

Mosul; The Post ISIS Landscape



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How we proceed:

1. Interviews with political & military leaders, fighters & militants, supporters & would-be volunteers to generate hypotheses,
2. followed by lab exps to test plausibility,
3. next, structured interviews and experiments with leaders, militants and supporters
4. then, experimentally designed mass surveys to test potential pathways to & from violence

The Road to Mosul

- Long lines of Trucks and lorries on the road to Mosul.
- Except for individual efforts, not much of construction is seen.
- Lack of planning and Corruption by the local government.

**In-depth interviews & Experiments from N. Iraq,
Debaga camps 1 & 2, Stadium Camp & 2 Khazer camps, July-Oct
2017**

Interviews in and around Mosul, Nov 2018–Feb 2019

**(measures & methods independently checked with thousands of
respondents in other cultural contexts)**

**(Note: We find mass surveys generally *unreliable*, often
conducted by contractors undertrained in scientific methods,
without follow-up Qs or eliciting of justifications from
respondents, and conducted in the presence of others who can
influence responses)**



**Men from
Mosul area
waiting to get
IDs checked**

**Photo
Lorenzo Meloni**

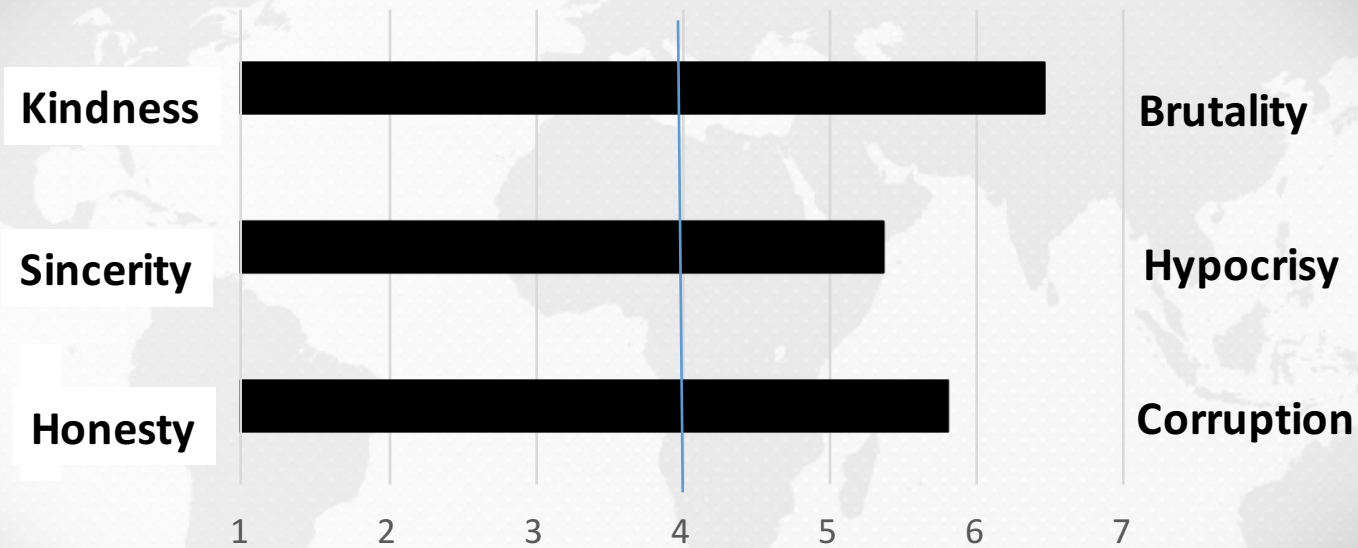
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Initial Support for the ISIS “Revolution” (*al-Thawra*)

- “For the first few months, there was freedom to move anywhere, no identity cards, no checkpoints. The Iraqi army used to humiliate us at checkpoints and take money to let people pass. [ISIS] let young people feel freedom. They rebuilt bridges and schools.”
- “But then [ISIS] lied. They told everyone that there would be a general amnesty, there would be no punishment for people who followed Sharia. Then they broke their promises. They killed former army officers and police and anyone with an important position in the [former] government, first terrifying them, then taking money from them, later executing them.”
- We received them with celebration in the beginning, we served them with big feasts, but they insulted the Sunni community more than [former PM Nouri] Malki did.

