Sanad
for peacebuilding

Q
Social Inquiry

Government
of Canada
Gouvernement
du Canada

# "Ideas are more dangerous than deeds": Street-level perspectives of violent extremism in Nineveh Governorate, Iraq



October 2018

*This assessment has been designed and implemented by Sanad for Peacebuilding and Social Inquiry with support and funding from the Government of Canada.*

## Acknowledgments

## About Sanad for Peacebuilding

Sanad for Peacebuilding is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, established in 2013 with support from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Sanad works to build and strengthen peace, democracy and human rights in Iraq through dialogue-driven interventions which support local reconciliation, countering violent extremism, IDP returns, support for the rule of law, and other key issues in areas across Iraq.

Our mission is to promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion through the innovative and inclusive use of research, dialogue, and peacebuilding processes and to serve as a replicable example in the region. We use integrated and long-term approaches to identify and mitigate some of Iraq's most entrenched conflicts.

Sanad additionally provides support and technical expertise to civil society networks, particularly the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF) which consists of a group of civil activists with expertise in conflict management, through facilitation and mediation mechanisms, in addition to observing and analyzing conflicts and capacity building in the field of peacebuilding. Sanad also provides technical and administrative support to the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities Network (AIM), which consists of a group of organizations representing various Iraqi minority groups, and works to achieve minority rights in Iraq through the advocacy and dialogue mechanisms.

Sanad is governed by an independent board of directors, comprised of members with professional backgrounds in peacebuilding, civil society, rule of law, human rights, media, academia, and government, who reflect the diversity of Iraq's communities.

## About Social Inquiry

Social Inquiry is an Iraq-based not-for-profit research institution focused on influencing policy and praxis that establishes civic trust and repairs social fabric within and between fragile communities, and communities and the state. Its research centers on three thematic rubrics: (a) social cohesion and fragility, (b) transitional justice and reconciliation, and (c) post-conflict political economy, exploring intersecting political, social, psychological, economic, and historical dimensions within these themes.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

The roots of violent extremism vary by context and entail a number of structural and enabling factors as well as individual incentives – understanding these elements at the micro level is key to designing an effective strategy for countering violent extremism (CVE). With a focus on Nineveh Governorate in Iraq in the aftermath of the ISIS conflict (2014-2017), Sanad for Peacebuilding and Social Inquiry, with support from the Government of Canada, conducted a mixed-methods study of community perspectives of violent extremism as well as potentials for countering it, in addition to exploring views and attitudes on those who have been affiliated with such groups or who lived under this group's control.

This research centers on how people in Nineveh's conflict-affected communities view extremist thinking and action (both among their own groups and others), how such beliefs gain traction, and what means they feel can stop it – taking into account the fact that *all* communities, regardless of ethno-religious, tribal, or political identity, have the potential to develop extremist ideology if certain conditions persist. The focus of this report therefore is not to identify areas or ethno-religious groups that are prone to extremism, thus further stigmatizing people and locations in the country, but to present a fuller picture of dynamics to help ensure future CVE initiatives are effective by addressing society as a whole, not only one group. Because of Iraq's relatively young population, and the breadth of children and young people who lived under ISIS rule for a number of years, to say nothing of those recruited into the group, special focus was also paid to views on reintegration and rehabilitation of children and youth, moving beyond security concerns toward psychosocial support and intervention. The overall aim of this work is to contribute to an evidence base for shaping a longer-term CVE strategy in Nineveh Governorate, taking into account the views of those most affected by extremist violence, both from this most recent conflict as well as historically.

This brief summary is followed by an overview of CVE theory, context of Nineveh Governorate, detail on study methodology, analysis of key findings, and finally, considerations to take into account in devising CVE programming and policy.

## 2. Radicalization and Countering Violent Extremism in Theory and Practice

While there is not one set pathway toward radicalization or one strategy for countering the oft-resultant violent extremism, there are common trends and factors across contexts that are important to bear in mind in developing approaches to curbing such tendencies, particularly in post-conflict contexts. To start, it is necessary to understand that radicalization itself is a process that takes time and is as much a function of cognitive change as it is behavioral. Such a process can be defined as one in which "an individual changes from passiveness or activism to become more revolutionary, militant . . . especially where there is intent towards, or support for, violence," (Hoeft, 2015: 8). It is also imperative to note that not all extremism is violent per se or that violence itself originates from extremist belief in all cases. The focus of study here however is on violence linked to extremist thinking and how to prevent such violence from occurring.

The root drivers toward this violent extremism are dynamic, fluid, and multiple (Sinai, 2007). They entail *structural motivators* including repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, lack of access to political processes or justice, a history of hostility between identity groups, external state interventions in the affairs of other nations, among others; *individual incentives* such as a sense of purpose, adventure, belonging and acceptance, material gain, fear of repercussions; and finally, *enabling factors* like the presence of radical mentors, access to radical online communities, social networks with violent extremist associations, access to weapons, a comparative lack of state presence, direct victimization, and an absence of familial or community support, among others (Holmer, 2013). Which combination of structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors lays the groundwork for violent extremism in a given context depends on the specifics of the societies in which they are formed. Though in general, research indicates that political transitions tend to create conditions for the spread of violent extremist activities, as do grievances with security actors (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016).

Within individual societies, the typology of extremists therein also varies, with some more ideologically driven than others and some more active in their participation than others, though it should be noted that high levels of belief do not necessarily correlate to high levels of violent action at the individual level and vice versa (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016). In other words, there is often a disconnect between attitudes and behaviors among those who ideologically support violent extremism but do not participate in acts of violence and those who do actively participate but do not necessarily believe in violence or the ideology behind it and instead act for other reasons. This again reinforces the point that extremist thought in and of itself may not necessarily be problematic as it does not inevitably result in violence.

