.

The government should also publicly collaborate with religious leaders, as they are the most trusted figures in Gambian society. This will allow it to raise awareness about how radicalization occurs and its effects. Religious leaders must prioritize peace, promoting peaceful teachings and encouraging tolerance among interfaith and intra-faith groups. As an illustrative example, Activista the Gambia, in 2023, convened a two-day interfaith dialogue bringing together religious leaders from both the Supreme Islamic Council, the Christian Council, and youth groups, to emphasize the importance of maintaining peace and fostering peaceful coexistence in the country. In order to prevent extremist groups from exploiting grievances arising from anti-terrorism measures for recruitment or indoctrination purposes, it would be in Gambia's interest to support and promote ongoing dialogue between actors in the criminal justice system and civil society, drawing for example on the best practices initiated by WACAP[1] in West Africa. Such initiatives represent valuable opportunities for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly those dedicated to promoting peace, to play an active role. By intensifying efforts in this direction, CSOs can effectively advocate for tolerance and cultivate dialogues among various faith religious groups. The emphasis should be on reaching out to young people, recognizing them as a pivotal demographic in the prevention of radicalization and extremism

While the involvement of other relevant social groups and institutions, such as religious and traditional leaders, remains crucial in the fight against radicalization, it is imperative to adopt a collective and comprehensive approach. This multifaceted strategy with the economy, security forces, and community leaders ensures that advocacy efforts are targeted, inclusive, and capable of addressing the diverse factors contributing to the challenge of radicalization and extremism.

[20]The WACAP (The West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors) network, created in 2013, aims to facilitate international cooperation in criminal matters for all transnational organized crime, including terrorism. It is implemented with the support of the Economic Community Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose 15 states are also members of the of the WACAP network, plus Mauritania and Chad.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Public Awareness and Youth Engagement

1. Promote Tolerance and Individual Rights:

Political and religious leaders should sensitize communities on endorsing tolerance as a fundamental principle of democratic governance. This includes exercising individual rights without infringing upon the rights of others.

2. Civil Society Outreach and Education:

- Civil society groups should engage in community outreach and sensitization programmes to encourage young people to refrain from violence and participate in peace education and non-violence programs.
- Outreach activities should target youth as a pivotal demographic group in preventing radicalization and extremism.

3. Comprehensive Approach to Radicalization:

Adopt a comprehensive approach involving all social segments, including religious and traditional groups, to address various factors contributing to radicalization.

4. Religious Leaders and Peace Promotion:

- Religious leaders should prioritize peace, promote peaceful teachings, and encourage tolerance among interfaith groups.
- Convene religious leaders from both the Supreme Islamic Council and the Christian Council in inter and intra-faith dialogues to emphasize the importance of maintaining peace and fostering coexistence.

5. CSO Advocacy for Tolerance:

- CSOs should intensify efforts to advocate for peace and tolerance through community-based programs.
- Engage religious and traditional leaders to promote peaceful teachings and interfaith harmony.
- Recognize young people as a pivotal demographic in preventing radicalization and extremism, developing targeted programs to address their specific needs and vulnerabilities, including educational support, vocational training, and community involvement.

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEEDS OF YOUTH

Skill Development and Job Market Integration:

Address skill development and create a competitive job market to ensure the successful integration of graduates into the workforce.

Focus on Vulnerabilities and TVET Programs:

- The government should address existing vulnerabilities and key drivers of radicalism and extremism.
- Initiatives should include robust Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs that translate skills acquisition into job opportunities.
- Standardize learning to curb dropouts and provide avenues for continued education through TVET institutions.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Include Women in National Strategies:

In line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, include women at all levels of national strategies against radicalization and in their implementation.

Prevention of Violent Extremism (For Authorities)

National Strategy and Structure:

- Establish a national structure or component to prevent violent extremism.
- Provide a toll-free contact number at the national level for individuals and communities to share relevant information with detection authorities ("if you see something, say something").

