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The Importance of Sunni-Iraqi Support in the Rise and Fall of ISIS in Iraq

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The Importance of Iraqi-Sunni Support in the Rise and Fall of ISIS in Iraq

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Honors Research Project

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Abstract

ISIS, a Salafi-jihadist terrorist organization stationed in the Middle East, has had its fair share of "successes" and "failures," both of which have been present in Iraq. Toward the beginning of the development of ISIS, it garnered a very powerful supporter base in Iraq. However, that has changed since then; ISIS currently, in 2024, no longer has the support of the vast majority of the Iraqi people. What is the reason for this? This research paper will seek to analyze and answer two major questions: what role does the Iraqi Sunni population play in ISIS's trajectory of successes and failures in Iraq? And why would the Iraq Sunni population support ISIS in the first place?

Introduction

ISIS, while being a pretty new insurgency group—relatively speaking—has a very significant history in the Middle East but more specifically, in Iraq. ISIS has been a force that has been slowly gaining popularity in the Middle East over the years. In June of 2014, ISIS had successfully seized much of the territory in northern Iraq, including Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, and Tikrit, the birthplace of Saddam Hussein, and the last major Iraqi city to fall to Coalition forces in 2003 during the Iraq war. However, the amount of support for ISIS in the very place that they were founded—Iraq—has greatly diminished over the years. By 2015, ISIS lost much of the Iraqi Sunni public's support and, by December of 2017, ISIS had lost 95 percent of the territory that it had once seized in northern Iraq. With ISIS being a Sunni insurgency group, one would reasonably suspect that it would garner major support from the Sunni population in Iraq. So where did the Sunni support go? The main questions I will be asking and answering are

the following: what role does the Iraqi Sunni population play in ISIS's trajectory of successes and failures in Iraq? And why would the Iraq Sunni population support ISIS in the first place?

The goal of these questions are to analyze and understand not only the role the Sunni population played in Iraq, but also, why the Iraqi Sunni population would support a violent terrorist organization like ISIS at all. This both includes successes and failures on behalf of ISIS to influence Iraq, as well as analyzing the correlation between Iraqi Sunni support and ISIS victories (and defeats). The main way that this will be measured will be through qualitative data collected by a series of random surveys in Iraq from 2014-2018.

These are very important questions that must be asked, as ISIS, Al Qaeda, and any future terrorist organizations are not the sort of groups that form in a day. Their use of fear, persuasion, religion, and other dynamics of their insurgency play a crucial role in the understanding of their group. In addition, it is necessary to see how ISIS spreads its following, and where they fail to spread their following, for a better understanding of the spread of terrorism is the key to stopping this very spread from occurring.

Background

In order to properly comprehend the results of the data, it is crucial to first dive into the history of how ISIS came to be, how ISIS gained power in the first place, and how ISIS subsequently lost that power. To elaborate, there are considered to be four phases of ISIS's rise to power but in this article, I will be focusing on the following three: 1) the rise of ISIS, 2) the peak of ISIS, and 3) the decline of ISIS.

First, I will touch on the founding history of ISIS. For context, ISIS was formed under a different name in the beginning. In 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi established an offshoot of Al

Qaeda called “Al Qaeda in Iraq” (AQI). Zarqawi refused to join Al Qaeda due to differing ideologies, which is why he decided to create his own offshoot. Al Qaeda focused more of their attention on targeting Western powers, whereas the Islamic State focused more of their attention on targeting local regimes to dominate them and spread their ideology.

After al-Zarqawi was killed by US forces on June 7th, 2006, AQI began to face a significant amount of local opposition from their support system: the Sunnis. This is due, in large part, to the fact that many Iraqi Sunnis who aided the insurgency felt alienated due to AQI’s frequent mistreatment of civilians, and can also be credited to the fact that AQI tried to replace local power structures with its own foreign components. Thus, in an attempt to save their image and distance themselves from Al Qaeda, AQI merged with smaller, more local insurgent groups and rebranded as “The Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI). Even still, the Iraqi Sunni population did not trust them, and the newly formed ISI was gravely weakened in 2007 by the Sunnis—who were armed with American weaponry—forming militia groups, known as the “Awakening Councils,” to remove them from the territories (1). ISI continued to operate underground for the next few years, continuing to target Shias, Christians, the Awakening Councils, and the Iraqi government.

The Rise of ISIS (2012-2014)

The rise of ISIS, specifically in Iraq, officially begins between the years of 2012 and 2014. From this time and even prior, the ISI was severely weakened and was hiding in the Western portion of Iraq, away from the cities and where no one lived. After falling off of the map for several years, it re-emerged around 2011, taking advantage of the instability and economic insecurity of Iraq and Syria at the time (2).

Iraqi Sunni Support from 2012-2014



The scale above roughly indicates the transition period of support from the Iraqi Sunni population. The scale has two ends, ranging from support for the government to indifference to support for insurgents. As the image above indicates, the Iraqi Sunni population's support shifted from acquiescence—or skewed in favor of—toward the Iraqi government to acquiescence toward insurgents groups, such as ISIS. So, the question is what caused this shift?