Understanding such individual and context specific nuance is critical for countering and/or preventing violent extremism because such phenomena do not follow linear patterns across contexts and one size fits all approaches are not possible (Horgan, 2009). Generally speaking, however, focus is given to strategies that seek to change the behaviors of those already in extremist groups or at risk for joining, including through exposure to counter-ideology, assistance with social networking, livelihoods support, and counseling, among others, to prevent them from violent action and (re)engagement with such groups (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016). Behavior change in

this manner is prioritized as it is easier, faster, less costly, more quantifiable, and realistic than attempting to change attitudes (Borgo & Horgan, 2009). This is useful in the short-term, but leaves open the possibility for a return to violent extremist groups if and when it once again becomes advantageous to do so, if more concerted efforts toward attitude change are not over time also introduced (Rabasa et al., 2010). Furthermore, taking purely military or security focused action alone cannot end or deter violent extremism, and in some cases, may exacerbate it (Fink, 2015). Given all of this, policy and thinking on CVE have moved toward a more "whole of government approach," placing interventions within the development and security nexus. This means focusing on mitigating both the narratives and structural causes that make individuals more vulnerable to recruitment (Holmer, 2013).

More thought has also been given to the ways in which peacebuilding can intersect into this practice, for example through ensuring greater resilience and non-securitized space for civil society, equipping women to participate, reforming security entities, and bringing more stakeholders to the fore to better analyze such contexts through a more neutral conflict prevention lens (Holmer, 2013). This is particularly important as it seeks broader support for addressing root causes of violent extremism addressed at the wider society, with meaningful engagement of the local community, in a given context rather than focusing specifically on one group and imposing intervention, stigmatizing them further – a tendency that often occurs in relation to Muslims (Abu-Nimer, 2018).

# 3. Placing Violent Extremism in the Context of Nineveh Governorate Before and After the ISIS Conflict

Home to Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, Nineveh Governorate encompasses the largest area of Iraq occupied by ISIS for the longest amount of time, having been completely retaken in mid-to-late 2017. Nineveh Governorate provides a particularly useful case study of how accumulation of historical, identity-based grievances can lead to further violence if not appropriately addressed.

*Pre-2003*

The governorate is comprised of, among others, Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Yezidis, Christians, Shabak, Sunni Turkmen, and Shia Turkmen. The bulk of the areas surrounding Mosul City to the west and south are also predominantly tribal in structure. Such diversity, particularly in the northern districts of the governorate often was engineered through "Arabization" campaigns undertaken by the previous regime in the 1970s and 1980s (Human Rights Watch, 2004). This does not mean that the sub-districts were homogeneous before, but majority/minority relations were maneuvered with the intention to shift power relations towards the Sunni Arab population at the expense of other ethnic groups. This legacy serves as the foundation of many disputes and grievances (Social Inquiry, 2017a). Furthermore, these areas also faced historical development neglect as indicated by high levels of poverty, low human capital, and subpar public service provision.

*2003-2014*

The fall of the previous regime in 2003 brought sectarian, anti-government violence to the governorate and particularly to Mosul City, including identity-based kidnapping, assassinations as well as explosions and attacks. Overall, in the aftermath of 2003, Sunni Arab populations and those associated with the previous regime started to be removed from both local public administration and security forces, at the same time that extremist groups (including Al-Qaeda and later Al-Qaeda in Iraq) were targeting Sunni individuals that sought to collaborate with the new authorities and the Shia community, furthering their marginalization. Security forces brought into the governorate to quell unrest were also from outside the area, of different ethno-sectarian composition than that of the populations they were to serve, and often did not coordinate well with existing local security actors (Mogelson, 2017). New and harsh counterterrorism laws (still on the books), inordinately targeting Sunni Arab populations, also fed anger and frustration (Bradley & Nabhan, 2013; Haddad, 2013). This led to further population movement as sectarian warfare escalated in 2006 and 2007, including the migration of Shia Shabak communities into predominantly Christian areas outside Mosul City, which some assert was a "Shia-ization" process (MERI, 2017a and b). Furthermore, the northern areas of the governorate were listed as disputed under Article 140 of Iraq's 2005 Constitution. Although its status is still not resolved, its administration has been controlled de facto by the Kurdistan Regional Government since 2003 – with the Kurdistan Democratic Party serving the main decision-making actor –thanks to expanding military control over the area as well as a more effective use of clientelism networks than the central government (Social Inquiry, 2017a).

Amid this rampant violence and instability, U.S.-led efforts sought to carry out combat operations in cities in Nineveh to push out sectarian insurgency, provide aid to the population, and foster tribal reconciliation (Packer, 2006). This also entailed creating and/or equipping Sunni forces among tribes to help fight against Sunni insurgent groups, with these eventually to be incorporated into official security provision roles. While such a strategy reduced violence in the short-term, these gains were short-lived in part because sectarian and political divides and mistrust prevented genuine reconciliation and reintegration of forces. Thus allowing Al-Qaeda in Iraq the means and opportunity to keep its foothold within these areas. This paved the way for the emergence of ISIS, who took large swathes of territory across Nineveh Governorate in a lightning fast advance that began in the summer of 2014, after having taken significant portions of central Iraq already (i.e., portions of Anbar, Diyala, and Salahaddin Governorates). Their arrival and control of the bulk of the governorate exacerbated longstanding grievances between communities, harshly persecuted minorities like the Yezidis, targeted families with members in the governmental security forces, and expelled Sunni Arab and Kurd tribes that did not abide by their rule (Minority Rights Group et al., 2015).