End-State Perception of ISIS

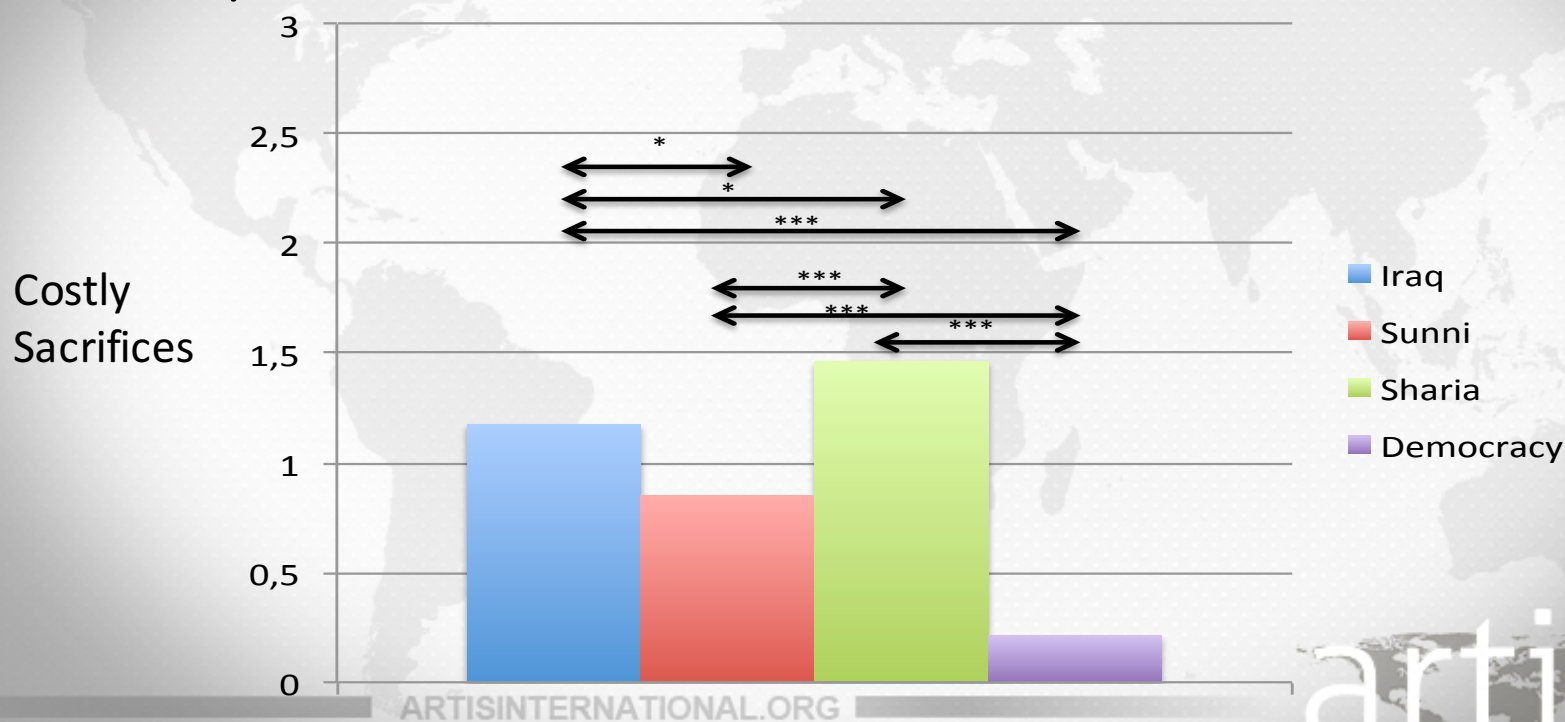
(on 7-point Likert scale)



All End-State means were significantly over midpoint, $p < .001$

- Others attributed ISIS's increasingly brutal behavior to pressure on from coalition attacks and airstrikes.
- **Most interviewees saw clear difference between foreign fighters' dedication to the Caliphate and the locals' lack of commitment.**
- Sunni Arab militia commanders, currently fighting with Iraqi army & Peshmerga, acknowledged initially welcoming ISIS. Often members of tribal elites, they switched sides when ISIS turned to class warfare, inciting less privileged tribesmen to seize property and kill them.
- **Many dispossessed elites and their kinsmen want blood revenge, adding to the threat from Shia militias a dangerous potential for internal conflict among post-ISIS Sunni Arab communities in Iraq.**