In 2006, Nouri al-Maliki, a sectarian Shia, became prime minister of Iraq with backing from the United States. Al-Maliki initially promised to reach out and support Iraq's minority groups, the Sunnis and the Kurds, and he even had both groups represented in his cabinet. However in 2011, as the American troops began to withdraw from Iraq, al-Maliki began to go after many of his political rivals, most of whom were predominantly Sunni. Then came the discrimination of the Iraqi government against the Iraqi Sunni population. Sunnis were arrested by the hundreds, and tens of thousands of Sunnis were arrested in total. Whenever there was even a whisper or hint of terrorism occurring in an area, the Iraqi army would go in and arrest Sunnis just to keep them in detention for years on end without a trial. According to Rafi al-Essawi, the former Sunni minister of finance in al-Maliki's cabinet, many Shia political figures tried talking to al-Maliki to convince him that this is not the right way to go about dealing with the increasing tensions in the region, but to no avail (3).

In December of 2012, al-Maliki's security forces arrested all of Rafi al-Essawi's bodyguards based on allegations of terrorism. Al-Essawi was known across Iraq as a peaceful

man, so this event sparked dozens of protests across the country in many Sunni dominated cities such as Mosul, Fallujah, Ramadi, and Kirkuk. However, these protests only reinforced secularism into the minds of the Shia population. Militias came with tanks and SWAT teams to disperse these protests, and ended up killing many of the Sunni protesters.

So back to the initial question: what caused the Sunnis to shift their attitudes from in favor of the government to being in favor of ISIS? The answer is that it was the consistent mistreatment and discrimination of the Sunnis by the government that was run by al-Maliki. Sunnis felt like they no longer had a home in Iraq and they felt hopeless. That is when ISIS began to mobilize, and they did so by taking advantage of the hopeless feelings of the Sunnis.

The Peak of ISIS (2014-2015)

In 2013, as the ISI made headway in increasing their troops from Syria, they officially renamed the organization the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)” (also known as the “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)”).

When Mosul was taken, roughly 6,000 ISIS soldiers defeated 30,000 Iraqi troops, which is considered a major defeat for the Iraqi government. So how did this happen? The vast majority of the Iraqi military is Shia, and the Shia soldiers did not want to die defending a city of Sunnis. So, when ISIS stormed the city, the Iraqi army turned the other way and consequently, ISIS practically walked into the city and seized power with little to no resistance. ISIS continued its reign successfully, continuing to attack Shia, Kurds, and the Iraqi government through suicide bombing. That is until they began to face opposition starting in 2015.

The Decline of ISIS (2015-2018)

2015 officially starts the decline of ISIS. According to Al Jazeera, “[i]nside ISIL territory there were ongoing ‘gross human rights violations’” (4). Not only this, but Iraqi militias—made

of mostly Shia and Kurds—as well as the United States begin to mobilize against ISIS. On December 1st of 2015, Defense Secretary, Ashton Carter, announced the United States special operations forces would be sent to Iraq to help Iraqi and Kurdish fighters (5). So at this point, ISIS is in big trouble. They have not only alienated the Iraqi Sunni population, but now the military and militias were counterattacking. Eventually, ISIS was defeated and by December of 2017, it had lost 95% of the territory it had once seized.

Methodology

In order to find the information for how the Iraqi Sunni public affected the rise and fall of ISIS, more research was needed than simply looking in a book. In order to understand how the public feels at any given time, it is very necessary to have polls and samples taken of said population. However, in this case, more than simple polling of the public was necessary. Due to the large differences in the sects of Islam and the differences in the beliefs of said sects, the polls need to take into account exactly which groups are being talked about, specifically whether the person being asked these questions is Sunni, Shia, or Kurdish. In addition to including information about the different major sects of Iraq, the information needed to span across the course of multiple years in order to effectively track how the attitudes of the Iraqi population, specifically of the Sunni population, toward ISIS shifted over the years.

By the end of the data collection, a sample of 1,500 Iraqi respondents were included. The respondents consisted of the two dominant sects of Islam in the Middle East, that being Sunni and Shia, as well as an ethnic minority who consistently faces mistreatment by the government in the Middle East, that being the Kurds. This polling was carried out between the summer of 2014 and 2018 by the University of Akron's own Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler and his colleague, Dr. Munqith

Dagher, while they were conducting research for the IIACSS, which is a very respectable and reputable Iraqi polling firm. This data represents a nationally representative survey of the Iraqi public.

The respondents, who were all Iraqi citizens that were over the age of 18, were chosen randomly using what is called 'the next birthday method.' Iraqi households were randomly chosen and the adult in that household who had the next birthday was who was chosen to be interviewed. In addition to randomly choosing people to ensure a diverse pool of information, the data was not gathered from areas directly controlled by ISIS in order to avoid contamination of the polling pool by those who may have a skewed view, such as those in ISIS. In addition, the data was gathered from 300 different sampling points.