*2014-2018*

ISIS's advance as well as the military operations to counter it – carried out by a panoply of actors including the Kurdish Peshmerga Forces, Iraqi Security Forces comprised of, among others, the Army and armed groups called Popular Mobilization Units – caused mass waves of internal displacement. As areas were retaken in 2015, 2016, and 2017, return of displaced populations began though not without concerns related to who could and could not go back to their places of origin due to a combination of ethno-religious and political rivalries and fear of ISIS returns (Social Inquiry, 2018).

Because ISIS occupied parts of Nineveh Governorate for three years, time and location of displacement are key factors linked to how individuals and communities seem to make judgments of others regarding potential ISIS affiliation. Further compounding matters, people across different ethnic and tribal groups in the governorate interpret ISIS affiliation (and perpetration) differently. The lack of consensus around what constitutes a crime in relation to ISIS (e.g., being a member of the group, being related to someone in the group, perpetrating human rights violations, carrying out property destruction and theft, etc.) is leading to further confusion and anger, producing not only collective blame, but collective punishment as well in terms of rapid adjudication of guilt and harsh punishment in relation to ISIS affiliation taking place in Iraqi courts, destruction of villages, killing, blocked return, banishment and/or detention of whole families, and most recently, the prevention of the receipt of aid and identity documents (El-Ghobashy & Salim, 2017; Social Inquiry, 2017a; Human Rights Watch, 2018a; Human Rights Watch, 2018b). This collective blame however is not only felt by Sunni Arabs nor is about ISIS affiliation alone. Other groups also report feeling that they are blamed and recognize blame cast upon others, related to pre-2014 factors and post-ISIS actions (Social Inquiry & USIP, 2018). This latter point also highlights a bigger issue within this context that so far has remained unaddressed: that ISIS (and by extension the Sunni Arab population) was not the sole perpetrator of abuses during and after the conflict. Among respondents in a recent survey in Nineveh, individuals who have returned to their places of origin after October 2017 are raising this issue, particularly in relation to destroyed villages and homes (Social Inquiry & USIP, 2018). This comes in addition to reports of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure (Human Rights Watch, 2018c; Abdul-Ahad, 2017; Khan & Gopal, 2017).

The ability not only to return to one's community of origin but to be accepted back into it, particularly for anyone deemed ISIS affiliated, underscores the dynamics above, and is particularly worrying when considering it in relation to children and young people. It is a concern reported by community leaders in Nineveh – and is apparent given the young population of Iraq in general (Massella, 2017). Youth did not always initially join or recruit into armed or extremist groups during the ISIS conflict out of ideology, but for the expected benefits one can gain from being a part of them (Abdulsamad & Watne, 2017; Revkin, 2018). These benefits are not only monetary, but can also help protect the individual, family or tribe from retaliation and guarantee better access to power centers and better treatment. In some instances, joining a group fighting against ISIS would help in facilitating a return from displacement (Massella, 2017), but Sunni Muslim young people associated with ISIS are often blocked from returning home. They may also end up left behind by their families or in detention; similar abandonment is also occurring among Yezidi children forcibly recruited into ISIS and rescued from their strongholds (Jalabi, 2018). Beyond this, a significant proportion of children and young people experienced or witnessed high levels of violence during the ISIS occupation of Nineveh and in the military operations to remove them. Young children exhibit severe trauma and mental health symptoms, particularly those whose families lived under ISIS control for lengthy periods, and now face a future with limited access to psychosocial support and care (Save the Children, 2017). This may make them increasingly vulnerable to future exploitation and more susceptible to violent extremist ideology, if more sustained attention is not paid to their needs.

In sum, grievances and more radical ideology may entrench, increasing chances for violence to stem from it, because of the dynamics on the ground even after the immediate major threat seems to have passed. This is worrying if not properly understood and addressed considering as well that previous attempts by the state to deal with past experiences of violence are viewed unfavorably by residents of Nineveh, across ethno-religious groups (Social Inquiry & USIP, 2018) and the growing numbers of people again across ethno-religious lines joining security forces in the governorate (Social Inquiry, 2018).

# 4. Methodology

Given the sensitive nature of research on CVE and the desire to seek breadth and depth with respect to responses, a mixed-methods research design was utilized. This included survey tools that had both closed and open-ended questions so respondents could more freely report their views.

**Geographical targets.** Communities for fieldwork in Nineveh Governorate were selected to allow for a diversity of scenarios in relation to conflict and violent extremism in the sample, given the differing ways in which areas were impacted by ISIS. The focus also sought to include the scope of ethno-religious diversity in the governorate. Thus, the following subdistricts were included in the sample:[1]

- Mosul Center: large urban area under ISIS control for three years with a significant portion of the population having remained in the city during that time; ethno-religiously diverse including Sunni and Shia Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Sunni and Shia Turkmen, and Christians.
- Hamdaniya Center and Bartella: peri-urban area to Mosul Center, under ISIS control for two years with most of the population having fled ahead of their arrival; ethno-religiously diverse including Christians and Sunni and Shia Shabak populations.
- Sinjar Center and Sinuni: remote rural area under ISIS control for one year, suffering heavy targeting and violations of human rights; ethno-religiously diverse including Yezidis and Arabs, although very few returns of population from both group have taken place.
- Qayyarah: mid-sized urban and rural area under ISIS control for two years with a significant proportion of the population having remained during this time; ethno-religiously homogenous Sunni Arab population.