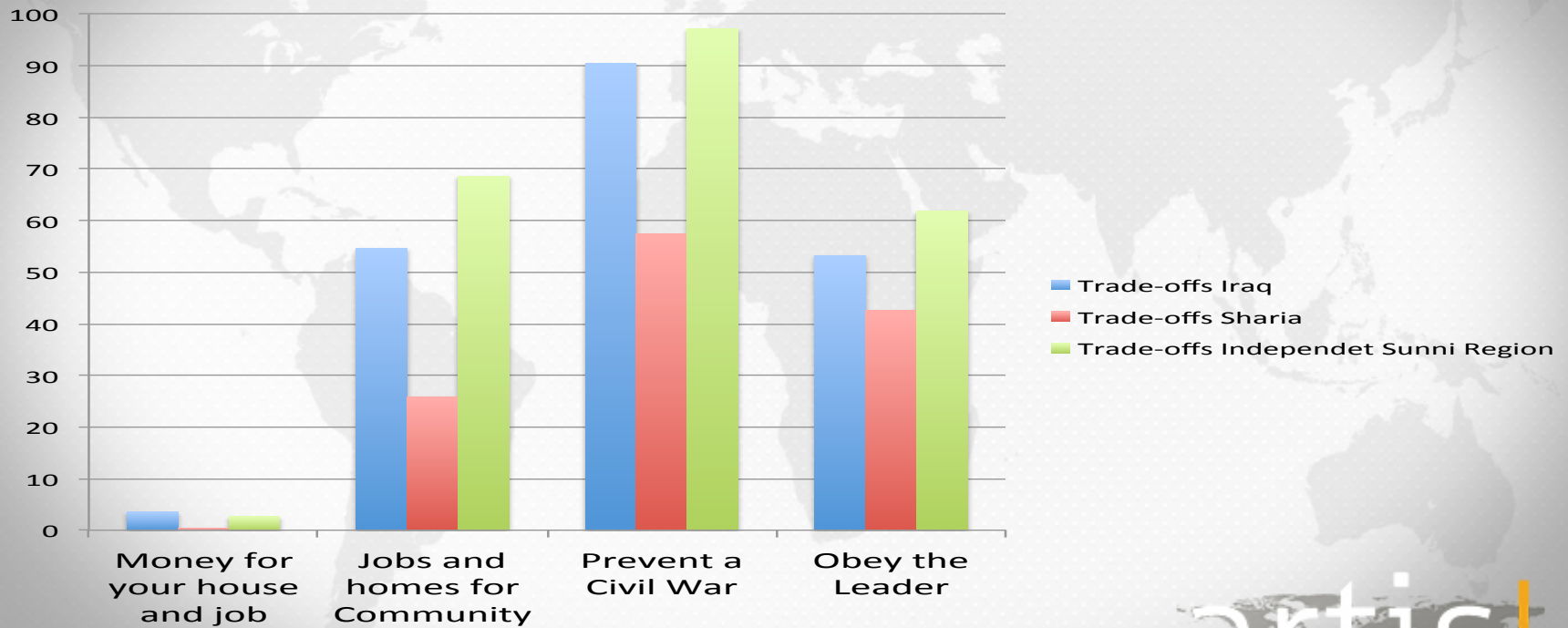
Costly Sacrifices for Values (Lose job or source of income to defend the value; Go to jail; Use violence; Die; Let my children suffer physical punishment)
People most willing to sacrifice for Sharia, least willing to sacrifice for Democracy



People in the Camps Fall into Two Opposing Mindsets:
Unified Iraq vs Sunni Homeland + Sharia

- Support for an **Independent Sunni Region + Sharia** is negatively correlated with support for a **Unified Iraq** and **Democracy**.
- People who support **Sunni Homeland + Sharia** are willing to make costlier sacrifices than people who support a **Unified Iraq**.
- And even supporters of **Unified Iraq** are unwilling to sacrifice for **Democracy**.

Tradeoffs for Values (Independent Iraq, Sharia, Independent Sunni Homeland)
Not for Money or Personal Gain but to Prevent Civil War
People least likely to tradeoff Sharia



Has ISIS Lost? Not So fast....

“America wants to impose democracy only to divide the Sunni people; [ISIS] gave us hope with Sharia.”