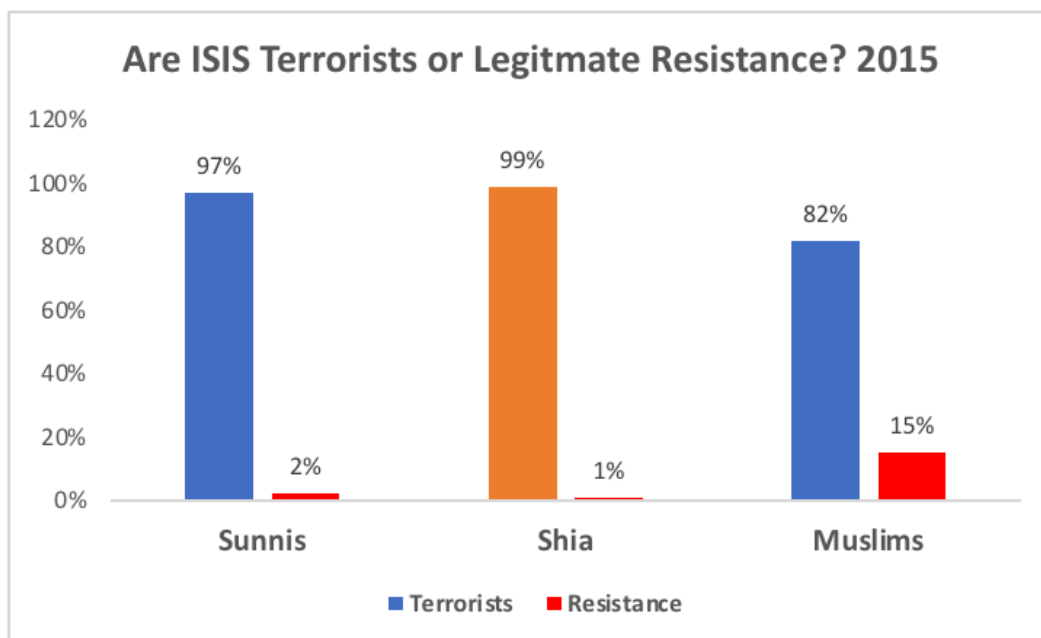
The data was collected through interviews. These interviews were conducted in person, face to face with the interviewees, though the information was recorded on a tablet. The split on the demographic of those interviewed was about half in terms of gender, with 50.3 percent of those interviewed being male. Other important demographics about those interviewed would include the religious affiliations of those interviewed, of which 15.8 percent were Kurds, 27.5 percent were Sunni Arabs, 52.6 percent were Shi'a Arabs, and 2.3 percent were Christians. All of these demographics were backed by a program called Percentmatch, as well as previous surveys of the area, making it even more likely that the information gathered is an accurate representation of people in Iraq (6).

With all of this being said, it is important to note that the main demographic whose results this article will be focusing on is not the Shi'a or the Kurds, but the Sunnis. Given that ISIS is a Sunni salafi-jihadist terrorist organization, expecting the Shi'a to support them is a non-starter, judging by the extensive, violent history the Shi'a and Sunnis have with one another.

Expecting the Kurds to support ISIS is also a non-starter due to the fact that the former prime minister and president of Iraq—Saddam Hussein, a Sunni—mistreated not only the Shi'a, but the Kurds as well. Consequently, the Kurds saw ISIS as a threat due to the fact that ISIS is Sunni. Given the fact that ISIS is a Sunni group and the history between the Sunnis with both the Shi'a and the Kurds, it is reasonable to expect the Sunni population being the only sect in Iraq supporting ISIS in any capacity.

Findings/Results

Figure 1

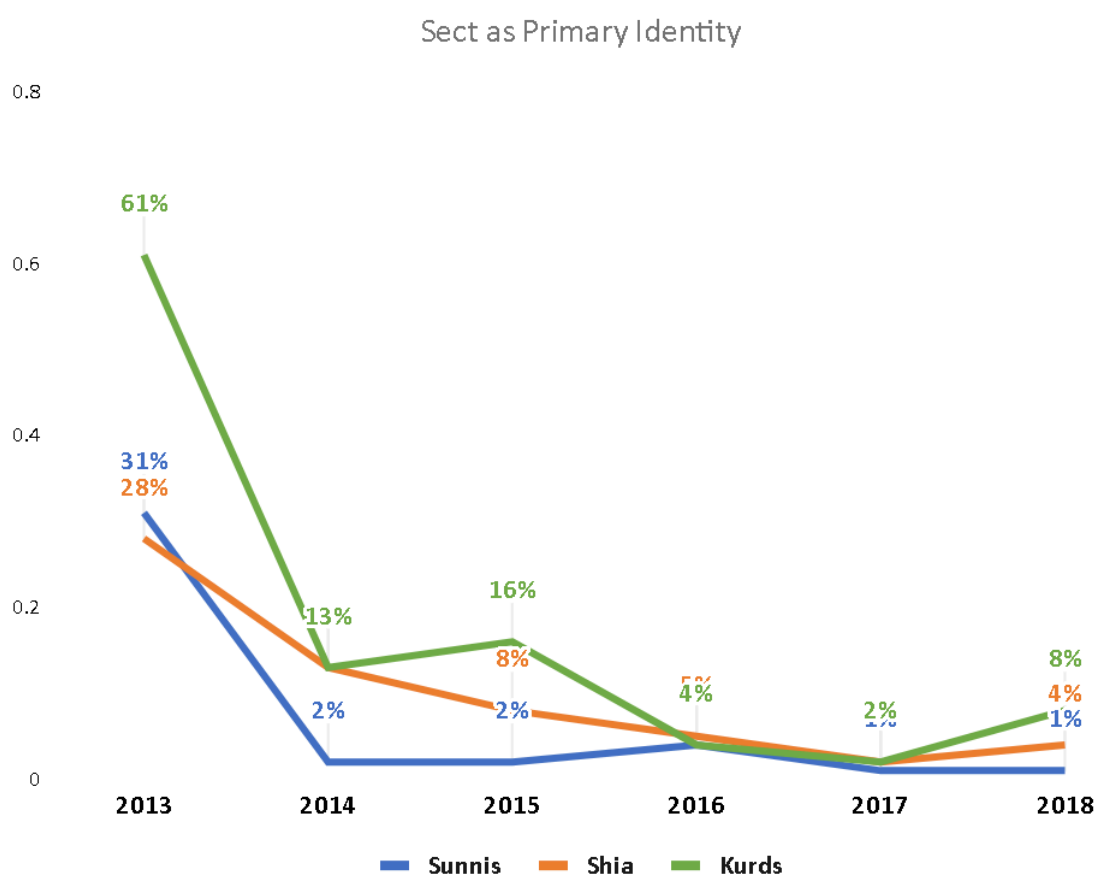


Source: IIACSS

Figure 1 shows that the vast majority of both dominant sects of Islam—Sunni and Shia—as well as Muslims as a whole think that ISIS are terrorists rather than just legitimate resistance. More specifically, 97 percent of Sunnis and 99 percent of Shia think that ISIS are