**Sampling.** The population sample for this research focused primarily on those people from the districts described above who were also currently residing there. This includes of combination of *returnees* that were displaced during the ISIS conflict and have since come back as well as *stayees* that did not leave when ISIS occupied the area or during military operations. In addition to current residents of Nineveh, who form the bulk of the sample, the research team also gathered the insights from key informants from these districts currently still displaced as their views may be different from those who have returned or never left. Finally, an additional subgroup interviewed consisted of teachers and principals of the primary and secondary schools in the target locations, who provided a more nuanced view of the relation between extremism and youth and the impacts of experiencing violent extremism on boys and girls.

First, sampling among residents was designed to fit a combination of qualitative and qualitative methods as follows. Because of this, the research team sought to gather a "good enough" sample, rather than a strong statistically significant sample, that would allow for the variety and level of detail needed while still making it possible to run statistical analysis at a 90% confidence interval. The criteria for analysis divides communities as follows: ethno-religious group (per location); age (youth, middle-aged, elderly); gender; and community role (community member, community

---

[1] Tel Afar Center was originally included in the sampling. However, as further explained in the limitations section, it was finally excluded although some data was collected, due to security concerns and lack of trust from respondents.

leader, political leader, religious leader, security force member) as well as occupation (government employee, wage worker, unemployed/inactive, student, etc.). Other characteristics included experience of violence and displacement (2003 onward) and place of most recent displacement (e.g., Mosul, Kurdistan Region, displacement camps, etc.).

In total, 601 validated surveys were conducted across the four target locations as classified in Table 1. Respondents were selected randomly within the specific locations where fieldwork took place within each subdistrict. This randomness is manifested in the ethno-religious variety achieved in the sample, which did not seek group balance or quotas but a representation of the majority and minority groups living in each area.

Table 1. Sampling of resident respondents per area of analysis

| Total interviews | By ethno-religious group | By gender | By community position |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mosul Center | | | |
| 172 interviews in total | 167 Sunni Arabs<br>1 Shia Arab<br>1 Sunni Kurd<br>2 Mixed | 119 male respondents<br>53 female respondents | 142 community members<br>14 community leaders<br>11 security members<br>5 religious leaders |
| Hamdaniya Center + Bartella | | | |
| 167 interviews in total | 84 Syriac<br>70 Shia Shabak<br>7 Chaldean<br>4 Shia Turkmen<br>2 Kaka'i | 100 male respondents<br>67 female respondents | 117 community members<br>23 security members<br>22 community leaders<br>5 religious leaders |
| Sinjar Center + Sinuni | | | |
| 140 interviews in total | 112 Yezidis<br>21 Shia Kurd<br>5 Shia Arab<br>2 Shia Turkmen | 83 male respondents<br>57 female respondents | 104 community members<br>19 security members<br>9 political leaders<br>8 community leaders |
| Qayyarah | | | |
| 122 interviews in total | 115 Sunni Arabs<br>1 Shia Arab<br>1 Sunni Kurd<br>5 No response | 106 male respondents<br>16 female respondents | 89 community members<br>13 security members<br>10 religious leaders<br>10 community leaders |

Second, sampling among key informant internally displaced persons (IDPs) aimed to target community leaders (currently in displacement) from all the ethno-religious groups identified in each geographical area. Given that the sample size is significantly smaller, this purposive targeting ensures that insights from all groups in displacement are captured in the analysis. While the final sampling of the 33 key informants is listed in Table 2, it is worth noting that community leaders could not be identified and interviewed for some of the groups (e.g., Sunni Arabs from Sinjar or from Hamdaniya). Interviews were carried out in Duhok, Erbil and Mosul by members of the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF). Their responses were included where they differed from survey respondents.

Table 2. Sampling of key informant IDPs per area of analysis

| | |
|---|---|
| Mosul Center | 5 Sunni Arab community leaders<br>3 Sunni Kurd community leaders<br>2 Turkmen community leaders<br>**Total: 10 key informants.** |
| Hamdaniya + Bartella | 3 Syriac community leaders<br>3 Shabak community leaders<br>2 Kaka'I community leaders<br>**Total: 8 key informants.** |
| Sinjar Center + Sinuni | 4 Yezidi community leaders<br>2 Shia Arab community leaders<br>2 Shia Kurd community leaders<br>**Total: 8 key informants** |
| Qayyarah | 1 Sunni Arab community leader<br>**Total: 1 key informant** |
| Hatra | 3 Sunni Arab community leaders<br>**Total: 3 key informants** |
| Baaj | 2 Sunni Arab community leaders<br>1 Shia Arab community leader<br>**Total: 3 key informants** |

Third and finally, sampling among the education community in these four subdistricts aimed to target teachers and principals from a variety of experiences in displacement: some who taught while under ISIS control, some who decided not to teach, and some who displaced and continued teaching in displacement camps. In total, 29 key informants from the education community were surveyed on specific questions about links between youth and extremism, as disaggregated in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Sampling of key informants from the education community per area of analysis

| | |
|---|---|
| Mosul Center | 3 basic school teachers<br>3 secondary school teachers<br>2 secondary school principals<br>**Total: 8 key informants** |
| Hamdaniya + Bartella | 4 basic school teachers<br>1 basic school principal<br>2 middle school teachers<br>**Total: 7 key informants** |
| Sinjar Center + Sinuni | 3 primary school principals<br>2 secondary school teachers<br>2 secondary school principals<br>**Total: 7 key informants** |
| Qayyarah | 1 primary school teacher<br>5 secondary school teachers<br>1 secondary school principal<br>**Total: 7 key informants** |

**Survey design and implementation.** The survey itself contained both closed and open-ended questions across three main themes: i) presence and development of extreme views within communities; ii) operation and dynamics of violent extremist groups within communities; and iii) perceptions of communities on how to manage consequences of violent extremism, particularly related to prevention and/or reintegration. The quantitative questions were reframed into a qualitative manner when asked to the key informant sample.