- **ISIS may have lost its state, the Caliphate, but not necessarily the allegiance of supporters of Sunni*Sharia to its core values.**

Nearly 2/3 of supporters of Sunni*Sharia, vs less than 1/3 of all respondents, indicated that Sharia was ISIS’s most cherished value.

- **Underlying conditions of political and confessional conflict that caused people to initially embrace ISIS haven’t appreciably changed.**
- **ISIS taking over villages at night, daylight attacks around Kirkuk, Makhmour, the Anbar Desert, etc. at level similar just before establishment of Caliphate**

Shia Flags and Symbols



- Following the war Against ISIS, Shia armed groups stayed in and around Mosul.
- Established HQs and offices and gradually expanded their presences and domination.
- Commercial offices, investments & investment.

The Abandoned City



**The city has not
recovered
neither from the
war nor from ISIS**

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Individual Reconstruction Efforts



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Post ISIS Studies; Summery Results.



- How people who lived under ISIS perceived its State and Laws.
- Trust in Iraqi Army before & after liberation of Mosul city.
- Will ISIS, physically and as a set of believes, be completely eliminated?
- Resilience of Sunni community against ISIS and Iran.
- Intentions of involved countries in Sunni areas.

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Fieldwork 2018: N = 72, all males, Age 18-50yo (Avg = 28, majority b/w 23 and 30)

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Perception, Trust, & willingness to Sacrifice

- Our goals were to better understand how people who had lived under ISIS, some for over three years, perceived ISIS's rule and its State, their own political future, and their trust towards Iraqi army, their willingness to make costly sacrifices for their primary groups and for political and religious ideals.



**Hassan Sham
Village with
camp in
background.**

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**Debaga Camp,
located South East
of Mosul.**

A faint, light gray world map is visible in the background of the slide, centered behind the text.

What was good about ISIS?

1- Defending Religion & Implementing Sharia.

2- Security & Freedom.

3- Providing Services.

Caliphate Street



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Complete Elimination of ISIS

No (n = 46)

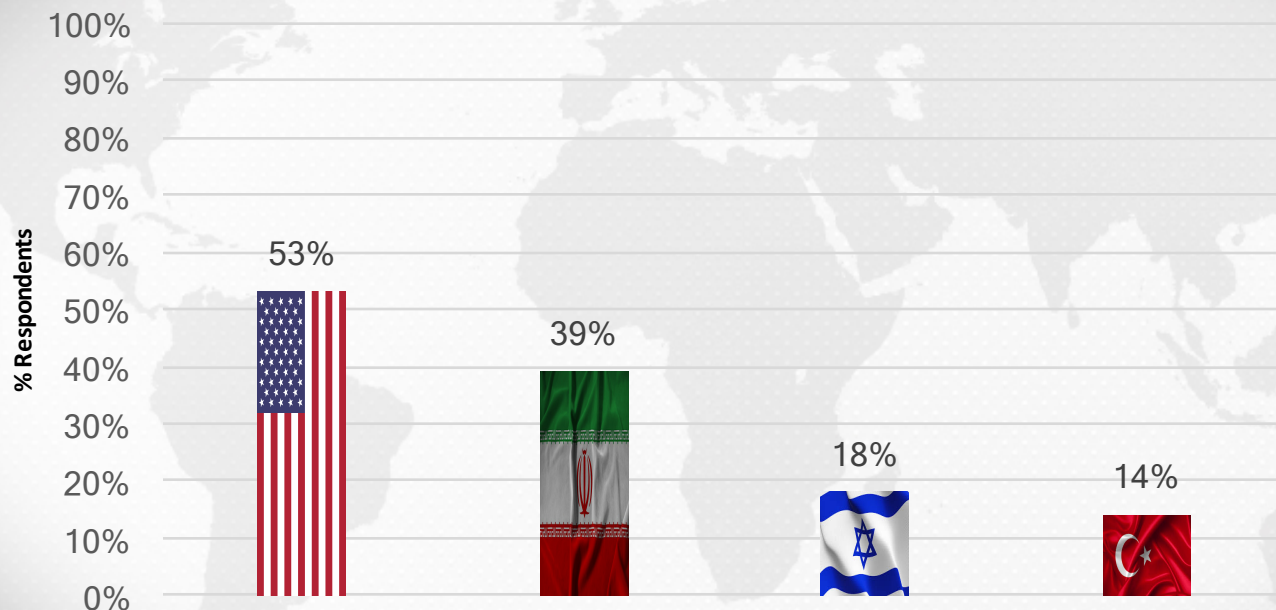
Perhaps (n = 19)

