

# CONTEXT AND DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This block aims to assess the opinion of respondents on the environments that favour the surge of violent extremism. It also looks into the causes and mechanisms that create favourable conditions for an individual to turn into a violent extremist.

## Main findings

- Asked to identify in which environments individuals are more likely to be turned into violent extremists, a majority of respondents answered “Conflict zones”. The virtual domain, i.e. the Internet and social media, is ranked second by respondents (respondents from the Maghreb ranked it first).
- Only one EU country (France) among the five most exposed Euromed countries.
- Overall, Syria and Iraq are seen as the countries more likely to suffer from violent extremism in the upcoming years. France is the most exposed European country according to respondents.
- Respondents are more prone to consider that other countries are exposed to the threat of violent extremism rather than their own country.
- State authorities have a particular responsibility in the surge of violent extremism (foreign military interventions, authoritarian trends or the failure to come up with inclusive policies).
- While respondents from the European Union mentioned “Marginalised urban areas” as offering fertile ground for violent extremism in bigger proportions than respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, the latter were more prone to identify religious communities and educational institutions as environments in which an individual can turn into a violent extremist.
- Prisons are not considered as the most sensitive environment in this regard. On deradicalisation in prisons, respondents are sceptical about the possible influence of moderate religious actors on already radicalised individuals and insist on the ineffectiveness of isolating specific prisoners. In turn, they stress the importance of preparing prisoners for their reintegration into society and of training prison workers adequately.
- Respondents acknowledged that the question of the drivers was complex and plural. Violent extremism is to be understood as a social rather than religious phenomenon.
- “Weak state capacity, economic exclusion and limited opportunities” are seen as key drivers of violent extremism in Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries. “Political exclusion and discrimination” is seen as a key driver in EU countries, in particular according to respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries.
- At a more individual level, respondents agree that the most significant individual driver was the perceived humiliation and discrimination from the society in the country of residence on ethnic, national, linguistic or religious grounds.
- Almost twice as many EU respondents as their counterparts from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries considered that “Psychological vulnerability” is the most important factor.

### “TERRITORIALISING” VIOLENT EXTREMISM

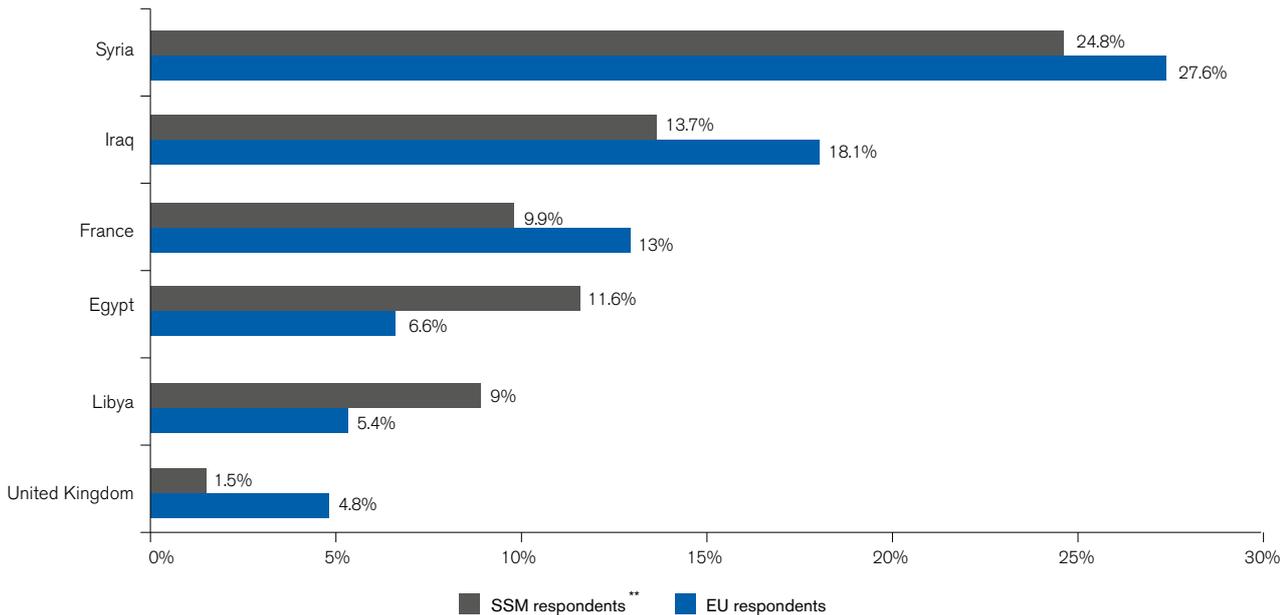
**Question 1** was aimed at identifying which countries presented the highest risk of undergoing violent extremist attacks in the upcoming years. Respondents were asked to rank the three countries most exposed to violent extremism. Among the countries ranked first by respondents, Syria and Iraq obtained the highest percentages, followed by France.

Differences of patterns in the responses from EU respondents on the one hand and Southern and Southeast Mediterranean respondents on the other are rather limited regarding the three countries cited above, although EU respondents selected these three countries as first choice in bigger proportions than their counterparts from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries. In turn, the latter were more inclined to rank Egypt or Libya first (see Graph 1).

Turkey was not identified as a major target for violent extremist groups by a high proportion of respondents. However, the country featured higher among Turkish respondents than among the rest of participants. Turkey appears in third position among Turks, with only France and Iraq above.

However, in general, respondents tended to regard other countries as potential targets rather than their own country. French and Moroccan respondents, for instance, have not massively indicated France and Morocco respectively as countries at high risk.

**Graph 1: Which of these countries\* are likely to become targets or continue being targeted by violent extremism in the upcoming years?**  
(results show the first choice out of three)



\* Respondents had a drop-down menu with the 43 Euro-Mediterranean countries (members of the Union for the Mediterranean) as well as Russia, the US and the Gulf countries, Iran and Iraq.

\*\* Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Below is a selection of accompanying comments formulated by respondents:

Syria's Assad regime will have a Jihadist problem for many years to come because of its sectarian affiliation and its brutality. Ruling by force alone will not work. Turkey, as a neighbour of Syria and party to the conflict, will likely also have to cope with growing problems of radicalisation (as seen in recent attacks, including the assassination of the Ambassador of Russia in Ankara). Finally, Tunisia has the greatest number of citizens fighting for ISIS, and this problem will likely come to haunt it at home after the fall of Raqqa and Mosul.

Israeli respondent

The UK and France both have a history of colonialism and imperialism and are most of the time seen as the reasons for poverty, secularism and dictatorships in the Arab region (through years of colonisation). Both countries have also been involved in military campaigns in the region, therefore they are seen by Jihadists as the enemies of Islam and will be the target for their terrorist attacks. For Turkey, the situation is more or less related to the politics of Erdogan in the region and some foreign interests in destabilising the country by successive and repeated terror attacks.

German respondent

Mon choix s'explique par:

1. L'occupation de zones entières par des mouvements terroristes.
2. Par la fragilité des gouvernements et l'instabilité politique.
3. L'incapacité d'éradiquer les menaces terroristes dans les conditions sécuritaires faibles et non garanties.