The survey was designed in KoboToolBox and allowed for enumerators to type responses to open-ended questions into their mobile devices. Enumerators were selected from the geographical locations where the survey was conducted, and represented the ethno-religious diversity of each area. Gender balance for each enumeration team was sought where possible. Survey responses were coded by the research team using NVivo software and further analyzed in Stata.

**Limitations.** The biggest limitation to this study was the inability to include IDPs still in camps into the sample, as originally planned. Time and access constraints prevented this from taking place and their insights would probably be different than those key informants in displacement living in urban areas.

In addition, though Telafar Center was included in the study sample and some data collection took place in the district, if was finally excluded. The context there was still too fragile, residents had only begun returning, and many felt uncomfortable answering questions related to such a sensitive topic as violent extremism. Given this feedback from enumerators, a decision was made to halt data collection and exclude these respondents given that the surveys were not fully answered.

Finally, a 50-50 gender balance for the sample was not achieved, despite best efforts and the inclusion of women within the enumerating teams. The 32% response rate for women however is consistent with other survey data collection within this context.
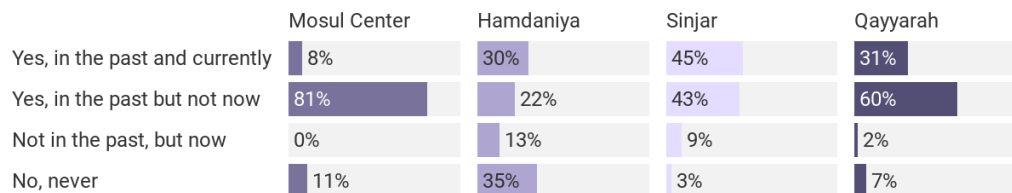
# 5. Findings

The analysis of findings is presented by general thematic topic and disaggregated by location and component, as appropriate. The following topics are listed below:

- Existence of past and present radicalization in society
- Drivers of violent extremism
- Promoters of violent extremism and their means
- Characteristics of those who radicalized
- Reintegration into the community
- Segments of society at risk now
- Prevention
- Remaining frustrations among residents

## 5.1. Existence of past and present radicalization in society

That radicalization is an element of society and part of daily life at some point in time is a sentiment widely shared by respondents across locations, save for Hamdaniya (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Based on the definition of radicalization given, have there been or are there elements of this within your district?[2]

| | Mosul Center | Hamdaniya | Sinjar | Qayyarah |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes, in the past and currently | 8% | 30% | 45% | 31% |
| Yes, in the past but not now | 81% | 22% | 43% | 60% |
| Not in the past, but now | 0% | 13% | 9% | 2% |
| No, never | 11% | 35% | 3% | 7% |

Dynamics in Mosul Center and Qayyarah districts are relatively similar to each other. The large majority of respondents in each location (80% in Mosul Center and 60% in Qayyarah, respectively) indicate that while radicalization was present in the past, it is no longer an issue now. Residents note that radicalization and by extension extremism is not present anymore both because ISIS is viewed as no longer around and because of perceived changes in the contextual factors of these locations which bred extremism in the first place as well:

> Now the situation is under control and we are not allowing extremism to return. (Sunni Arab male young security forces member, Mosul Center)

> In the past, there has been extremism because of some government practices. (Sunni Arab elderly male religious leader, Mosul Center)

---

[2] This question was prefaced by the following definition: "Radicalization is the process by which an individual or a group undergo a transformation from participating in the political process via legal means to supporting the use of violence or using violence instead." This was to ensure respondents had the same understanding of the concepts under study and to broaden the discourse beyond the most recent conflict, as they deemed necessary.

Before it used to be religious figures who try to [radicalize], but now they do not exist here. (Sunni Arab, male young community member, Mosul Center)

The security situation improved and hatred disappeared between the army and the people. Now the situation is much better than before. The sectarian killing was daily. (Sunni Arab, male middle-aged community member, Mosul Center)

Extremism has been eliminated by the elimination of ISIS. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged security forces member, Qayyarah)

People have become more aware and more aligned with the government. (Sunni Arab male young community member, Qayyarah)

At the same time, as will be discussed in later sections, old grievances and factors that may cause further radicalization still persists, according to respondents in these locations. Thus, some of these views may also be wishful thinking or a desire to move peacefully forward in the aftermath of this most recent conflict.

While in Sinjar district, responses are roughly split between there previously being a presence of radicalization but not anymore (43%) and those who feel that radicalization existed before and continues now. The reasons for this continuing radicalization however have evolved over time (this will be discussed in the next section).

Hamdaniya district as a whole differs from the other locations in that over one-third (35%) of residents asked feel that radicalization never existed in the area. This finding significantly shifts if the responses are disaggregated between Syriac and Shabak groups. Syriac respondents, on one hand, mainly indicate that radicalization was present in the district in the past as well as currently (50% of respondents) and only 18% mentioned that there never was radicalization. Shabak respondents, on the other hand, hold a different view: 54% indicate that there was and is no radicalization in their district, while another 39% mentioned that radicalization may have existed before, but not now. This gap is significantly relevant in understanding the dynamics and religious polarization highlighted in the following sections for this district in particular.

## 5.2. Drivers of violent extremism

In focusing on the reasons why people joined violent extremist groups within the target districts in Nineveh in the last five years, respondents across locations indicated that conviction and faith in extremist ideology and material gain, respectively were the primary motivating factors (Figure 2). Breaking this out by location, these findings are particularly clear in Mosul Center, Sinjar and Qayyarah districts. Hamdaniya district resident responses are more evenly distributed among different drivers besides ideology and material gain including being ordered to join such groups by community leaders, seeking to protect the community, seeking greater recognition or status, and out of fear of reprisal.

