

RELEASE IN FULL

Identifying and funding political and economic opportunities for communities that are vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment to violence

Political and economic factors can leave certain communities or populations susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist organizations (VEOs), who in turn often leverage these factors in their efforts. When such groups are marginalized, poorly governed or ungoverned, or denied basic services, the resulting grievances may leave them susceptible to radicalizing and recruiting narratives. Returning foreign fighters can exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

VEOs can move in to fill the void—providing services, governance, and, importantly, a sense of belonging, dignity and self-respect. VEOs use economic incentives to help recruit unemployed or underemployed individuals from poor and marginalized areas. In addition, VEOs often offer the promise of a political voice to such individuals that feel excluded from formal political processes or face structural discrimination. Yet, we should acknowledge, poverty, unemployment, political marginalization and discrimination alone do not necessarily lead to recruitment and radicalization – poor communities, for example, are rarely centers of recruitment. Other push and pull factors often accompany political and economic drivers to make them relevant factors.

Economic and political drivers are context-specific, varying within communities, countries and regions, ranging, for instance, from lack of agricultural opportunities, access to technological jobs, or appropriate education. Political and economic drivers may be issues amenable to local solutions, such as increasing input into local decision-making or expanding the job market, or they may require a more systemic solution, like responding to rampant corruption, ineffective market regulation and insufficient education standards.

To provide appropriate political and economic opportunities that can prevent or counter violent extremism in vulnerable communities, a focused approach must be used. This requires leveraging available research, current best practices, and on-the-ground knowledge to feed into the design of appropriate programming. In addition, pilot interventions can be used to test assumptions and learn lessons on effective opportunities to stem recruitment and radicalization.

The international community should consider:

- Providing support to mechanisms like GCERF that support indigenous civil society organizations implementing locally-relevant political and economic activities designed to address the drivers of radicalization and recruitment.
- Supporting partners working with at-risk communities to develop approaches to mitigate political and economic drivers tailored to their communities.
- Encouraging partners to consider implications of political and economic policies on the violent extremist phenomena and explore ways to mitigate their negative implications in ways that address these drivers.
- Conducting and sharing evaluations of political and economic interventions to refine approaches to ensure these drivers are being addressed.
- Revising discriminatory laws, policies and practices in order to increase political, economic, and social inclusion of marginalized groups at risk of radicalization and recruitment.
- Piloting vocational, job matching, and other jobs programming and initiatives that specifically target populations at risk of radicalization and recruitment, including strategies for engaging local business communities.