terrorists, which is pretty significant considering that ISIS is a Sunni terrorist organization. While Iraqi Muslims as a whole don't have such a stark difference in percentages like the Sunnis and Shia, the majority of Iraqi Muslims—82 percent—feel that ISIS is a terrorist organization rather than legitimate resistance. This data shows that even in 2015, ISIS did not have very much support at all from the general Iraqi public.

Figure 2

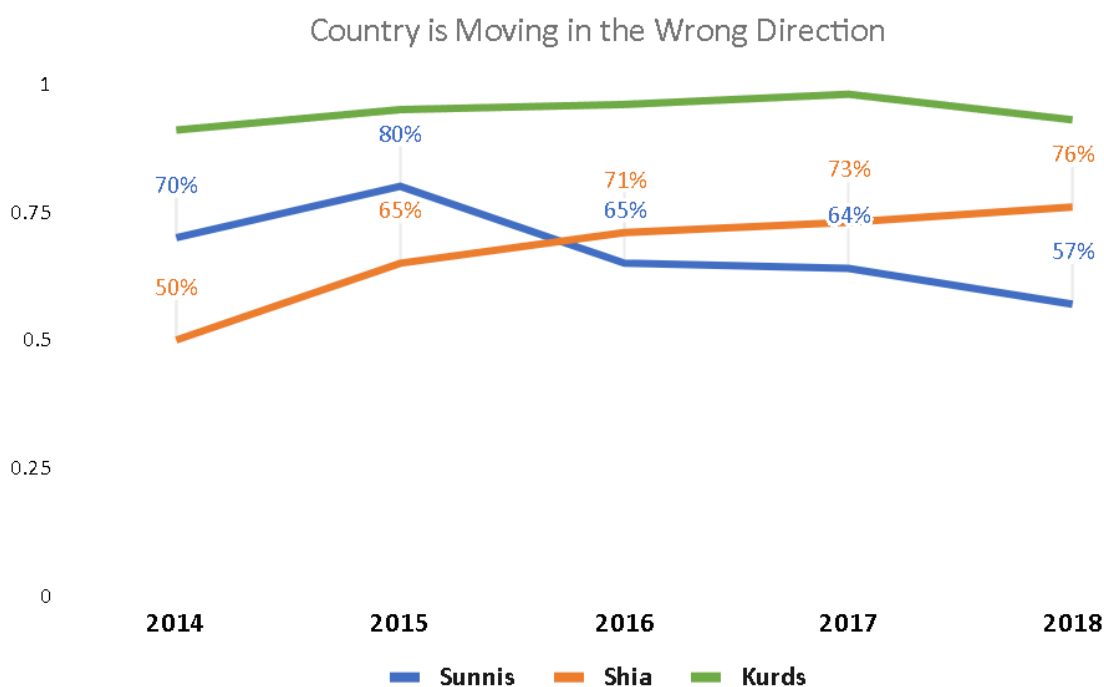


Source: IIACSS

Figure 2 shows the time period of 2013 to 2018, and the belief of the Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish people that their sect was their main identity. Over the course of this five year difference, starting around the time that ISIS was rising, the people of all three sects dropped

significantly in the number of people who said their main identity was their sect. The largest drop of this was the Kurds, dropping a whopping 53 percent of the population who identified themselves as Kurds first and foremost, from 61 percent in 2013 to eight percent in 2018. While the drop was not quite as significant in the Sunni and Shia populations, with 31 percent of Sunni identifiers in 2013 dropping down to only one percent in 2018, and 28 percent of Shia identifiers dropping down to four percent in 2018, the numbers in all three groups still were at astounding lows. This data would seem to show the population distancing themselves from their religion, a religion that ISIS was using as an idol to try and garner support. It is worth noting that the Sunnis dropped to the lowest percentage, further indicating that they wanted to distance themselves from the Sunni insurgency group, ISIS. This distancing is indicative of a distancing, not from Islam itself, but from the group trying to focus the religion into a weapon.