When asked what this radicalization was for, respondents, again across locations and components, cite ethno-nationalism, religion or sectarianism, politics, neglect or targeting, and security as key causes. How these elements interacted and which had primacy varied by location.

Figure 2. Top drivers that explain why some people joined violent extremist groups (multiple choice allowed)

**Mosul Center**

| Driver | % |
|---|---|
| Conviction and faith in the ideas | 73% |
| Material gain | 69% |
| Ordered by community leaders | 35% |
| To protect their component | 23% |
| Seeking greater status and recognition | 20% |
| Seeking adventure / boredom | 19% |
| Seeking a sense of belonging | 13% |
| Seeking revenge | 10% |
| Fear of reprisals by extremist groups | 8% |
| Other | 1% |
| No response | 1% |

**Hamdaniya**

| Driver | % |
|---|---|
| Conviction and faith in the ideas | 39% |
| Material gain | 41% |
| Ordered by community leaders | 33% |
| To protect their component | 37% |
| Seeking greater status and recognition | 28% |
| Seeking adventure / boredom | 0% |
| Seeking a sense of belonging | 0% |
| Seeking revenge | 6% |
| Fear of reprisals by extremist groups | 22% |
| Other | 0% |
| No response | 1% |

**Sinjar**

| Driver | % |
|---|---|
| Conviction and faith in the ideas | 72% |
| Material gain | 34% |
| Ordered by community leaders | 19% |
| To protect their component | 15% |
| Seeking greater status and recognition | 17% |
| Seeking adventure / boredom | 5% |
| Seeking a sense of belonging | 4% |
| Seeking revenge | 18% |
| Fear of reprisals by extremist groups | 21% |
| Other | 1% |
| No response | 4% |

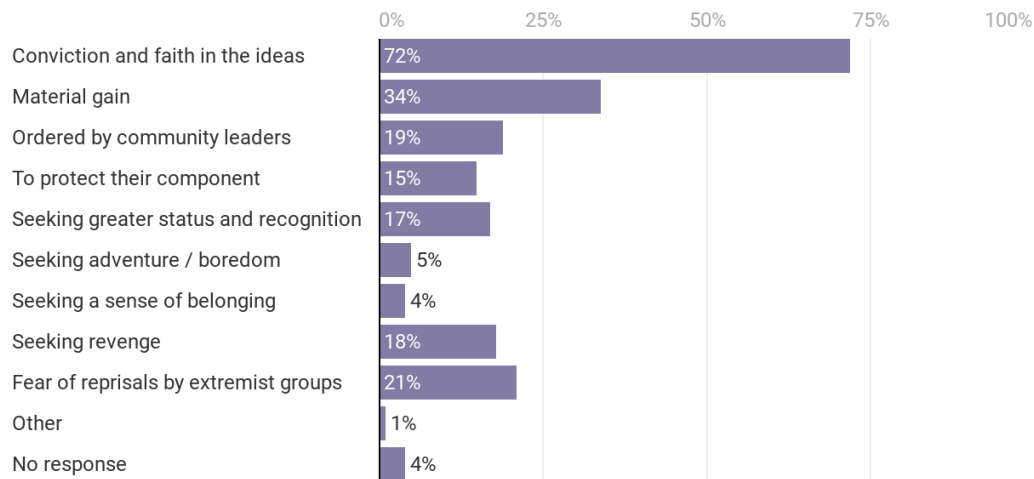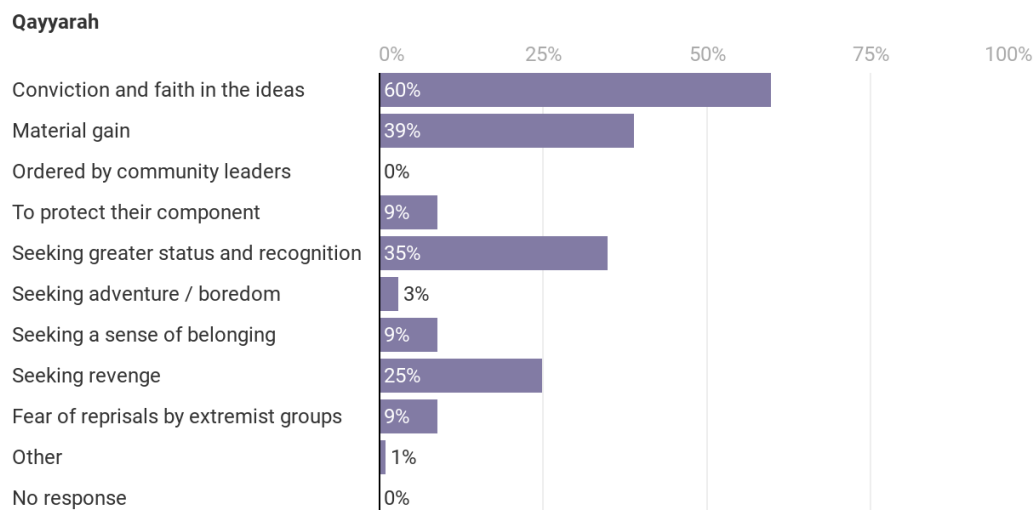Figure 2 (continued). Top drivers that explain why some people joined violent extremist groups (multiple choice allowed)

**Qayyarah**

| Driver | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Conviction and faith in the ideas | 60% |
| Material gain | 39% |
| Ordered by community leaders | 0% |
| To protect their component | 9% |
| Seeking greater status and recognition | 35% |
| Seeking adventure / boredom | 3% |
| Seeking a sense of belonging | 9% |
| Seeking revenge | 25% |
| Fear of reprisals by extremist groups | 9% |
| Other | 1% |
| No response | 0% |