Don't Know (n = 5)

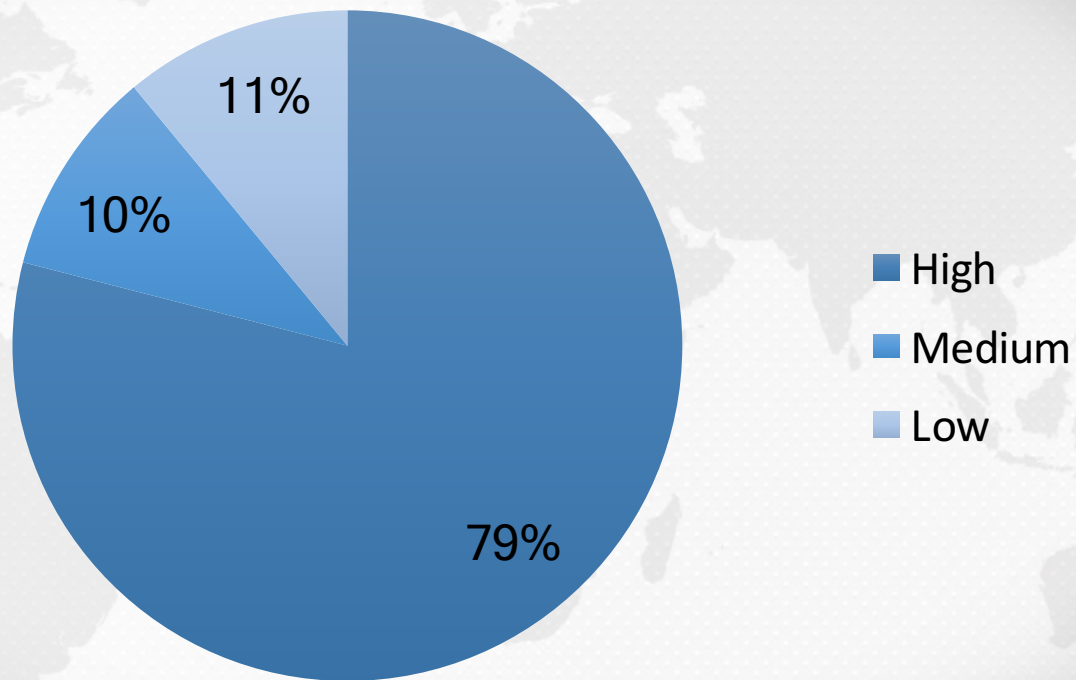
Yes (n = 2)

Do you think
ISIS will be
defeated and
eliminated
completely?

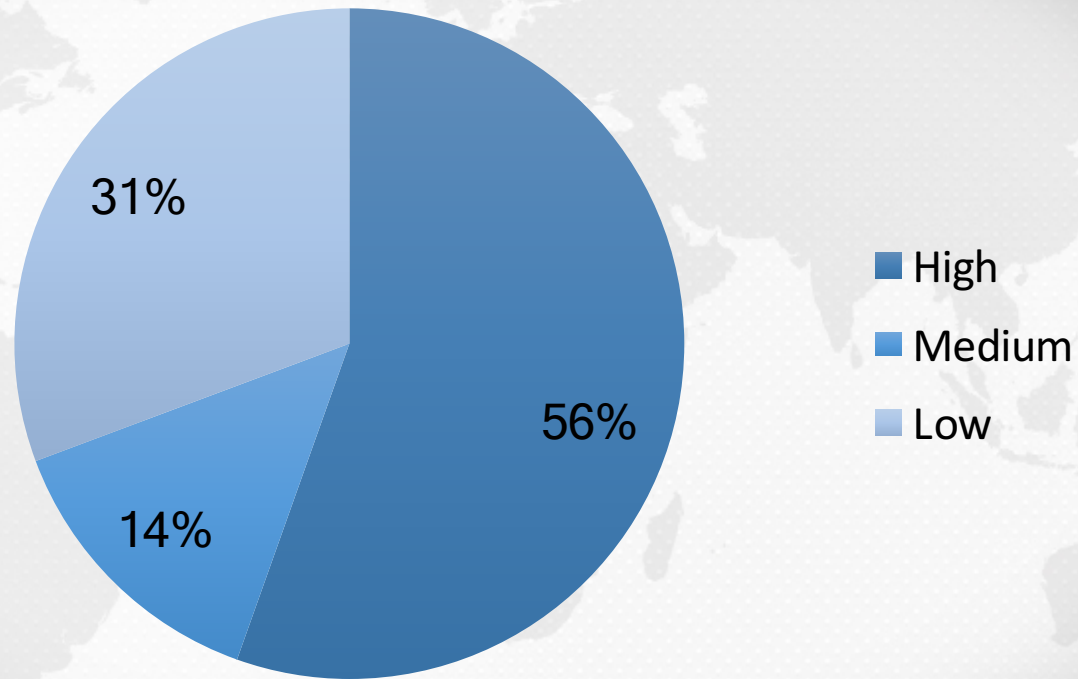
Conspiracy Beliefs: Countries Helping ISIS