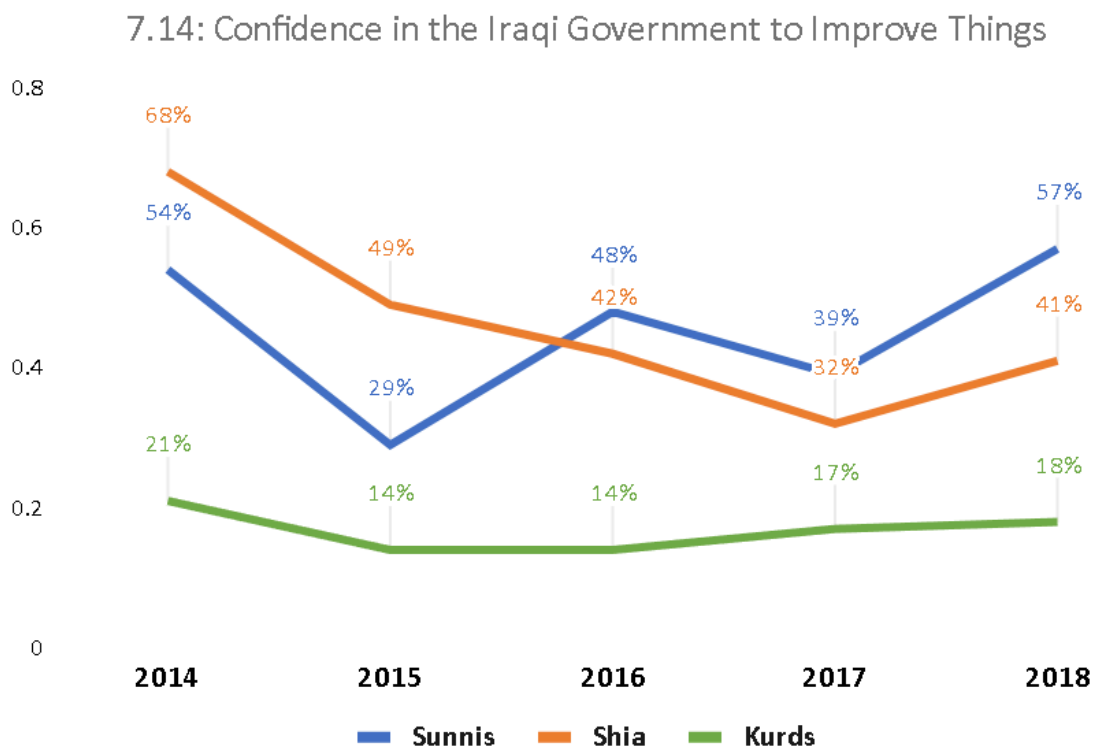
Figure 3



Source: IIACSS

Figure 3 shows the time period of 2014 to 2018, and the belief of the Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish people that the government was moving in the wrong direction. This span of ISIS's rise and rule in the area found a rise in all except the Sunni's belief that the government *was* heading in the wrong direction. To be precise, the Kurds went from 91 percent believing that the government was heading in the wrong direction to 93 percent. While this was not an astronomical climb, less than 10 percent of the population believing the government is not bad is a very miniscule amount. Similarly, of the Shia participants, only 50 percent believed the government was heading in the wrong direction in 2014, as opposed to the 76 percent in 2018. Finally, though they did decrease, the Sunni people asked only dropped down to 57 in 2018 from their 70 percent in 2014. Being that ISIS is primarily made up of Sunni, it would make sense that there would be more sympathizers for a government doing little to stop ISIS within this group. However, it is still worth noting that there was almost 60 percent of the Sunni who believed the government was heading in the wrong direction.

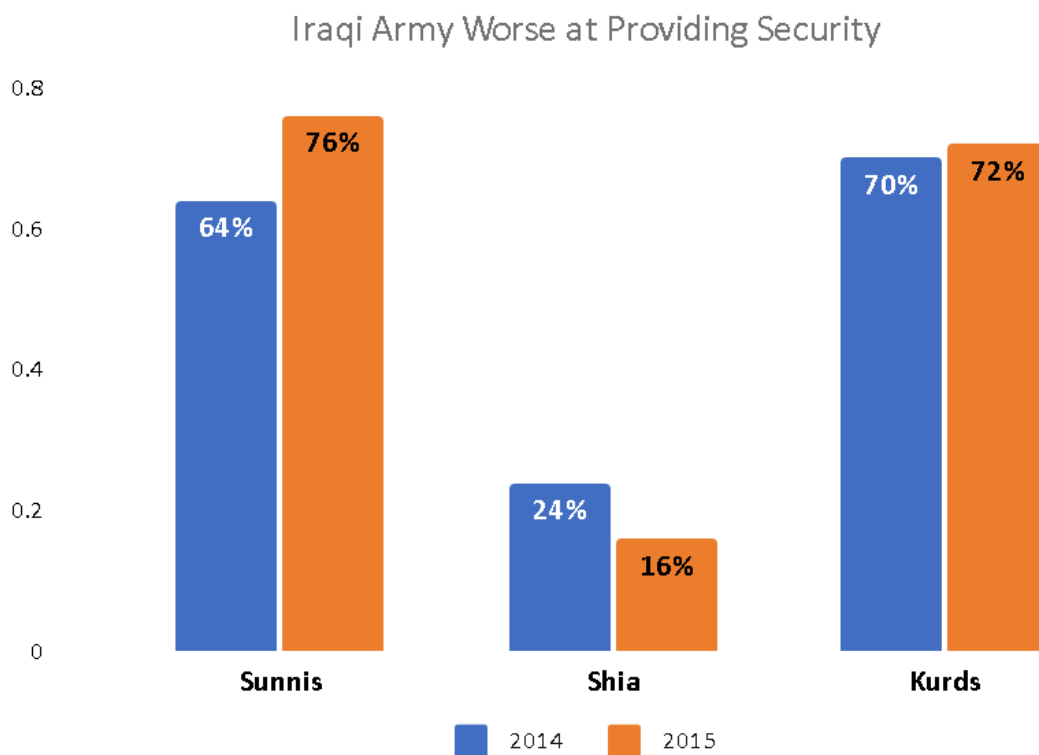
Figure 4



Source: IIACSS

Figure 4 is the percentage of each population—Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds—that had confidence in the Iraqi government to improve things from 2014 to 2018. As shown in the chart, in 2014 at the start of the occupation, the Shia population had the most amount of confidence in the Iraqi government at 68 percent, the Sunnis were behind at 54 percent, and the Kurds had the least amount of confidence in the Iraqi government at 21 percent. In 2015, the Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds all dropped to 49 percent, 29 percent, and 14 percent respectively. By 2018, after ISIS was expelled from the territory, the Shia confidence in the government rose to 57 percent, the Sunni confidence rose to 41 percent, and the Kurds' confidence rose to 18 percent.