Within Sinjar Center and Sinuni, for example, while Yezidi and non-Yezidi respondents alike noted security concerns, ethno-religious tensions between Yezidis and Sunni Arabs and politics as root causes, many respondents also pointed out that now, the real issue is political given the multiplicity of actors in the area:

> In the past there were religious, national and sectarian issues, but now they are political as much as they are religious or nationalist by virtue of the presence of many armed factions and political parties. (Yezidi male young community member)

> In the past, extremism was largely religious, sectarian, and political. But, now we can say that [extremism comes from] the political issues between the parties in the district. (Yezidi male middle-aged community member)

This is distinctly different from Yezidi IDP key informants who note continuing ethno-sectarian concerns between both Shia and Sunni Arabs as well as Arabs and Yezidis as the primary areas of radicalization, with no mention of any growing political divisions.

The Sunni Arab segments of the sample highlight the confluence of politics, ethno-sectarianism, and security in driving people toward extremism, specifically within Mosul Center and Hatra and Baaj – locations that have or are encompassed by particularly diverse communities including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Yezidis. In particular, negative interactions between Sunni populations and Shia security actors operating there as well as tensions between identity groups:

> I think it was security. Sometimes, sometimes, some individuals, not all of the security forces, dealt harshly and unprofessionally with the different social component against them. Extremists exploited these gaps to recruit. (Sunni Arab male you community member, Mosul Center)

> Sectarianism between Shias and Sunnis. Especially Sunnis outside Mosul and the Shia army. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community leader, Mosul Center)

> Several political and religious reasons are sometimes linked to security. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member, Mosul Center)

Sectarian between Shia soldiers and Sunni insurgents. Religious between the Yezidis and Sunni. Racism between Arabs and Kurds. (Sunni Arab male young community leader from Baaj displaced in Mosul Center)

These abovementioned areas also remain relative "hotspots" for security given they have been more recently retaken from ISIS. Mosul Center has suffered heavy destruction from the conflict and its population targeted by security forces in the aftermath of the conflict. Baaj and Hatra too have experienced similar including a very tightened security context given the geographic remoteness of both. This may explain the more circumspect and careful language used in the above responses.

Sunni Arab respondents from Qayyarah, an ethno-religiously homogenous district retaken in 2016, echo these sentiments, but much more strongly and openly reported that political exclusion by the state, marginalization, and targeting by security forces operating in the area, all driven by sectarianism have motivated radicalization in the district: "The political exclusion of the Sunnis has led people to feel injustice and the Shia control over the state without giving [Sunnis] their rights has led to their fervor with groups claiming to support Sunnis," (Sunni Arab young male community member). This language more directly links these issues to the struggle for power between Sunni and Shia Arab factions, claims of ethnic cleansing, and the desire at one point to "establish a state for the Sunni component independently" (Sunni Arab female young community member). These more reportedly polarized dynamics are further highlighted by the fact that 31% of Sunni Arab respondents in Qayyarah note that revenge was a motivating factor for violent extremism – this rate is higher here than all other locations and components in the study.

Finally, in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella, Shia Shabak and Syriac respondents also described issues related to politics and ethno-religious identity at the heart of any existing or potential extremism in the area, with each raising different viewpoints on where the grievances come from. For Shia Shabak respondents, extremism is linked to discrepancies in socio-economic development and land ownership based on religion and politics, noting:

> Extremism is because or about land disputes. (Shia Shabak male middle-aged community leader)

> [Extremism comes from] economics, politics, and building and reconstruction. (Shia Shabak male middle-aged security forces member)

> [Extremism comes from] religious, racial nationalism, politics, and land. (Shia Shabak female middle-aged community leader)

And indeed, 27% of Shia Shabak in this study report that seeking greater status and recognition is a key driver within the district for people to join violent extremist groups. The only location in this study where this rate is higher is in Qayyarah.

The Syriac respondents, on the other hand, view drivers of extremism linked to changes in population in the district, reducing their ethno-religious component numbers and raising sectarian and political concerns connected to this:

> Religious issues and problems related to the district are the components and composition of the population in which the different sects of the Christian component decreased by 50%. (Syriac male young security forces member)
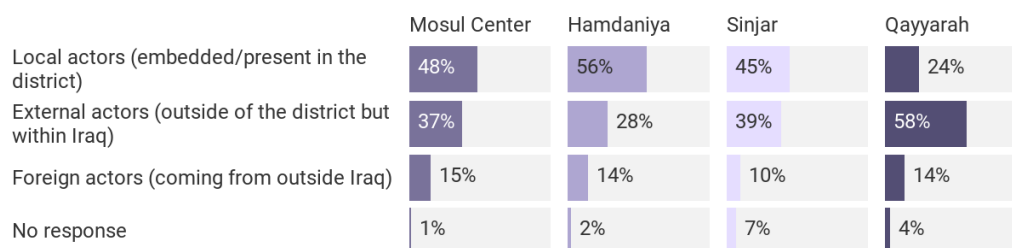
The problems and issues are because the demographic composition changed after liberation, i.e., political and sectarian problems. (Syriac male middle-aged community member)

For demographic change, for the sake of religion. (Syriac male young community member)

## 5.3. Promoters of violent extremism and their means

Respondents across nearly all locations indicate that those with most influence in spreading violent extremism are local actors from within their respective districts, as opposed to actors external to the district but within Iraq or foreign actors (Figure 3). In Hamdaniya Center and Bartella, 56% of respondents who answered this question felt that local actors had the most predominant influence, followed by 28% who feel that actors external to the district held greatest sway. The same pattern is found in Mosul Center (48% local actors, 37% external actors) and, to a lesser degree, in Sinjar Center and Sinuni where responses are roughly split (45% local actors, 39% external actors). Qayyarah is the outlier in this regard as respondents here note that external actors had greater predominance than local ones (58% versus 24%, respectively). What is clear from all locations is that people feel foreign actors had relatively less influence overall.