Cependant, des attaques peuvent cibler aussi des pays tels que le Royaume Uni, les États Unis ou la France, même si le pouvoir politique est fort. Le double objectif des terroristes islamistes est :

1. De s'imposer dans les pays musulmans en vue d'arracher le pouvoir et installer la chariaa.
2. De s'attaquer à l'occident considéré comme ennemi d'un point de vue idéologique.

Tunisian respondent

**Question 2** was an open one that aimed at assessing respondents' opinions on the main actors or type of actors responsible for the surge of violent extremism. Respondents were invited to identify up to two actors that have a "Particular responsibility for the surge of violent extremism". The results indicated that a vast majority of respondents underlined the responsibility of state authorities, especially EU member states and the US (see Graph 2).

Governments in Europe that are not dealing with migrants' marginalisation and increasing unemployment may push some youths to engage in violent extremism. Southern governments that polarise societies or are lax in fishing corruption and inequality or do not bother about youth unemployment may also spur radicalisation.

Belgian respondent

The governments have the first responsibility because of their failure to sustain or to increase the same levels of confidence they had at the time of elections. The sole focus on security and the lower focus on communication with youths and solving their acute problems especially in the impoverished areas deepen the situation and make it even worse.

Egyptian respondent

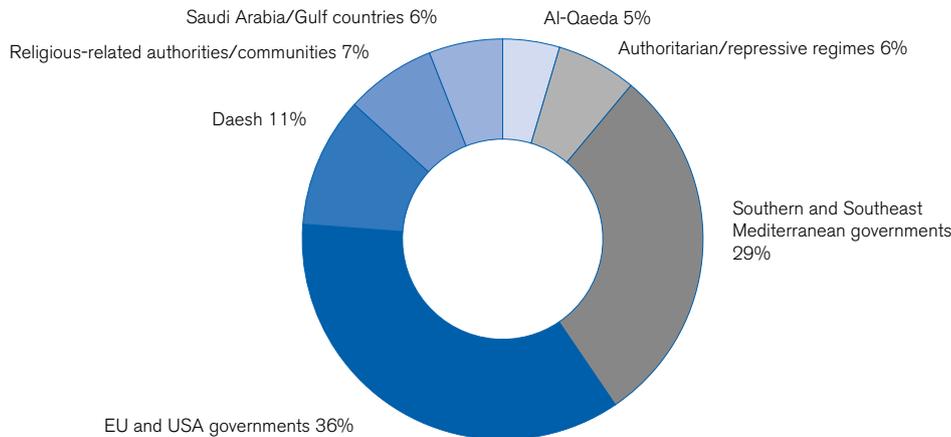
In this context, respondents often referred to military interventions that have destabilised regions where violent extremist groups are now based. Respondents specifically alluded to the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, jointly with several EU countries, as well as the French interventions in Libya and Mali and the foreign military presence in Syria.

Governments from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries are also held responsible for the increase of violent extremism, although in a slightly less significant proportion than Western governments. However, one can assume that most respondents who mentioned “Authoritarian and repressive regimes” also had Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries or Gulf countries in mind.

Les acteurs gouvernementaux tels que les pays comme l'Arabie Saoudite qui exporte son idéologie fondamentaliste (salafi-wahhabi) et radicalise ainsi une partie des musulmans dans le monde entier, y compris en Europe.

Finnish respondent

**Graph 2: Which actor(s) (governmental or non-governmental) has (have) a particular responsibility for the surge of violent extremism? (categories developed from the open-ended answers)**

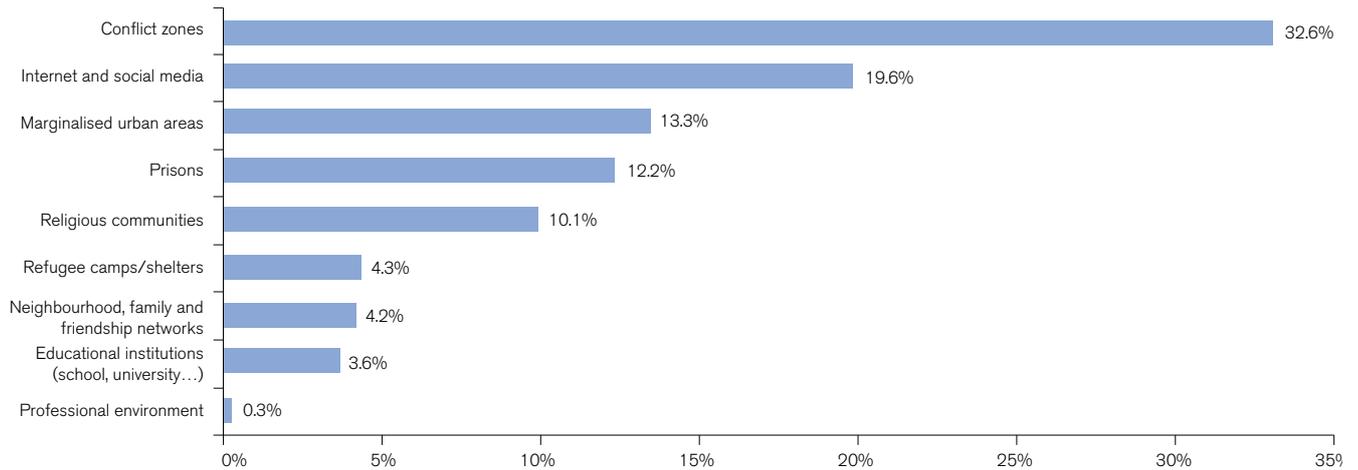


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

In **Question 3** the aim was to find out which environments were perceived by respondents to offer the most fertile ground for turning an individual into a violent extremist. Respondents were asked to choose three options and rank them. Among the options ranked first, respondents chose “Conflict zones” way ahead of the second most-chosen option, “Internet and social media” and the third one, “Marginalised urban areas”. “Prisons” and “Religious communities” are ranked, respectively, fourth and fifth (see Graph 3).

**Graph 3: In which environments and contexts are recruiters more likely to successfully turn an individual into a violent extremist?**

(results show the first choice out of three)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