Figure 5

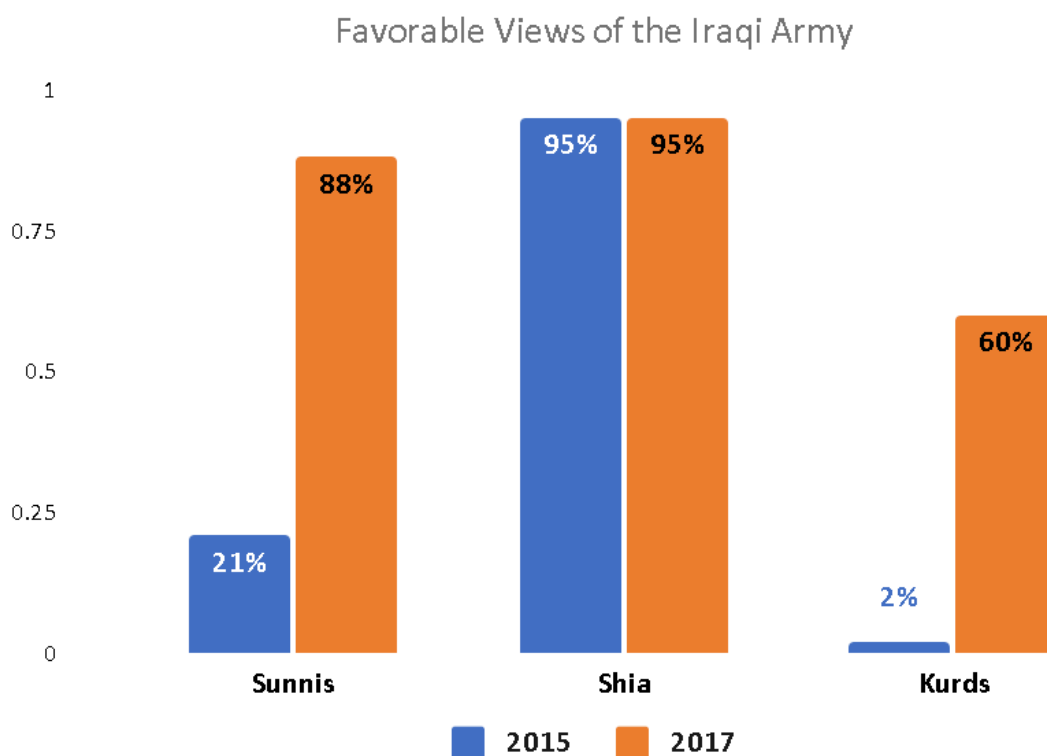


Source: IIACSS

Figure 5 shows the amount of people from each sect who believe the Iraqi army is doing a poor job at providing security, both in 2014 and in 2015. While the Sunni and the Kurds seemed to mostly consider the Iraqi army ineffectual at providing the security required, the Shia seemed to believe they were doing decently, with more thinking they were doing well in 2015 than in 2014. To be specific, the Sunni population increased in its lack of faith in the Iraqi army, from 64 percent believing it was ineffective up to 76 percent. This is likely due to the lack of opposition that the Iraqi army showed toward ISIS when they took the vast amounts of territory in northern Iraq in 2014. Likewise, the Kurds increased, though not by as much, as the percentage increased from 70 percent to 72 percent. The Shia, on the other hand, dropped from 24 percent believing the Iraqi army was ineffective in 2014 down to 16 percent in 2015. This

graph is likely influenced in part by ISIS, as those who see the continued rise of ISIS likely would have less faith in the military's ability to provide security. However, it is also important to note for other statistics, specifically those involving foreign intervention, as faith for their own military would decrease the want for foreign aid, meaning a low percentage wanting foreign aid does not necessarily mean a liking of ISIS, merely a trust that their country can handle it without others.