Trust In Iraqi Army (Overall)

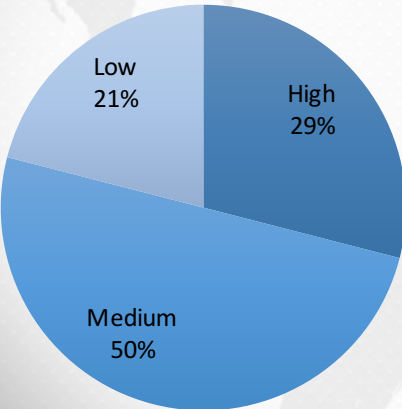


Trust Iraqi Army With My Life

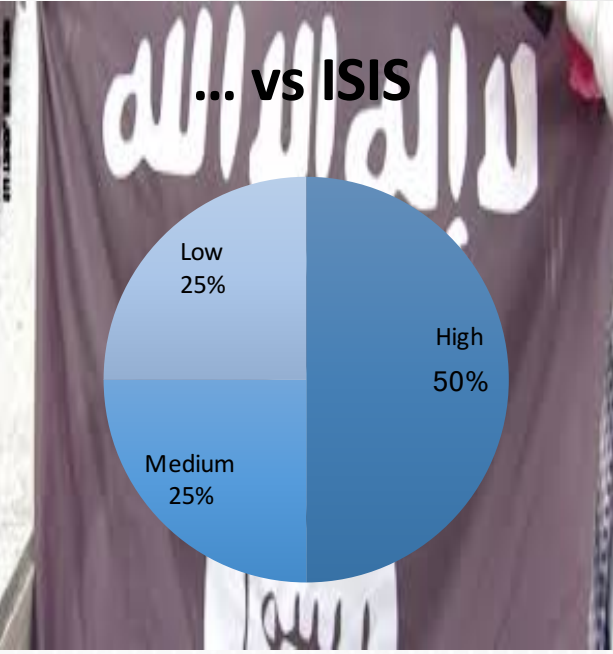


Resilience of Sunni Arabs

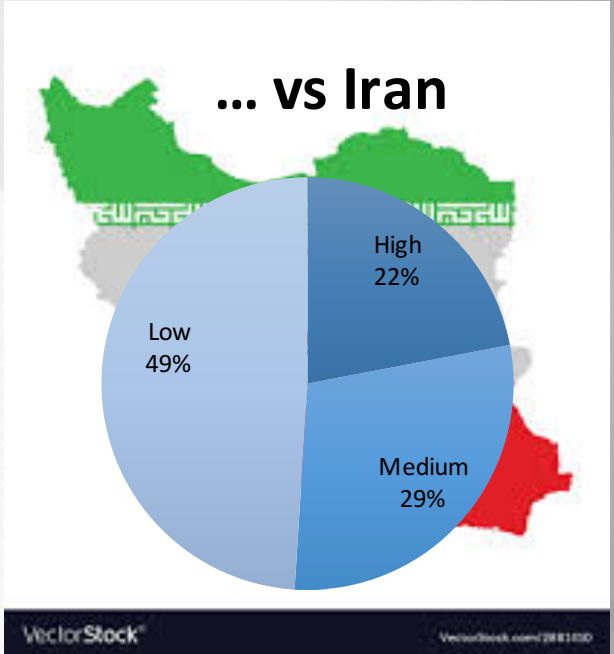
Overall



... vs ISIS



... vs Iran



Before 2014



Checkpoints; Collective
Humiliation & Movement
Restriction

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After 2017



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The disadvantaged religious, social and economic pre-Isis conditions are still there;



