

Bureau of Conflict and
Stabilization Operations

CSO Advanced Conflict Analytics

Survey Based Empirical Drivers of Violent Extremism in Niger

Advanced Conflict Analytics Team

Office of Policy

Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

RELEASE IN FULL



Summary

The Advanced Conflict Analytics Team applied statistical regression analysis to identify drivers of support for violent extremism. The data was derived from an in-depth public opinion survey commissioned Special Operation Command Africa (SOCAF) in Niger in mid-2014. The findings also evaluate the links between religious ideology and support for religious violence.

- Demographic variables such as age, income, and listening to the radio were each associated with reduced support for religiously motivated violence. Females were generally more supportive of violence than were males.
- Respondents who had religion as a guiding force on their daily life were associated with reduced support for political violence.
- Adhering to values that were consistent with a sense of Islamic superiority was associated with increased support for religious violence.
- A belief that Muslims should not associate with non-Muslims was associated with increased support for violence.
- In summary, the aggregate empirical findings suggests that the average person most likely to support violent extremism in Niger is probably a young, poor, female who has little media consumption even by radio. This person probably believes in Islamic superiority, even if Islam does not guide daily activity, and believes that Muslims should not associate with non-Muslims.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Bureau of Conflict and
Stabilization Operations

CSO Advanced Conflict Analytics

Appendix A: Definitions and Measurements

Characterizing Violence Extremism

The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) characterizes violent extremism (VE) as “Violence, and/or support for violence, motivated by an extremist ideology and committed or supported by non-state actors.” This report is specifically designed to better understand potential links between extremist ideology and support for violence. Extremist ideology, in this report, is ideology that cannot be reconciled with or coexist with other worldviews.

Survey Characteristics

Survey participants were 1,486 Nigeriens aged 16 and above. The survey was designed to provide analysts with a representative sample across 3 Nigerien regions: Diffa, Maradi, and Zinder.

Measures

The survey contained a number of survey measures designed to examine ideological perspectives, support for religious based violence, and other factors thought to be important to these topics. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the variables included in this study.

Table 1. List of Overall Independent and Dependent Variables Included in Model

Age	The age of the respondent
Education	Self-reported educational attainment
Income	The income of respondents
Gender	Gender of respondent
Radio Consumption	Number of days per week the respondent listens to the radio
Islamic Superiority	Multiple variables such as “all nations should follow Islam, the President of Niger should be required to be Muslim.”
Importance of Religion	Degree to which respondents indicate that religion guides daily life
Western Oppression	Belief that the West oppresses Muslims
Social/Political Activism	Degree to which respondent is politically active.
Avoid Unbelievers	Respondent belief that Muslims should avoid contact with unbelievers
(DV) Support for Religious Violence	Series of questions designed to examine support for religious based violence such as “I would support a family member who decided to join a group that uses violence to defend my religion.”

*See Appendix B for a full list of variables.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Bureau of Conflict and
Stabilization Operations

CSO Advanced Conflict Analytics

Regression Results for Support for Violent Extremism

The analysis specifically examined the impact of ideology (i.e. Islamic Superiority and a belief that Muslims should not interact with non-Muslims) on support for violence. As noted in Table 1, several other variables were included in the model for exploratory purposes. The regression model accounted for a significant amount of variance ($R^2 = .12$ $p < .001$) in support for violence. Table 2, below, displays the results of the regression analysis.

Table 2: Results of Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.858	0.139		13.388	.001	1.586	2.13
Age	-0.003	0.001	-0.081	-2.91	.004	-0.005	-0.001
Edu	0.005	0.01	0.012	0.434	.664	-0.016	0.025
Income	-0.05	0.007	-0.18	-6.771	.001	-0.065	-0.036
Gender	0.044	0.025	0.051	1.76	.079	-0.005	0.094
Radio	-0.024	0.006	-0.117	-3.969	.001	-0.035	-0.012
Islamic Superiority	0.048	0.026	0.049	1.887	.059	-0.002	0.098
Importance of Religion Daily	-0.091	0.019	-0.128	-4.696	.001	-0.129	-0.053
Mus Avoid Non Mus	0.046	0.013	0.095	3.457	.001	0.02	0.073
West Oppress	-0.018	0.019	-0.026	-0.948	.343	-0.057	0.02
Social Activist	0.006	0.02	0.008	0.309	.758	-0.034	0.046

*Green indicates significant at the $p < .05$ level, yellow indicates marginal significance at the $p < .10$ level.

Of most interest for the present analyses, the two ideology factors—Islamic superiority and belief that Muslims should not associate with non-Muslims-- were both associated with increased support for violence. Importantly, the importance of religion to daily life was associated with a reduction in support for violence. This finding implies that while a feeling of Islamic superiority is indeed associated with VE, simply being a devout Muslim is not. This suggests that there is a distinction between people that might be termed “Extremists” and those who might be termed “Devout Muslims.”