Figure 6

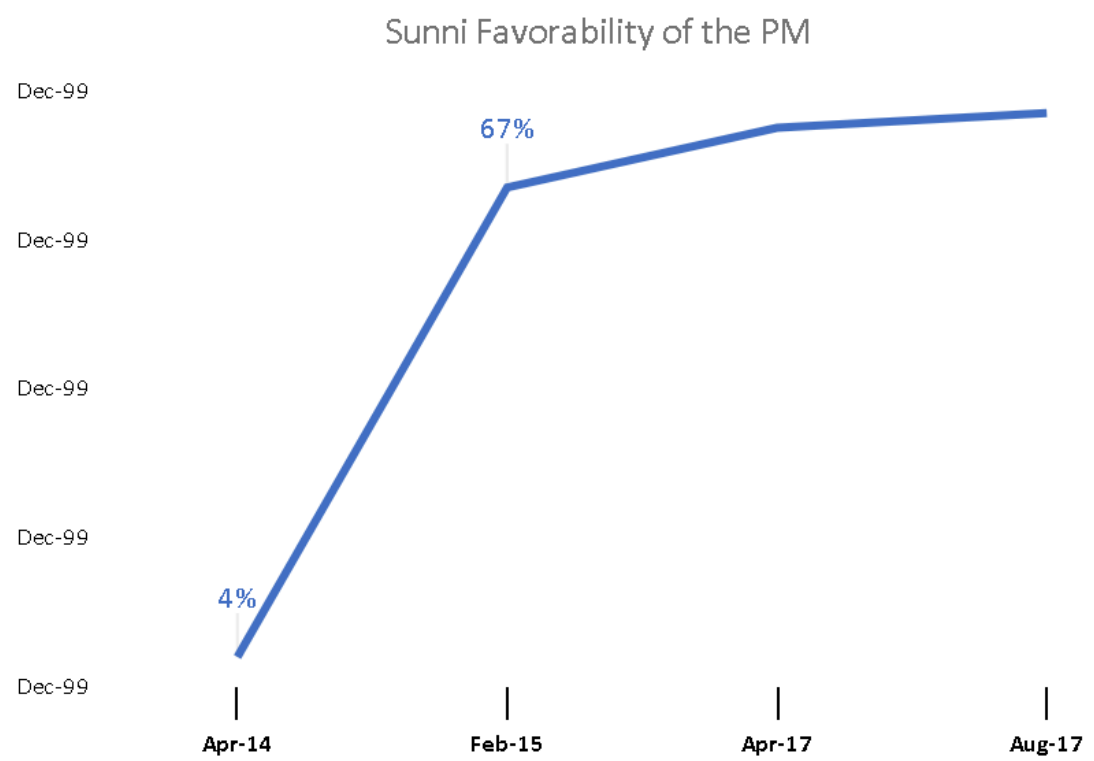


Source: IIACSS

Figure 6 is a graph representing the three major sects of Islam in Iraq—Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish—and displaying whether or not they have favorable views of the Iraqi army in 2015 and 2017. To be more precise, the Sunni population had only 21 percent of their population that possessed favorable views of the Iraqi army in 2015, which rose drastically to 88 percent in

2017. Likewise, the Kurds increased dramatically between those two years as well, as 2 percent of the Kurdish population had a positive view of the Iraqi army in 2015, and up to 60 percent did in 2017. The Shias' positive views of the Iraqi army, in comparison, remained exactly the same in both 2015 and 2017 at 95% percent having favorable views of the Iraqi army. It is likely that the reason these results rose in the Sunni and Kurdish populations is due to the fact that in 2015, the Iraqi army did not have as strong of a presence when it came to counter attacking ISIS; that was primarily the Iraqi militias. However in 2017, that is when the Iraqi army—along with Iraqi militias and aid from U.S. special operations forces—began making headway with defeating the ISIS occupation.

Figure 7



Source: IIACSS

Figure 8 focuses on the Sunni, specifically their favorability to the Prime Minister from April of 2014 until August of 2017. This number increased rapidly from 2014 to 2015, when Nouri al-Maliki was replaced as Prime Minister by Haider al-Abadi. The difference between these two Prime Ministers was their support, or lack of support, for the Sunni population, as Nouri al-Maliki helped marginalize and persecute the Sunnis, in a very similar vein to ISIS with the Shia, while Haider al-Abadi stood more with the people, and was more focused on helping everyone of all sects regardless of their differences. The Sunni support for such a leader, increasing from only 4 percent of the population supporting Nouri al-Maliki to 67 percent supporting Haider al-Abadi, and only rising thereafter, was a clear indicator as to how the Sunni people felt about their mistreatment under al-Maliki's reign. This graph also attests to how the Sunni population's attitude began to shift in favor of the government rather than in the favor of the insurgency.

All of these different statistics seem to indicate that people of Iraq are unhappy with the state of affairs in Iraq, specifically those brought on by the Iraqi government—at least at first. The individuals who were surveyed mostly seemed to disagree about whether or not the Iraqi army was effective at diffusing the conflict with ISIS, with the Shia having faith in the army and Sunnis and Kurds not having faith. The government's ability, or lack thereof, to deal with ISIS was upsetting to the people, as it painted a picture of the country as declining. In addition, the people involved identified even less with their religious identities due to the behavior of not only ISIS under the guise of a religious banner, but also due to Nouri al-Maliki's discriminatory reign against the Sunnis as prime minister.

Discussion

With all of this being said, the real question is ‘why does Iraqi Sunni support matter at all?’ If a militant group, like ISIS, has the weaponry and influence to seize power, why do the citizens' opinions even matter? What could they possibly do but to simply accept their situation? The truth is that the citizens' support for a militant group, for example, is actually crucial if not necessary for the success of that group within that area. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who has control is not determined by the amount of firepower a group has, it is determined by the amount of supporters a group has. The support of the people is crucial simply because these groups heavily rely on the people for “food, shelter, recruits, and intelligence” (7). However, all of this heavily relies on the public’s willingness to make sacrifices in their own lives in order to support these insurgent groups.

So the question becomes “what causes the public to willingly submit themselves and/or their resources to support insurgent groups?” One of the arguments made by scholars has to do with the theory of relative deprivation. It is worth noting that this theory is particularly important in the grand scheme of the overarching research question, so it is important in regard to attempting to understand why individuals support violent groups. Relative deprivation theory refers to the belief that someone feels like they are deprived and/or entitled to something (i.e. money, resources, rights, equality, etc.) based on the comparison to someone else. For example, if a group feels as though they are being deprived of something that another group has, then consequently, they believe that the quality of their situation has gone down. Similarly, a group may feel like their situation should be better than it currently is, but is not. If said group of people feel as though another group (the government, an ethnic group, a religious group, etc.) is responsible for their predicament, then they may feel that the only way that they are able to stand up for themselves is to rebel in a violent manner. The argument is that the feeling of having no

meaning or purpose in life is what can lead individuals to support terrorist organizations, such as ISIS.

One could argue that the feeling of relative deprivation is exactly what the Sunni population in Iraq felt over the course of 2011-2018. Firstly, there is the clear discrimination that the Sunnis faced at the hands of the former prime minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, which took place in the form of arresting Sunnis by the hundreds and removing any Sunni that al-Maliki saw as a political rival. Then, there were the Sunni protests calling for change that the government never intended to act on in the first place. On top of that, predominantly Shia militias dispersed these protests by killing the protesters, and the government turned a blind eye.

Another argument made by scholars to explain why the public would voluntarily yield themselves or their resources to support violent terrorist groups is due to compliance. Compliance occurs when an individual(s) are coerced to join and support these groups through the use of threats, propaganda, or deprivation of resources, such as food, water, shelter, etc. A lot of the type of compliance that is used involves charismatic persuasion, which refers to being convinced by an individual member of a radicalized group (8). This is yet another argument that is made to explain why citizens will willingly submit themselves or their belongings/resources in order to support insurgent groups.

Now that several theories explaining why individuals join insurgent groups were proposed, the real question is how did the general public aid ISIS during the period of their rise and when they were at their peak? The main answer to this is that Iraqi Sunni citizens make up a decent amount of ISIS troops. The strategic reason for this is because Iraqi citizens know the lay of the land in Iraq, which gives them an advantage when it comes to coordinating attacks (9). Referring back to the theory of relative deprivation, if the Sunnis feel hopeless and that they have

nothing else to lose, joining a militant group like ISIS can give them a sense of belonging. They may not completely agree with ISIS's tactics, but it gives them the sense of having power and taking control of their life, which is something that they did not previously have.

Referring back to the data, there seems to be a correlation between ISIS's influence on the Sunni population—or lack thereof—and ISIS's victories and defeats in the Middle East. According to Figure 3, the numbers appear to clearly correlate with when ISIS seized territory and when it was defeated. To expand, in 2014; 70 percent of Sunnis, 50 percent of Shia, and 91 percent of Kurds—when asked if the country was moving in the wrong direction—answered in the affirmative. But in 2015, after ISIS invaded Iraq and seized territory, 80 percent of Sunnis, 65 percent of Shia, and 95 percent of Kurds—when asked the same question—answered in the affirmative. The number of people who believed the country was moving in the wrong direction rose in every single category following ISIS's invasion. Then, in 2018—after Iraq took back the territory from ISIS—the percentages of Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds who said that the country was moving in the wrong direction was 57 percent, 76 percent, and 93 percent; respectively. The percentage of Shia rising could potentially be due to the fact that since they were the most persecuted during ISIS's occupation, they do not believe that simply taking the territory back from ISIS is enough.

Not only this, but referring back to Figure 2, it appears that Muslims of all ethnicities and sects wanted to try and distance themselves as far as possible from the weaponization of Islam that ISIS was demonstrating. In 2013, 31 percent of Sunnis, 28 percent of Shia, and 61 percent of Kurds used their sect as their primary identity. By 2014—with ISIS on the rise—the percentages of Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds dropped to 2 percent, 13 percent, and 13 percent; respectively. The 29 percent drop in the Sunni population is especially significant, seeing as ISIS is defined as a Sunni

terrorist organization. In 2015, the percentages of Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds shifted to 2 percent, 8 percent, and 16 percent; respectively. During the year of 2017—before Iraq took back the Iraqi territories from ISIS—the numbers completely dropped to 1 percent of Sunnis, 2 percent of Shia, and 2 percent of Kurds identifying primarily as their sects.

All of this data, this empirical evidence, unable to be simply denied, points towards one truth: the citizens, specifically the Sunnis, of Iraq do not support ISIS. Whether it is the form of government that ISIS wants to establish in Iraq, the methods in which ISIS operates, or even the banner under which ISIS attempts to coalesce people, all have been rejected by the people of Iraq. No matter the means that may have differed between the groups for doing so, Iraqi people saw ISIS as a terrorist organization that needed to be removed from their land.

Conclusion

This academic research paper analyzes the following research question: what role does the Iraqi Sunni population play in ISIS's trajectory of successes and failures in Iraq? And why would the Iraq Sunni population support ISIS in the first place? Throughout this article, statistics were brought forth in the form of a randomized survey of 1,500 Iraqi citizens of three different sects: Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish. They were asked many different questions about democracy in Iraq, views of the Iraqi government, views of the Iraqi military, how they view their own identity, how they view ISIS, and other questions that might prove necessary or relevant in such an analysis of the area. The goal of this was to get a randomized sample of the population in order to test the correlation between ISIS's success and the Iraqi public's support.

During discussion, it was determined that public support from citizens is absolutely necessary for militant groups to be successful. After the statistics were broken down, it is clear

that there is a correlation between Iraqi Sunni public support and how 'well' ISIS performed in regard to achieving their goals. While further research will need to be performed in order to determine whether this is a causal relationship, this research can hopefully be used to help understand why or why not the public supports terrorist organizations like ISIS. That way, we can work toward preventing the spread of the harmful ideologies spread by these terrorist groups.

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