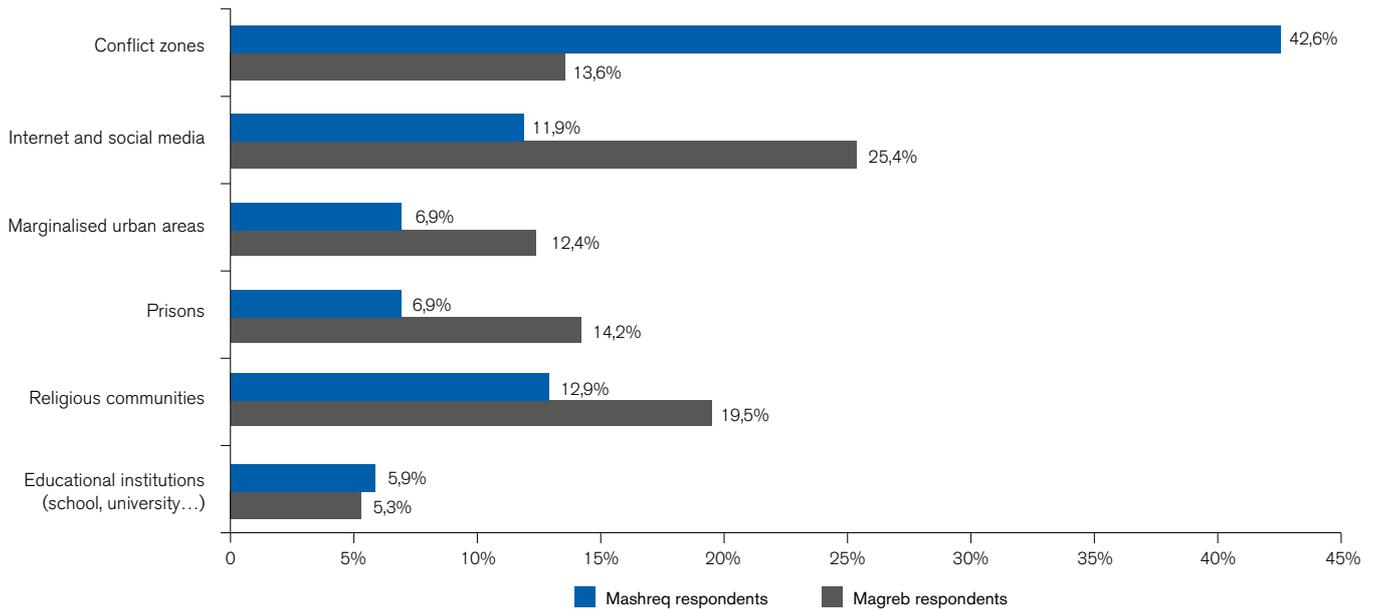
Respondents from Mashreq countries and EU countries chose “Conflict zones” as first option in bigger proportions than respondents from the Maghreb. In turn, Maghreb respondents were most prone to consider “Internet and social media”, as well as “Marginalised urban areas” as environments that could contribute to turning somebody into a violent extremist. Maghreb respondents chose these two options in bigger proportions than EU respondents and even determined that the most favourable environment to radicalise towards violent extremism was “Internet and the social media”. “Prisons” were also chosen by more respondents from the Maghreb than from the Mashreq (see Graph 4).

*Le discours d'incitation à la haine et de discrimination se développe principalement au sein des groupes religieux informels particulièrement dans les zones urbaines marginalisées, dans certains contenus scolaires et parfois dans les médias. Ce discours trouve écho dans les mosquées ou l'internet et les réseaux sociaux.*

Moroccan respondent

**Graph 4: In which environments and contexts are recruiters more likely to successfully turn an individual into a violent extremist?**

(results show the first choice out of three)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

It is also relevant to have a look at the distribution of the responses along the division between those from the EU and Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries (see Graph 5). While respondents from the EU chose “Conflict zones” and “Marginalised urban areas” as fertile ground for violent extremism in bigger proportions than respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, the latter gave bigger importance to “Religious communities” and “Educational institutions” as environments in which an individual can turn into a violent extremist.

In Tunisia, the first recruiters are preachers, the second are close social relationships (family, neighbours and friends) according to the study carried out by the Tunisian centre of studies on terrorism (2016).

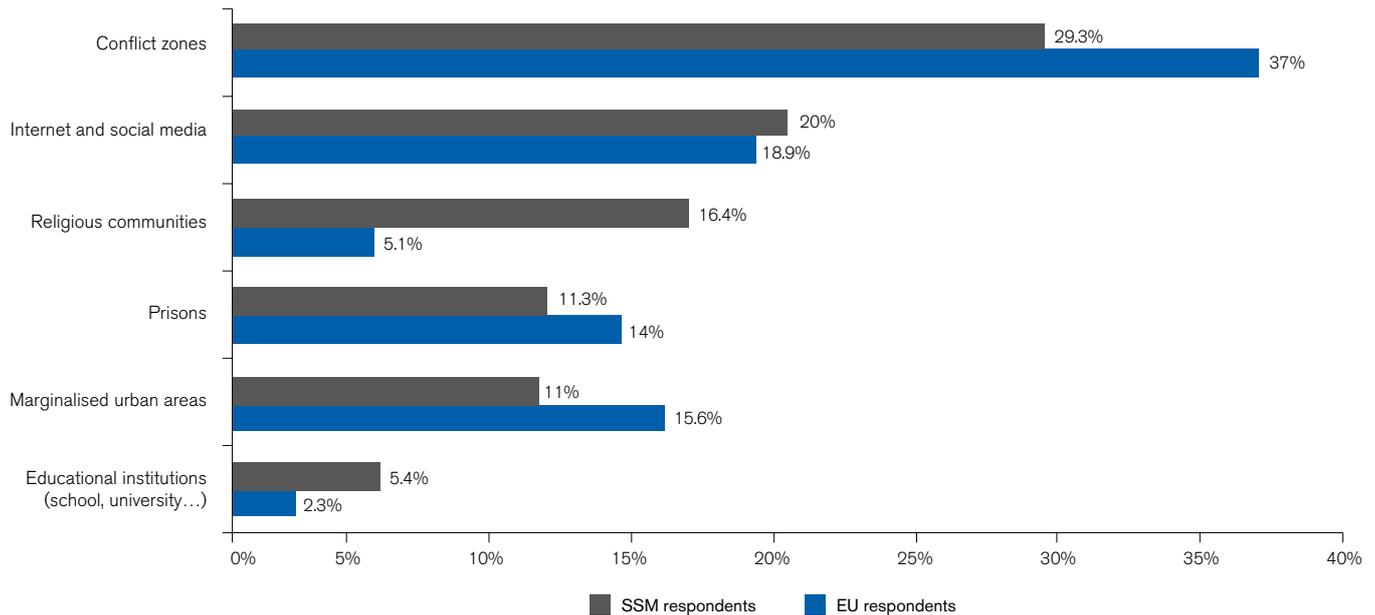
Tunisian respondent

The extremists also use mosques and fitness/martial arts clubs to spread their propaganda, offering to young people a self-valorising image.

Algerian respondent

**Graph 5: In which environments and contexts are recruiters more likely to successfully turn an individual into a violent extremist?**

(results show the first choice out of three)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

In their open comments, respondents were encouraged to elaborate on outstanding features regarding specific countries:

Any environments leaving room for abuse and arbitrary punishments and any environments where human rights are practically under suspension are likely to lead to abuse and secondarily to being more susceptible to be willing to join any group, any cause that is offering "shelter", belonging and a sense of purpose because, in that context, it will be like getting your humanity back, together with a form of safety, though that is most probably an illusion.

Swedish respondent

Though violent extremism is not really a problem in Greece, the inability to resolve or moderate the influx of refugees has allowed the Greek far right to become mainstream in many circles. Also, the inability of the state to overcome the reticence of a large part of society, especially the church, to build at least one mosque in Athens and to integrate Muslims has led to the presence of many illegal mosques with more radical teachings.

Greek respondent

A lot of those comments highlight the lack of inclusiveness and integration as an important parameter:

Neglecting and excluding youths and extremists from political life leads them to violence. Integration deradicalises them. Excluding moderate religious elements from political presentation radicalises them.

Libyan respondent

Le sentiment de marginalisation de communautés musulmanes concentrées dans des zones péri-urbaines est un phénomène à ne pas négliger en France.

French respondent

What is being offered in the first place is a feeling of belonging, which holds a very strong appeal for individuals confronted with an identity crisis and systematic exclusion.