Results also indicate that several demographic variables are significantly related to support for violence. Age, income, and regularly listening to the radio are all associated with reduced support for violence. Gender was marginally significantly related to support for violence such that females were somewhat more likely than males to support violence. Both Education and perceptions of Western oppression had no association with support for violence.

Conclusions

This report provided an initial assessment of the relationship between extremist ideology and violent extremism. Results provided initial confirming evidence that extremist ideology is indeed a significant driver of support for violence. As described above, one of the defining features of the CSO extremist ideology concept is a sense that two beliefs or worldviews cannot coexist. From the CSO perspective, such beliefs should be a driver of support for violence. The statistical analysis provides evidence for this thinking. Survey respondents who believe that Muslims should not associate with non-Muslims were significantly more likely to support the use of violence for religious purposes. Likewise, survey respondents who hold a very narrow view of Islamic superiority (such that all nations should follow Islam, that Muslim nations should all be governed by Sharia, and the President of Niger should be required to follow Islam) were

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Bureau of Conflict and
Stabilization Operations

CSO Advanced Conflict Analytics

also more likely to support violence. Importantly, general devotion to religion (measured by the importance of religion in one's daily life) was associated with reduced support for violence. This report provides empirical evidence that there is likely a notable distinction between "extremist Muslims" and what might be called "devoted Muslims." Simply being a devoted Muslim, based on these findings, appears to reduce support for violence. Extremist Islam, as characterized by a sense of Islamic superiority and beliefs that Muslims should not associate with non-Muslims, appears to increase support for violence.

These results make it clear that future research should attempt to further expand understanding of the distinction between Extremist Islamic individuals and devoted Muslims. Such understanding could provide one key to understanding the distinction between people at risk of becoming violent, ---and decent, religiously, devout people.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Bureau of Conflict and
Stabilization Operations

CSO Advanced Conflict Analytics

Appendix B: Survey Items Used for Analyses

The table below is a list of all survey items used in the analyses. In most cases, items were statistically combined to create composite variables where appropriate. The appropriateness of combining items into a composite is based on Cronbach's Alpha scores, a common measure of inter-item reliability in the social sciences (Cronbach's α scores are noted in the tables). Typically, Cronbach's scores above .70 are considered suitable for composite items and are said to be measuring the same construct. Because this study was exploratory, we combined items into indices if they were above or very near scores of .70.

Individual Demographic Variables	Question	Scale
Age	The age of the respondent	Numerical age
Education	Self-reported educational attainment	
Gender	Gender of respondent	Male/Female
Radio Consumption	How often do you listen to the Radio	1 (Do Not Use) – (6 Daily)
Islamic Superiority ($\alpha = .68$)	Question	Scale
Follow Islam	In the future, all nations should follow Islam	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Presidential Islam	The President of Niger should be required to follow Islam	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Sharia	All Muslim countries should be governed by absolute Sharia Law	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
National Problems and Religion	The answer to all of our country's problems can be found in my religion (Islam)	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Importance of Religion ($r = .84$)	Question	Scale
Daily Religion	How often does religion govern your daily actions	1 (Never) – 4 (Always)
Decisions and Religion	When you have to make an important decision, how often do you consider your religion first	1 (Never) – 4 (Always)
Coexistence (Single Item)	Muslims should avoid any contact with non-Muslims	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Western Oppression ($\alpha = .68$)	Question	Scale
Western Subjugation	Western Countries create excuses to subjugate Muslim Countries	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Interference	Western countries are interfering too much in the affairs of Muslim countries	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Humiliation	Westerners are humiliating Muslims	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Social/Political Activism ($\alpha = .68$)		
Free Expression	How effective is the government of allowing different groups to express their own opinions	1 (Very Ineffective) – 4 (Very Effective)
Youth Space	How effective is the government at fostering healthy social gathering space for Nigerien youth	1 (Very Ineffective) – 4 (Very Effective)
Challenge Religion	Many good people challenge religious teachings	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Written Political Leader	Have you ever called or written a politician	(1 Never) – 3 (Have done)
Support for Religious Violence ($\alpha = .78$)	Question	Scale
Friend Violence	I would support a close friend's decision to join a group that uses violence to defend my religion	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Family Violence	I would support a family member's decision to join a group that uses violence to defend my religion	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Violence and Salvation	Those who use violence in the name of religion, if killed, are guaranteed salvation	1 (Strongly Disagree) – 4 (Strongly Agree)
Support Mujahadeed	How important is it to support mujahadeen fighting on behalf of Muslims	1 (Not important at all) 4 (Very Important)
Fund Mujahadeen	How important is it to support charities that fund groups like al-Qaeda	1 (Not important at all) 4 (Very Important)

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED