

## Preventing Islamic radicalisation and conflict

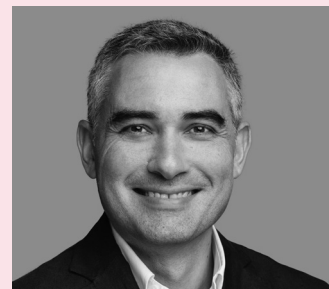
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In recent years, most of the major violent conflicts in the world have happened in Muslim-majority countries. Of these conflicts, a substantial and increasing share has been related to terrorism by Islamist insurgents (Gleditsch and Rudolfson, 2016). Specifically, driven by Islamist groups, the Sahel has seen a clear increase in terrorism after an outbreak of violence in Mali in 2012: it now accounts for 43 percent of the world's terrorism deaths; Mali and Burkina Faso are among the world's five countries most impacted by terrorism deaths; Burkina Faso now accounts for more terrorism deaths annually than any other country (Global Terrorism Index, 2023). And related to these facts, data from U.N.'s International Organisation for Migration shows a major increase in illegal immigration pressures over Europe coming from affected populations in the Sahel. Islamic radicalisation is a major correlate of violent conflict in the world today and deserves specific attention in terms of conflict prevention policies.

In this policy brief, we report on a series of studies we conducted in Mozambique on preventing Islamic radicalisation and conflict. Like some countries in the Sahel, Mozambique has seen the emergence of Islamist insurgents in its resource-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado, starting in 2017. Violence in this region is ongoing, has been associated with ISIS,

and has resulted to date in more than four thousand deaths, and more than 800 thousand people displaced. The immediate reaction of the Mozambican government was solely military, with little success or even backfiring because of mistargeting insurgents and losing support of local populations. This should not come as a surprise as the classical conflict literature has focused on the idea that increasing the opportunity cost of engaging in conflict is an important way to prevent it — i.e., that winning the 'hearts and minds' of local populations through development can be the most effective conflict-prevention strategy (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Miguel et al., 2004; Berman et al., 2011).

We collaborated with local religious organisations in Mozambique to test ways to decrease Islamic radicalisation, and in that way, reduce anti-social behaviours and violence in Cabo Delgado. We were encouraged to ally with civil society because an initial randomised controlled trial we launched before the conflict in Cabo Delgado province showed that community mobilisation through information provision by a consortium of organisations led to lower incidence of conflict in the first year of the conflict — as measured by independently reported geo-referenced violent events (ACLED and GDELT; Armand et al., 2020). This way, we started to believe that religious organisations (which



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