German respondent

**Question 4** was only made available for those respondents that indicated the “Prisons” option among their three choices in Question 3. It is worth noting that the vast majority of respondents that did include “Prisons” among their three choices in Question 3 are from EU and Maghreb countries, whereas few Mashreq nationals did so.

This question was aimed at determining which measures could be taken to effectively address radicalisation in prisons. Several generic categories of measures were submitted to respondents: isolating already radicalised detainees to avoid the spread of radical positions, providing training for reintegrating society, specific training and skills learning for the detainees, psychological support, religious counselling and training for the prison personnel (see Graph 6).

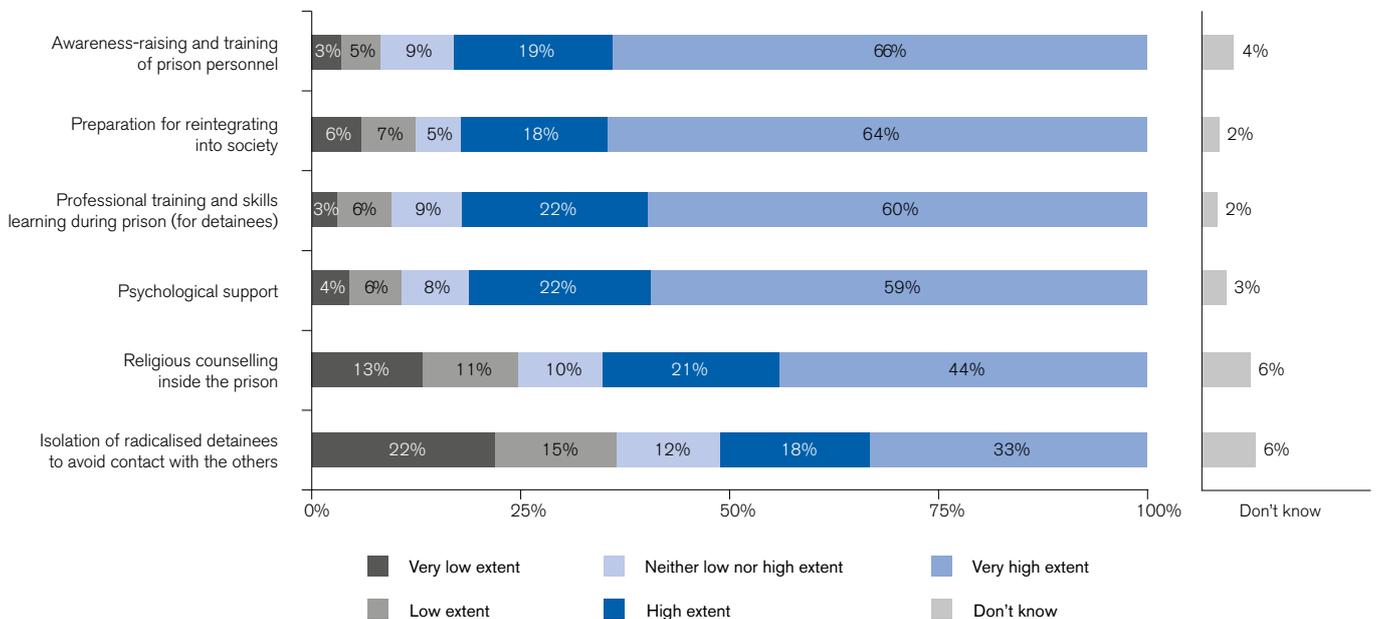
La question principale est d'arriver à faire recouvrir au détenu son identité première de simple citoyen qui ne voit pas dans les autres des ennemis et des individus qui lui sont différents mais aussi qui sont dans l'erreur. Travailler sur son identité première (et non seconde, celle qui lui donne le qualificatif d'extrémiste) pour une auto-réconciliation avec son environnement.

Moroccan respondent

Prison staff training is essential. It takes lot of time but is rewarding. Solid knowledge of religion, history of conflict-prone regions, and psychology are necessary. The same thing applies to teachers.

Algerian respondent

**Graph 6: To what extent could the following measures contribute to curbing radicalisation processes in prisons?**



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

It appears that, in relative terms, the least popular measure is “Isolation of radicalised detainees to avoid contact with the others”, despite some slight differences of patterns per categories of respondents (for instance, policy-makers are more prone than civil society respondents to consider that isolation of radicalised detainees can contribute to curbing radicalisation in prisons).

Isolating people makes them feel deprived. Not allowing radicalised detainees to be exclusively with one another might be a better but not cutting them off from each other altogether. A combination of psychological support and skills training in combination with controlled access to other radicalised people is likely to work better.

UK respondent

The second least popular measure is “Religious counselling inside the prison”, in particular among EU respondents (slightly less so for respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, including from the Maghreb). In the open comments, respondents stressed the fact that moderate religious actors cannot have an influence on already radicalised individuals. They also insisted on the ineffectiveness of isolating specific prisoners, on the importance of preparing prisoners for their reintegration into the society, and of adequate training for prison personnel.

Il serait difficile que l'accompagnement religieux puisse dédogmatiser un élément radical, pour la simple raison que le facteur de radicalité se puise dans la foi de la personne radicale, et qu'il considère le prêcheur « modéré » comme apostat qui tente de le convertir à une autre foi.

Tunisian respondent

## DRIVERS

Closely linked with the issue of the territories in which and the networks through which violent extremism can prosper is the issue of drivers, i.e. what elements provide a fertile ground for violent extremism, both at the macro level (Question 5) and at the individual level (Question 6).

**Question 5** was aimed at assessing respondents' perception of what the most significant drivers for the development of violent extremism are. Respondents had to choose between four drivers and were invited to establish a distinction between the most important drivers for EU countries on the one hand and for Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries on the other hand. They were also asked to identify such drivers in the case of their own country.

With the exception of “The role and impact of global geopolitics”, which respondents consider as a significant driver of violent extremism in equal proportions in both EU countries and Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, respondents have a differentiated analysis when it comes to the relevance of other drivers in the European Union, on the one hand, and Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, on the other (see Graph 7).