TO THE ATTENTION OF SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDERS GOVERNMENT OF THE GAMBIA

- a. Security services should give particular attention to activities and operators of the Ahmadiyya and other foreign-related groups and engage them in prevention activities, avoiding stigmatization or economic marginalization.
- b. Address socio-economic conditions of communities where the Ahmadiyya group operates to reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by radical groups.
- c. Governance and Security Enhancements:
 - Enhance democratic governance and address security challenges by increasing transparency and accountability within law enforcement agencies.
 - Implement measures to combat corruption and improve the trustworthiness of the police.
- d. TVET Programs and Education Reform:
 - Develop and expand TVET programs to provide practical skills and job opportunities for young people.
 - Reform the education system to standardize learning and reduce dropout rates, integrating TVET pathways within the formal education system.
- e. Facilitate Interfaith Dialogues: Encourage and fund interfaith dialogue initiatives like those organized by Activista the Gambia. These programs should promote peace, tolerance, and coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups.
- f. Adopt a Comprehensive Approach: Collaborate across sectors to adopt a collective and comprehensive approach to preventing radicalization. Ensure efforts are inclusive and target diverse factors contributing to extremism.
- g. Enhance Security Measures: Improve the capacity of security forces, including immigration and navy departments, to handle challenges like irregular migration effectively. Provide training and resources to strengthen their ability to maintain national security.
- h. Integrate Anti-Radicalization in Crime Prevention:
 - Include anti-radicalization components in national crime prevention programs, including those addressing substance abuse.
 - Provide particular attention and psycho-social assistance to returnee migrants.
 - Strengthen programs against irregular migration.
 - Through regional judicial cooperation frameworks (such as WACAP), strengthen the capacity of central authorities and prosecutors to combat all forms of cross-border and organized crime, as well as impunity, with the support of regional and international cooperation

TO INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

1. Support Local Initiatives: Prioritize support for national and local initiatives aimed at preventing radicalization. Provide funding and technical assistance for programs that address the root causes of radicalism, such as unemployment and lack of education.
- 2 . Support the production of knowledge that can be used to develop or improve national strategies for preventing violent extremism and combating terrorism, within the framework of a collaborative monitoring and anticipation platform.
- 3 . Support capacity-building for security and defense forces and all players in the criminal justice system through training programs on transnational organized crime and international cooperation in criminal matters, and ensure their inclusion in the curriculum of judicial training institutions.

OUTLOOK

I- Optimistic Trends

1. Geographic and Security Enclave

- The Gambia's position, enclosed by Senegal, restricts cross-border activities, reducing the threat of radical extremism.

2. Cultural and Religious Co-existence**:

- Peaceful coexistence among Muslims, including Ahmadis, and Christians, facilitated by the Supreme Islamic Council and the Christian Council, minimizes religious conflicts.

3. Religious Harmony

- Effective interfaith dialogue and cooperation help maintain peace, contrasting with more volatile regions in the Sahel.

4. International Security Cooperation

- Historical and ongoing support from Senegal and ECOWAS reinforces their perception as reliable security partners in combating terrorism.

5. Positive Cultural Values:

- A significant majority view peace, tolerance, and cultural diversity as protective against violent extremism.

II- Mixed Trends

1. Slow Occurrence of Radicalism:

- Although crime rates are high and security forces are struggling, radicalism is perceived to be advancing slowly.

2. Limited Radical Network Penetration:

- Opportunities for radical networks have not deeply infiltrated Gambian society compared to other Sahel countries.

3. Perception of Youth Behavior:

- Deviant behaviors, including political protests, criminal activities, and irregular migration, are linked to potential youth radicalization, indicating concern about future risks.

4. Gender Equality Perceptions:

- While a slight majority believe in gender equality, a substantial portion perceives inequality, highlighting areas needing improvement.

III- Worrying Trends:

1. High Crime Rates and Ineffective Security:

- Ineffectiveness of security forces in reducing high crime rates contributes to concerns about growing radicalism.

2. Youth Marginalization:

- Neglect of youth priorities in the National Development Plan has led to their marginalization and potential radicalization, particularly concerning migration and violence.

3. Risk of Violent Extremism:

- Marginalized youth involved in criminal activities are seen as vulnerable to religiously motivated extremism, posing future security risks.

4. Religious Intolerance:

- Increasing intolerance and the spread of radical ideologies within Islamic groups risk radicalizing young scholars toward violence.

5. Contentious Religious Relationships:

- Hostility between the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and Sunni Islamic scholars, fueled by hate speech from figures like Imam Fatty, is a significant potential trigger for conflict.

IV- Conclusion

The Gambia, though historically peaceful, faces emerging challenges that require vigilance. While traditional ethnic relationships have maintained peace, new issues like social media misuse, religious extremism, and verbal violence are concerning. Efforts to promote peace, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue are essential to prevent the rise of radicalization and maintain stability.

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