- Lack of services.
- Lack of employment
- Lack of reconstruction
- Corruption.
- Large presence of Shia armed groups.
- Sense of marginalization
- Checkpoints

Possible Value-Driven Initiatives to Derail Radicalization

Advice from Imam who formerly recruited for ISIS supported by data:

- Focus on violations of Sharia & traditional Sunni practices.
For example, killing foreigners just because they're foreigners is forbidden, especially if previously locally accepted as a guest (*dhif*).
- Provide positive, peaceful, concrete programs to youth that motivate religious sentiment and community spirit, taking a page from AQ & ISIS
Most AQ & ISIS social media (> 50%) designed for locals have focused on programs for social development; less than 5% on punishments.
- Offer help to family members of men at risk, rather than denigrate and isolate families, keeping them under constant surveillance and suspicion.
Most interviewees (85%) don't approve of revenge against those who supported ISIS, especially family members.

Google "ISIS" Search Volumes



June 9, 2014: [Mosul](#) fell to ISIS control

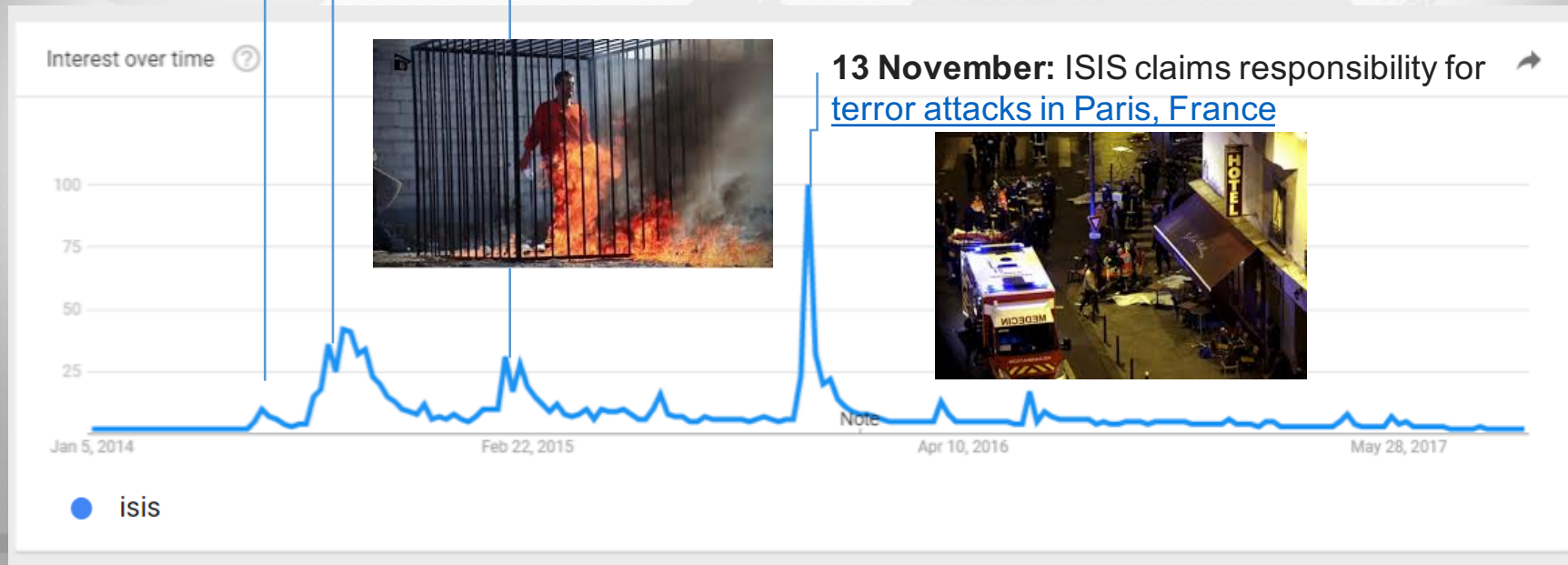
Aug 19, 2014: [James Foley](#) was beheaded by ISIS