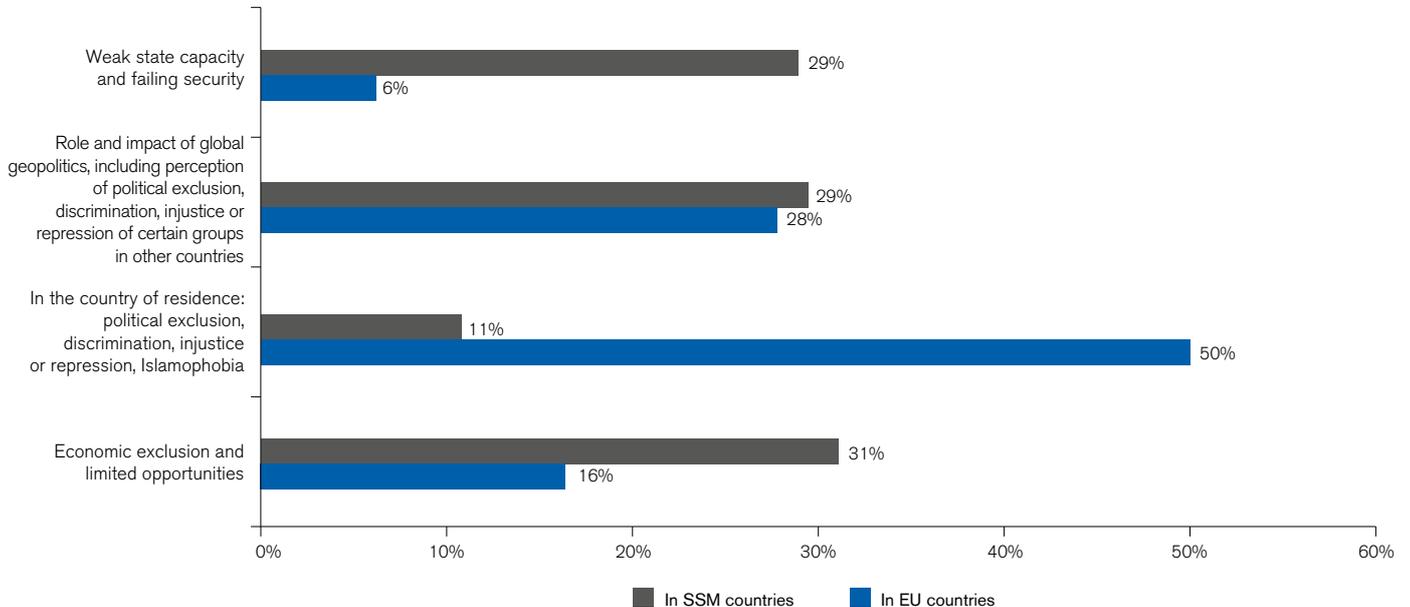
Economic exclusion and limited opportunities surely provide a fertile ground for the development of violent extremism in the Arab world, but also the lack of democracy and repression. On the other hand, marginalisation, discrimination, Islamophobia and political exclusion create terrorists in the West. Migrants or sons of migrants are never considered equal to the inhabitants of Western countries.

Syrian respondent

The drivers for which the most important difference appeared are “The weak state capacity” and “Political exclusion and discriminations”. Respondents determined that the former was a more significant driver for the development of violent extremism in Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries than in EU countries (difference of 23 points) whereas the latter was perceived as a key driver in EU countries (39 points more than for Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries). Respondents also consider that “Economic exclusion and limited opportunities” is a more relevant driver in Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries than in the EU.

**Graph 7: Drivers providing fertile ground for the development of violent extremism.**

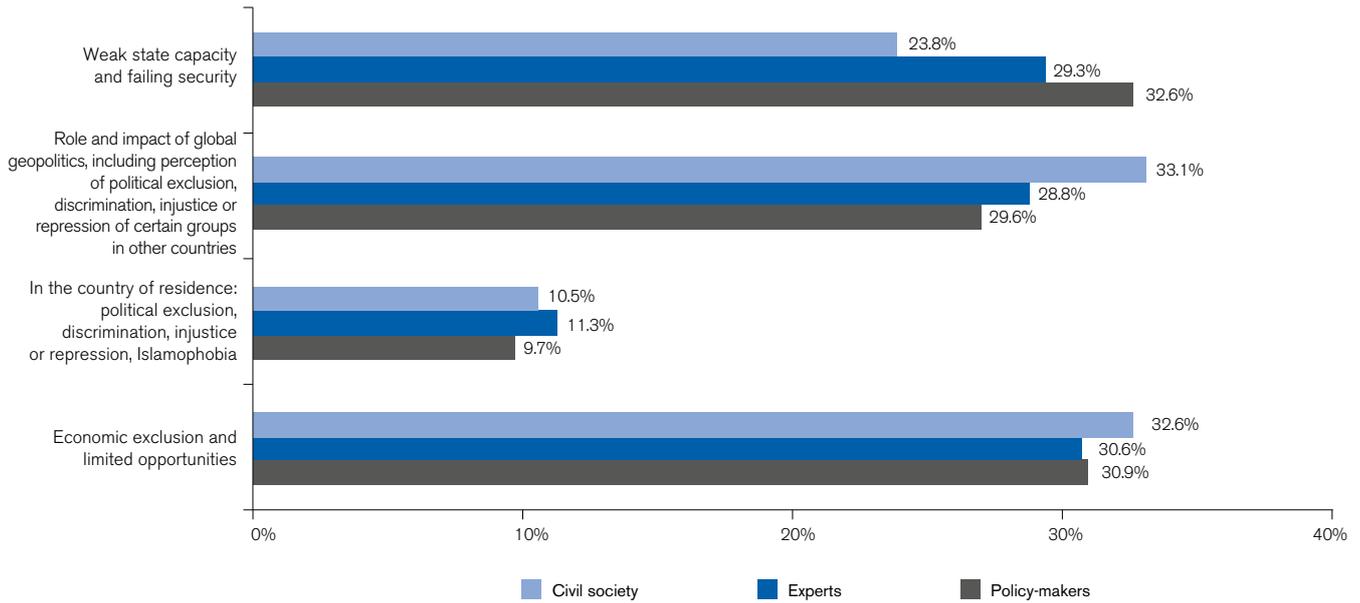
(% of the most significant driver in group of countries)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

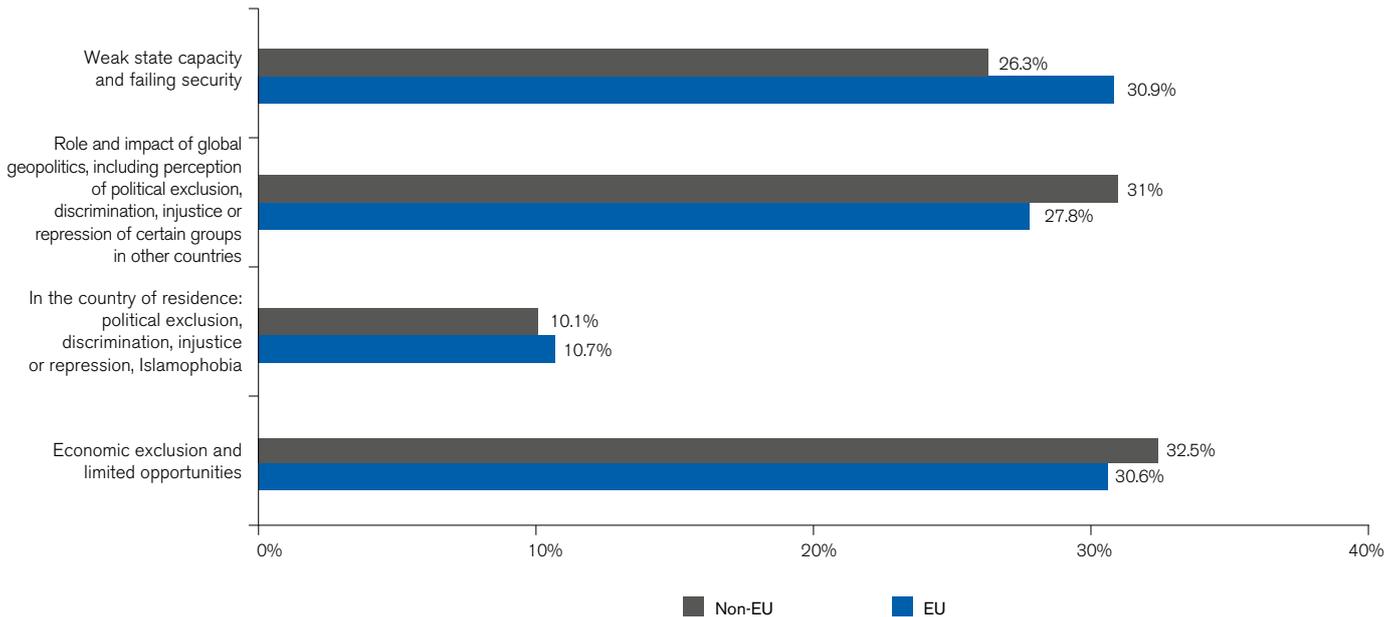
Furthermore, the trends are slightly different if one looks into the answers per category of respondents. When it comes to the situation in Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, EU respondents and policy-makers are slightly more inclined to think that “Weak state capacity and failing security” is providing fertile ground for the development of violent extremism than respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries or respondents from the civil society (see Graphs 8 and 9).

