

POLICY Brief

Countering Violent Extremism & Terrorism in **BURKINA FASO:**



Centre for Democracy & Development

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Background / Context

Until recently, Burkina Faso was relatively safe from terrorism. This changed in April 2015, when terrorists abducted a Romanian mining company worker in the northern part of the country and killed a security officer. Since then, as in West Africa more generally, violent extremism has become prevalent. This phenomenon has continued to grow following extremists' attacks in August and October 2015 on security outposts in Oursi and Samorogouan in the northern and western part of the country respectively¹. A significant uptick in terrorist activity was also experienced in the early days of President Christian Kabore's administration with an attack on Café Cappuccino and Hotel Splendid in Ouagadougou on 15 January 2016, which resulted in the death of 30 people and left 70 people wounded². In the following day, there was a further terrorist incident, with the abduction of a Western couple in Djibo.

Acts of terrorism in Burkina Faso escalated with numerous cross-border attacks in 2016. There were attacks throughout the year on security outposts in: Tin Akoff (January 15, 2016), Koutougou (May 31, 2016),

Markoye (September 1, 2016), Intangom (October 12, 2016) and Nassoumba (December 16, 2016). All these reportedly led to the death of 25 people and 9 wounded. Exactly 19 months after the attack on Café Cappuccino and Hotel Splendid (August 14, 2017), another attack was carried out in a Turkish Restaurant.

This led to the death of 18 people with a further 20 people injured. The unprecedented scale with which terrorist Attacks have taken place threatens the peace and stability the country enjoyed for many years.

The rise in violent extremism can be attributed to numerous factors. Firstly, there has been an increase in acts of terrorism in the country, which are linked to actors such as al-Mourabitoun group of Moktar Belmoktar and the Macina Liberation Front of Amadou Kouffa—both affiliated with al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Secondly, the emergence of radicalised hot spots in Ouagadougou, Bobo Dioulasso and in the northern part of Burkina Faso has raised security concerns.³ Finally, shrinking opportunities for upward social mobility as a result of poverty, unemployment, and frustrated expectations, make the population, particularly the youth, vulnerable to extremist ideologies⁴.

The government of Burkina Faso has employed hard and soft approaches in responding to the growing threats of violent extremism and terrorism. For instance, the anti-terrorism law of 2009 was reviewed in 2015 in response to some of the new threats to national security. In 2016, the government enacted the uniform West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) anti-money laundering/countering the financing of

³ Lyammouri, Rida, Short Assessment of Violent Extremist Threats in Burkina Faso, 2016, available in <https://maghrebandsahel.wordpress.com/2016/05/18/short-assessment-of-violent-extremism-threat-in-burkina-faso/>

⁴ Augustin Loada and Peter Romanuik, *Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Towards National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity*, Global Centre on Cooperative Security, June 2014.

¹ See Didier Boumoni, Fighting terrorism in Burkina Faso, 15 February 2017, retrieved at http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46811:fighting-terrorism-in-burkina-faso&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111

² Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, retrieved at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/27488.pdf>

terrorism law. It also established security and military cooperation with neighboring countries, such as the G5 Sahel Force (Force Conjointe du G5 Sahel, or FC-G5S), comprising of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, as a vehicle for strengthening cooperation against violent extremism and terrorism⁵. However, these approaches have limited impact, as they are still not part of a comprehensive national strategy⁶.

Against this backdrop, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) together with the Centre for Democratic Governance (CGD-Burkina Faso) convened a two-day dialogue on the 17 and 18 October 2017 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to:

- a. Foster discussion amongst critical stakeholders in different sectors in Burkina Faso on the rise of terrorism and violent extremism and its dimensions in the country;
- b. Interrogate government's response and capacity to confront the intermittent violent extremism and the development of comprehensive anti-terrorism strategy in the country;
- c. Make informed recommendations for effective anti-terrorism strategy in the country.

⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/challenges-and-opportunities-g5-sahel-force>

⁶ http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46811:fighting-terrorism-in-burkina-faso&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111

Key findings:

- (I) The phenomena of violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso are both homegrown and transnational in nature and character.
- (II) The inability of government to win the hearts and minds of the people in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism is linked to the deep-seated mistrust that exists between the government, security agencies and the people.
- (III) Religion is not the root cause of violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso. But its instrumentalisation and usage as a tool for mobilisation makes it a driver of violent extremism and terrorism.
- (IV) The use of force as a key response against violent extremist and terror groups by the state is not comprehensive enough to address the root causes and drivers of the phenomenon.
- (V) The absence of a strong convergence of interest and strategy within and among member states of ECOWAS makes it difficult for the organisation to implement its strategy against violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso and the region in general.
- (VI) The weakness associated with partnerships between state and non-state actors constitute a major obstacle to the implementation of strategies against

PREVENTING TERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN BURKINA FASO.



Shamsudeen Yusuf (CDD), Thomas Ouedrago, Executive Director (CGD). Representative of Minister of Homeland Security, Maïmouna Ouattara (18th October 2017) Ouagadougou

violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso.

Most of the responses to violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso are not embedded in rigorous scientific and empirical research as it relates to an understanding of the local contexts and nuances, which makes interventions less productive.

Recommendations:

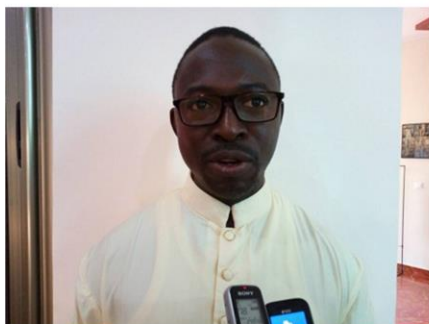
The participants at the policy dialogue resolved on the following as measures to be taken by different actors to mitigate the challenges:

Burkina Faso should take advantage of its membership of key institutions, such as ECOWAS and G5 Sahel, to strengthen military and non-military cooperation on issues relating to countering violent extremism and terrorism.

Partnerships with private sector are critical to driving the agenda for economic growth and development of the country. This is vital for creating opportunities for upward social mobility and to address poverty and unemployment in the State.

1. Government

- I. In its response to the threats posed by violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso, the government should adopt strategies that address both local and transnational drivers.
- II. There should be a robust and sustained collaboration between state, non-state actors in the design and implementation of anti-violent extremism and terrorism campaigns, in ways that are citizen, victim and community centered. Above all, such partnerships should reinforce the adaptive and resilience capacities of the communities as a major precondition for winning the hearts and minds of the people.
111. As a country, that shares borders with six others (Benin, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo), transnational cooperation is critical to Burkina Faso's fight against violent extremism and terrorism. In the light of the foregoing, the government of



Abbé Sylvain Yaméogo, vicar at Our Lady of the Apostles Parish Burkina Faso

2. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- I. Pursue and strengthen interreligious and inter-communal dialogue and deconstruct narratives that situate extremism as unique to Islam and/or any other religious beliefs.
- II. Research and technical support to state actors by think tanks and CSOs is important. This is relevant with a view to having empirical data and information on the manifestations, drivers and incentives associated with violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso.
- III. Religious leaders are identified as having a critical role to play in countering violent extremism in Burkina Faso. It is recommended that they work closely with the government and other civil society groups in the development of counter narratives for use in public awareness campaigns and education.



Boubakary Sadou Dicko, representative of the chief of Djibo

3. ECOWAS

- I. The regional body should effectively coordinate the efforts of neighboring States and the government of Burkina Faso to ensure clear articulation of interests and positions that are convergent towards combating violent extremism and terrorism in the region.
- II. The ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Framework remains an important regional architecture to mitigate incidents of violent extremism in the region. The regional body should ensure its strict application by member states by ensuring its domestication and implementation by the states in countering violent extremism.
- III. Periodic region-wide reflections on the implementation of the framework's core principles and provisions should be undertaken in order to allow actions to be taken for improvement by all parties, when necessary.

Conclusion:

There is no single factor that accounts for violent extremism and terrorism in Burkina Faso. Tackling these challenges requires pathways that are multi-dimensional in approach and take cognisance of local socio-economic and political context and transnational realities.



Centre for democracy and development, house 16, A7 street,
Mount Pleasant Estate (Citec) Mborá District
Email: cddabv@cddwestafrica.org



www.cddwestafrica.org