

Countering Violent Extremism in Lebanon**RELEASE IN
FULL**

Lebanon has a long tradition of moderation, but vulnerable Lebanese communities are increasingly targets for radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups as a result of spillover from the Syrian crisis, particularly in underdeveloped Sunni areas. To counteract this, POL/ECON has galvanized SFL, PD, USAID, USAID/OTI, and INL to develop an Embassy CVE strategic plan to guide our programming and coordinate our efforts.

Recruitment Strategies and Drivers of Violent Extremism

In an OTI-commissioned assessment, an NGO conducted field research in areas of Beirut, Bekaa, Tripoli, and Akkar that UNICIF has classified as "the most vulnerable." The NGO found that extremist recruitment in Lebanon is most often done in person, not online, through three main strategies: a call for action by religious leaders, offering financial incentives, and targeting youth searching for empowerment and revenge. The NGO found there is no linear explanation for violent extremism in Lebanon but five drivers in vulnerable areas:

- 1) **Political** – The NGO found that residents in vulnerable areas felt a lack of political representation by the national and local governments.
- 2) **Sectarian** - Sectarianism was perceived to be a direct source of discrimination, especially among Sunnis in Tripoli and the north.
- 3) **Economic** - Economic drivers were derived from frustration caused by minimal return on education, underemployment, and the negative impact of insecurity on livelihoods.
- 4) **Media** - Lebanese media was widely perceived to increase sectarian violence by perpetuating stereotypes and diffusing extremist messaging.
- 5) **Syrian crisis**: The Syrian crisis affects radicalization differently in Lebanon depending on the region. Areas with high concentrations of Syrian refugees cited security concerns, economic competition, resentment towards Syrians, and a strain on resources.

Selected Future Programming

- **CT-funded**: During its last solicitation, the CT Bureau approved three CVE project proposals from Embassy Beirut, two from POL. Pending final approval and congressional notification, CT will fund approximately \$820,000 in three projects to counter ISIL and Nusra's ongoing outreach and recruitment efforts aimed at Lebanon's vulnerable Sunni communities.
- **CVE Tech Camps**: We have worked with PD to plan a three-day technology camp in spring 2016 that will gather Lebanese government, civil society, and private sector participants to train them on online strategies to counter violent extremism online. PD has contracted with local tech partner Social Media Exchange and NEA/PPD has approved funding.