**Graph 8: Most significant driver for the development of violent extremism in SSM countries.**  
(civil society/experts/policy-makers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

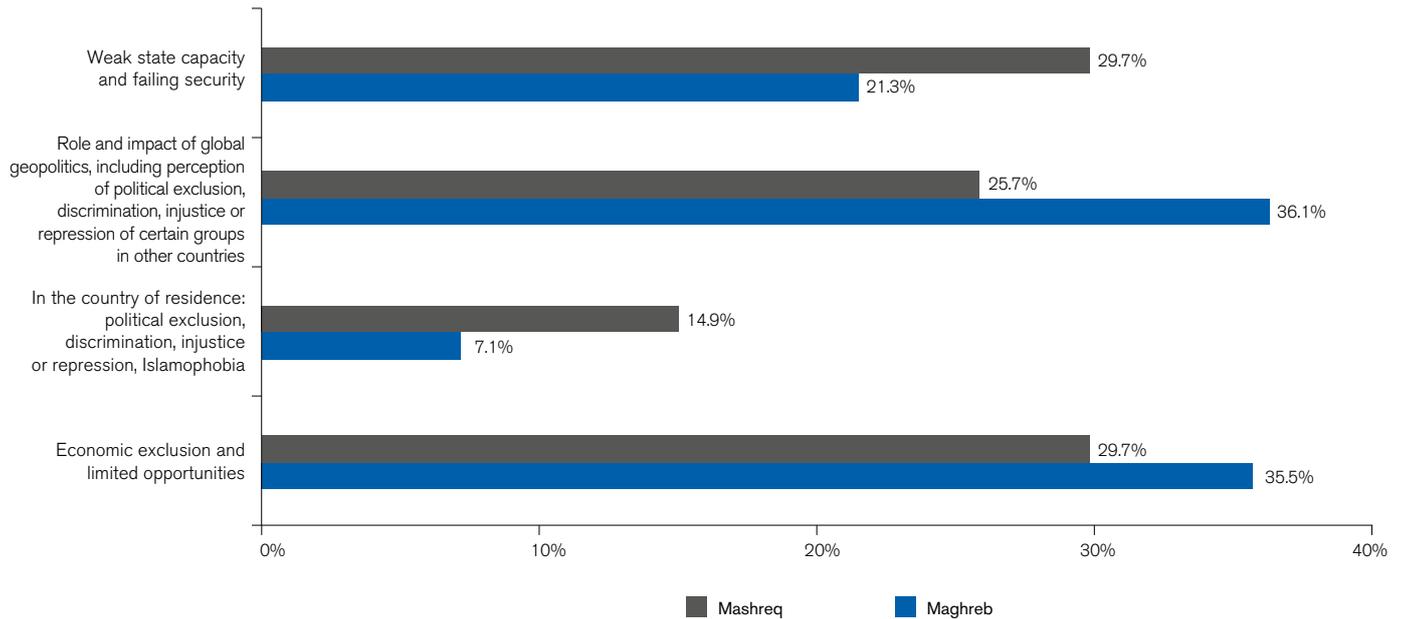
**Graph 9: Most significant driver for the development of violent extremism in SSM countries.**  
(EU/non-EU countries)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Respondents from the Mashreq are also more inclined to think that political exclusion and discrimination is a driver than Maghreb respondents.

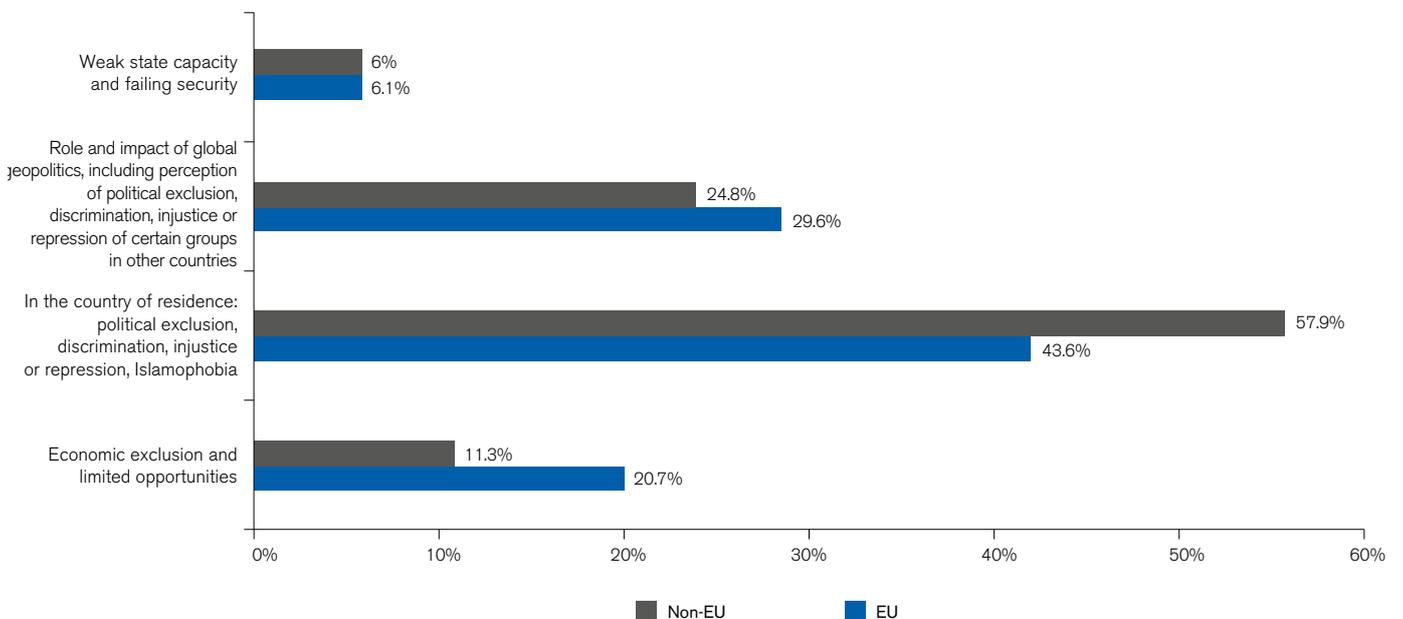
**Graph 10: Most significant driver for the development of violent extremism in SSM countries.**  
(Maghreb/Mashreq)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

When it comes to the situation in the EU, there are even bigger differences in the analysis. EU respondents are more inclined to think that “Economic exclusion and limited opportunities” matters in the EU than Southern and Southeast Mediterranean respondents. In turn, Southern and Southeast Mediterranean respondents consider to a larger degree than their EU counterparts that “Political exclusion, discrimination, injustice or repression and Islamophobia” matters in the EU.