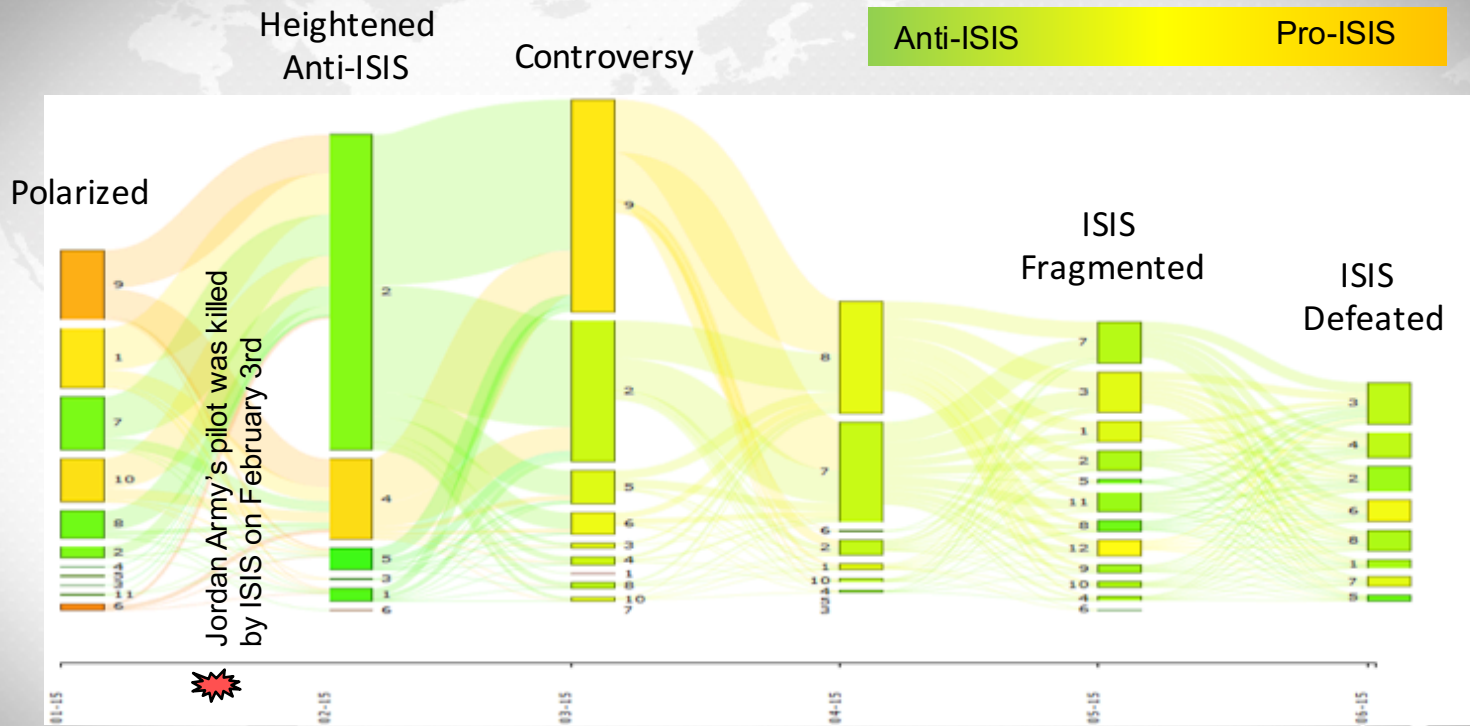
3 February, 2015: Jordanian Army pilot being burned to death while locked in a cage



13 November: ISIS claims responsibility for [terror attacks in Paris, France](#)



ISIS Trends: Dec 31, 2014 –



Monitoring (vs. *a priori* hatching of) Wedge Issues

In looking for wedge issues to flip popular support and proactive communication we should closely monitor events that spontaneously divide their own supporters or target audiences, paying attention to the cultures and contexts involved.

These potential wedge events very likely reveal deep and real divides in these groups' actual and prospective audiences (even al-Qaeda, competing with Isis for popular market share, protested the pilot burning as anti-Islam), because such events expose the "true" (i.e., spontaneously revealed) nature of their group's values and the fault lines support that can be exploited.

- This would suggest an intervention strategy that contrasts markedly with usual counter-narrative and public diplomacy approaches.
- Rather than asking SME panels for issues that may or may not resonate with an audience, then filtering those issues for selection through whatever political biases and preferences sponsors may impose before unleashing them, this other approach identifies issues-in-context that demonstrably do change minds.
- This can be then leveraged to include other issues to widen the breach (that SMEs may help to come up with, or validate, as a function of monitoring real internet traffic).