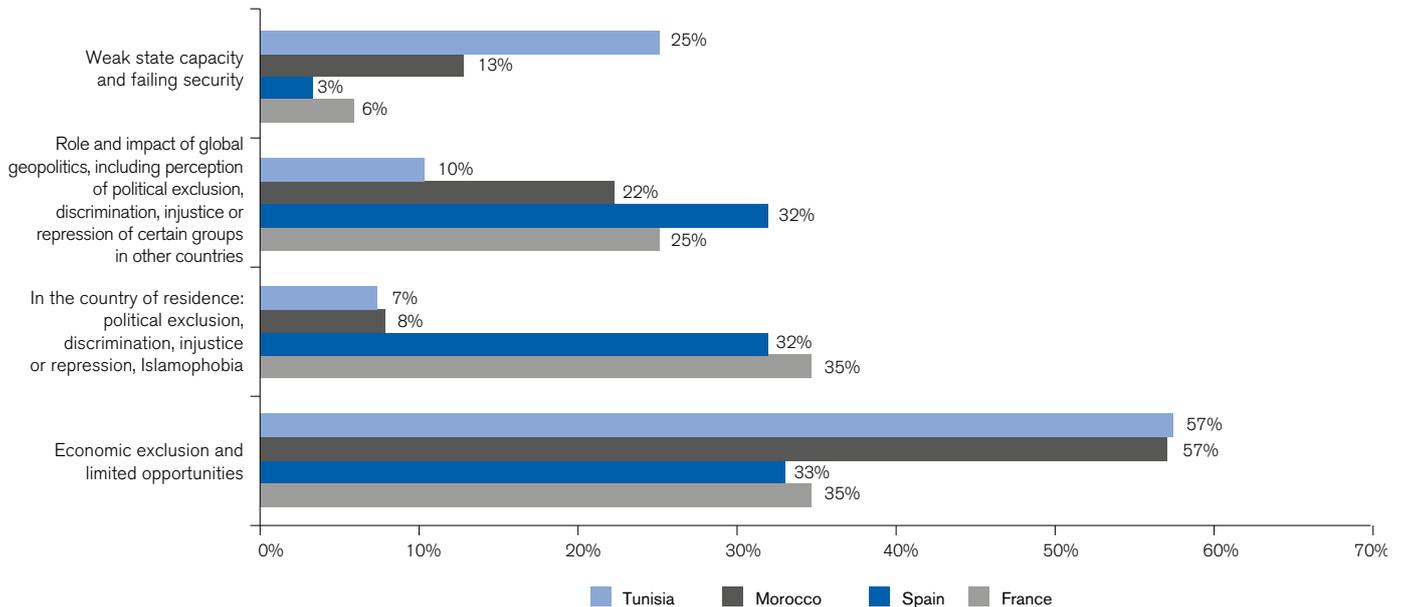
**Graph 11: Most significant driver for the development of violent extremism in EU countries.**  
(EU/non-EU countries)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Respondents were also asked to choose what they perceived as the most important driver in their own country. A graph has been compiled with representative cases in both EU and South and Southeast Mediterranean countries (see Graph 12).

**Graph 12: Drivers providing fertile ground for the development of violent extremism.**  
(% of the most significant driver in respondent's own country)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

With some small variations French and Spanish respondents identified “Political exclusion and discrimination”, “Economic exclusion” and “Role and impact of global geopolitics” as important drivers in their respective countries, which broadly matched with the perception of all respondents regarding the EU as a whole.

When it comes to respondents from Southern and Southeast regarding all SSM countries, “Economic exclusion and limited opportunities” prevails. This is in line with SSM countries commenting on their own countries. Maghreb and Mashreq respondents identify “economic exclusion” as the main driver for their own country (approximately 55 points). For example, 57.4% of Tunisian and Moroccan respondents chose this option as the most important one (see Graph 12).

Respondents from Turkey attribute more weight to the “Role and impact of global politics” for their own country than Maghreb respondents do for their own countries. In turn, they are less inclined to think that “Weak state capacity” is a problem in their own country than Maghreb respondents think it is in their country (see Graph 10). As for Israel, respondents attached less importance to “Economic exclusion and limited opportunities” in their own countries than in the Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries.

In the open comments, respondents highlighted the fact that one driver cannot be strictly isolated from the others:

Usually there is not only one significant element but many in a certain context. For example, in Southern Mediterranean countries we cannot exclude the economic exclusion and limited opportunities option. In addition, there are other factors such as some youths lost the feeling of belonging to their homeland, and what can be called value crisis.

Egyptian respondent

The rise of violent extremism is due to a complex mix of drivers: from social economic conditions, school teaching delivered by highly motivated professors and/or preachers, religious narrative on TV or in local mosques; activities of charity NGOs during a natural disaster to intervene instead of weak absent state; feeding the hungry, maintaining family when the family head is absent or in jail, assistance always has strings attached, distribution of "religious" attire and books and money.

Algerian respondent

It is also worth noting that a number of respondents felt that the role of religion and ideologies was under-represented in this question and throughout the Survey (see Boubekour "The Religious and Ideological Factors of Violent Extremism" p. 14):

Je suis surpris de ne pas trouver l'influence de certaines religions parmi les facteurs proposés.

French respondent

La dimension idéologique (lavage des cerveaux) essentielle manque complètement dans le schéma proposé.

Finnish respondent

The options in this question are limited and are biased to the deep roots theory. It does not appreciate the power of extremism as an ideological and spiritual force. Of course, it is related to a multitude of socio-economic and cultural factors, but it became an independent and self-generating force in its own right.

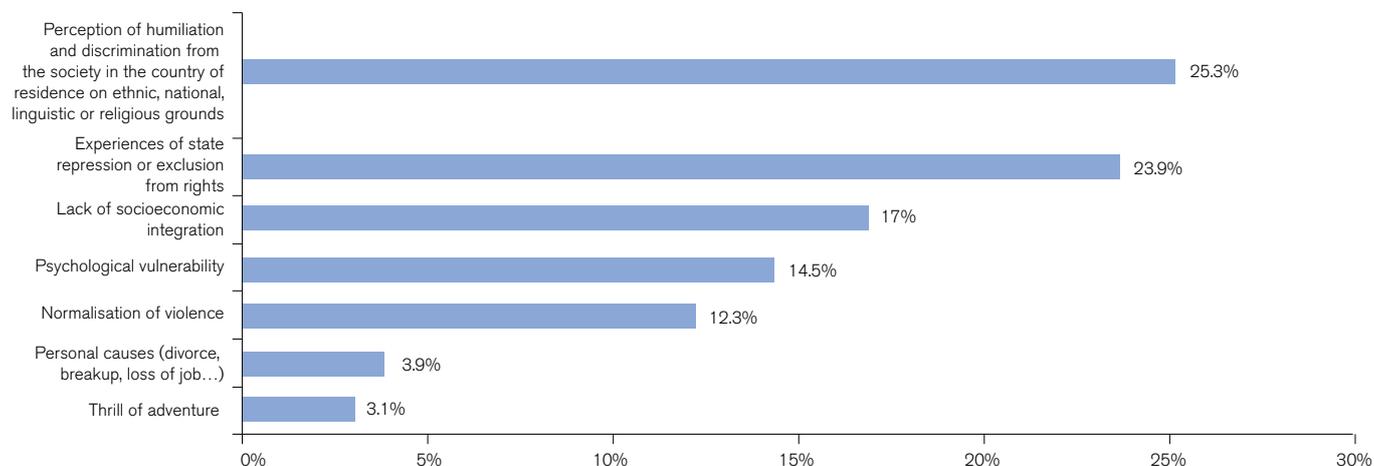
Egyptian respondent

There is no mention of violent religious ideology (Jihadism) and abetting conservative clerics (e.g. Al Qaradawi) who do not get their hands dirty personally, but egg others on.

German respondent

To close Block 1 on context and drivers of violent extremism, **Question 6** was aimed at assessing respondents' opinions on the prevailing individual drivers and motivations that push someone to turn to violent extremism (while Question 5 was about contextual and macro-level drivers). Respondents were asked to rank three options, the first one being the driver regarded as most important.

**Graph 13: In addition to an enabling environment, to what extent can the following elements help to explain why an individual turns to violent extremism?** (results show the first choice out of three)



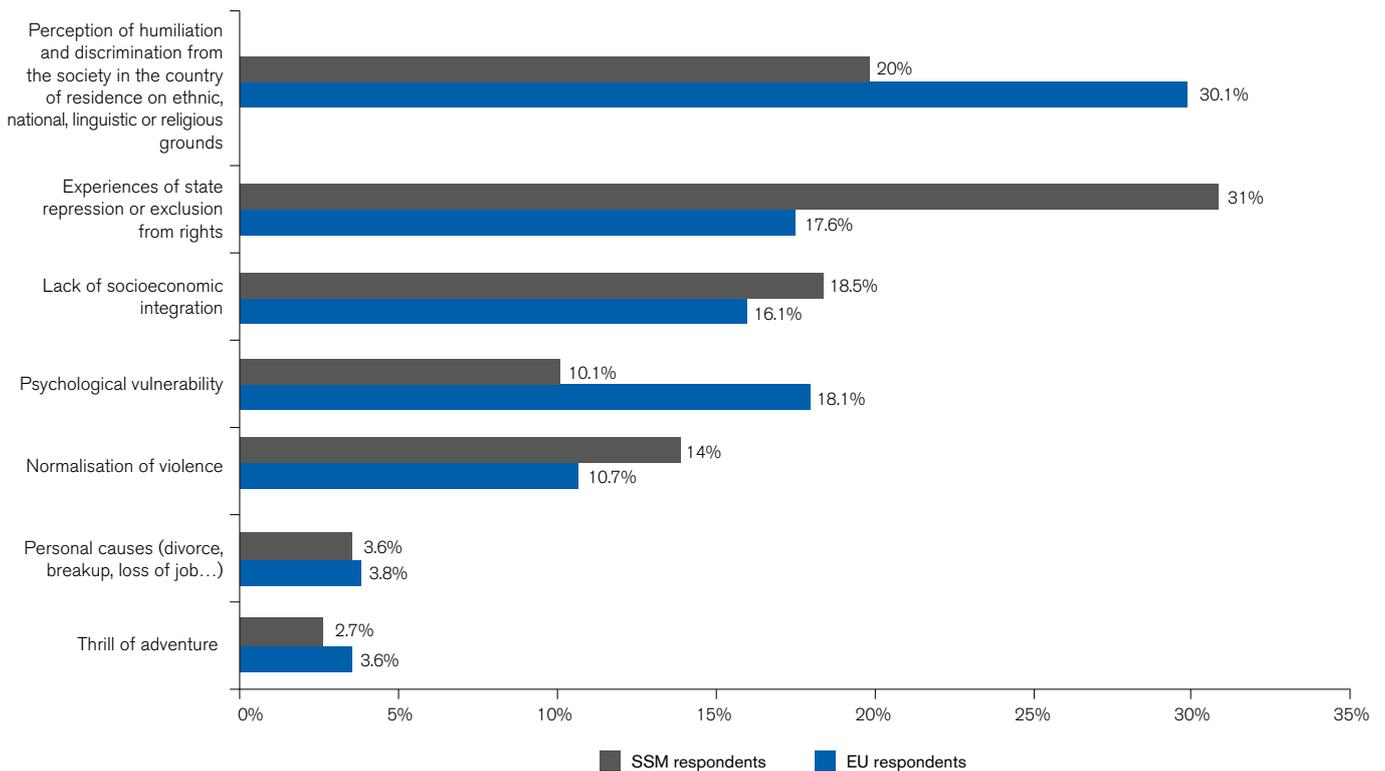
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Overall, respondents considered that the most significant individual driver was the “Perceived humiliation and discrimination from the society in the country of residence on ethnic, national, linguistic or religious grounds”. Indeed 25.3% of them ranked this as first option (see Graph 13). Close behind, 23.9% selected “Experiences of state repression or exclusion from rights” as the first option. In other words, respondents agree that the real or perceived relation between the individual and the rest of the society or the state is key to understanding what drives an individual to violent extremism.

La majorité des personnes amenées vers l'extrémisme violent souffrent de chômage et d'exclusion. Très rares sont les cas de personnes intégrées dans un cadre économique légal qui sacrifient leur statut pour entamer une aventure extrémiste violente. Dans le cas de la Tunisie, la normalisation de la violence, la répétition d'attentats terroristes, avec une vulnérabilité psychologique ont permis à certains de s'octroyer un pouvoir social et politique dont ils ont été privés. C'est pour cette raison que le renforcement des capacités et la confiance en soi sont des éléments primordiaux. Les rares personnes ayant un statut économique et social qui s'orientent vers l'extrémisme violent, le font pour des raisons idéologiques.

Tunisian respondent

**Graph 14: In addition to an enabling environment, to what extent can the following elements help to explain why an individual turns to violent extremism?**  
(results show the first choice out of three)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Graph 14 contrasts the percentages of each option with the geographical origin of respondents. The EU/non-EU division is significant in the top two options. EU country nationals regard “Perception of humiliation and discrimination” as the first individual driver towards violent extremism whereas Southern and Southeast country respondents (in particular from the Masheq) selected the “Experience of state repression” as the most important driver. Respondents who identified themselves as belonging to civil society were more prone to identify “Experiences of state repression” as the first driver than respondents belonging to the “Policy-makers” group.

The graph also shows a differentiated weight attributed to the importance of “Psychological vulnerability” as a factor leading to the radicalisation of an individual. Almost twice as many EU respondents as their counterparts from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries considered that this is the most important factor. In fact, EU respondents chose as first option “Psychological vulnerability” in bigger numbers than “lack of socioeconomic integration”.

C'est l'absence de perspectives (emplois, épanouissement, bien être) qui pousse une personne vers la radicalisation.

Moroccan respondent

What seems to me to be the most important factors in relation to Q6 are: 1) the fact that people have a (false) sense of fighting against global injustice, in other words, fighting for a bigger purpose, and 2) the person becomes part of a new community that is seen as welcoming and powerful, therefore making him/her powerful as well. Socioeconomic exclusion of the person or his/her community in the country of residence (and its perception) is important, but I am not sure it is a sine-qua-non condition.

Greek respondent