Figure 3. Which actors would you say had the most predominant influence in expanding radicalization?

| | Mosul Center | Hamdaniya | Sinjar | Qayyarah |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local actors (embedded/present in the district) | 48% | 56% | 45% | 24% |
| External actors (outside of the district but within Iraq) | 37% | 28% | 39% | 58% |
| Foreign actors (coming from outside Iraq) | 15% | 14% | 10% | 14% |
| No response | 1% | 2% | 7% | 4% |

Delving into more detail, respondents in Mosul Center, Qayyarah, and Baaj and Hatra, report very specifically the main actors who had previously promoted violent extremism and the means they used to do so. In particular, Sunni Arab respondents note that such rhetoric was espoused by religious authorities, political leaders including "former parties of the government," and tribes to a greater extent in Qayyarah and Baaj and Hatra. In Qayyarah, respondents also noted that prisoners also contributed to spreading extremism. While across these locations, respondents noted that "secret" or "illegal" meetings had taken place to spread these views, the bulk of their dissemination was in the public domain, through Friday sermons in mosques and social and regular media:

TV channels and mosques are the most effective means of spreading violent extremism. (Sunni Arab male young community leader, Mosul Center)

Mosques come first because they are the basis of the destruction of Mosul, in addition to the Husseiniat, which teach the crowd to hate the people of Mosul. And some television channels. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member, Mosul Center)

Sermons of mosques and some media for politicians and social media. (Sunni Arab male young community leader from Baaj displaced in Mosul Center)

> Social media, platforms and mosques under the authority of extremism. (Sunni Arab male young community member, Qayyarah)

Within Qayyarah, specifically, respondents also noted that money was also used as a means of recruiting people into joining extremist movements:

> Support young people with money and convince them through religious speeches to fight the Army and Shias. (Sunni Arab middle-aged male community leader)

> Persuasive speech and financial support. (Sunni Arab young male community member)

Yezidi respondents in Sinjar Center and Sinuni, on the other hand, indicate that violent extremism is spread via a number of actors and channels across the community. These include mosques, political parties, tribal structures, and schools, among others: "Many, many, many ways. For example, tribal sheikhs during councils, especially Sunnis. And some schools whose teachers were from outside the district. Party headquarters during activities and events, each trying to compete with the other. Clergy of all components," (Yezidi male middle-aged community leader). This latter point is important, because while most Yezidi respondents note that "Kurds and Sunni Arabs" are the primary promoters of extremism in Sinjar, there seems to be some growing awareness that it is also coming from other ethno-religious groups, including their own, as well:

> At present, some Yazidis and Shia are doing so. (Yezidi male middle-aged community leader)

> The heads and cadres of political parties, especially the Yezidis. (Yezidi male middle-aged security forces member)

> Religious men from all the components. (Yezidi male young security forces member)

While respondents in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella paint a similar picture of who promotes extremism in the district – local and district political leaders, religious leaders, party and identity aligned security forces in the area, and "civil activists" – how this extremism presents itself and where it stems from differ when compared to the other locations. This is in part because Hamdaniya Center and Bartella is now an ethno-religiously mixed area, with most population groups returning from displacement as opposed to the other locations above, where one group for the time being predominates. The other may have to do with the nature of the tensions therein.

A first point to note is that Shia Shabak respondents by and large did not answer questions related to who promotes extremism and by what means (70% and 60% don't know/no response rate). This is highest compared to their Syriac counterparts as well as the other groups in the sample overall. One rationale may be that they are trying to distance themselves from perceived views in the district that the Syriac community see all Muslims unfavorably: "A teacher asked a Christian student why she did not get along with her Muslim classmates. The student said that her mother told her 'Muslims are dirty people'" (Kaka'i female young community member). Answering who promotes extremism may seem like an implication that they have this information because their component has connection to extremists.

A second point of note is that, while respondents in general in Hamdaniya feel that local actors have predominant influence in spreading extremism, a non-negligible 26% of Syriac respondents in particular feel that external actors have the most influence and another 20% feel that foreign actors have same. This may relate to the belief that the so far legal movement and encroachment

of Shia Shabak communities into historically Christian areas is less a "normal" population migration toward better safety and services and more a politically driven "Shia-ization" process. The means of spreading extremism reported by both Shia Shabak and Syriac respondents reflect this concern over land and demographics.

Shia Shabak respondents report discrimination against them regarding land and property ownership as a means of promoting extremism:

> Not to sell land to Muslims. Not to rent houses to Muslims. (Shia Shabak female elderly community member)

> By not selling land to Muslims. (Shia Shabak male middle-aged security forces member)

> Not to sell the land to the Shabak except with the approval of Asayesh. (Shia Shabak male middle-aged security forces member)

Some respondents also note efforts to "Remove [Shabak] from governance" (Shia Shabak female young community member). The undercurrent of these sentiments seems to be a broader concern that these are "Survival motives for the stronger community to use sectarian means to promote one component over the other" (Shia Shabak female middle-aged community leader).

And indeed, survival seems to be a theme for Syriac respondents to what they see as an incursion onto their land and society including its governance and security by Shia Shabak communities:

> Through intervention in the privacy of the district and so on. (Syriac male elderly community member)

> Interference in matters related to the district and the privacy of the people of the district. (Syriac male middle-aged community member)

> Intervening in the privacy of the place. (Syriac male young community member)

> Involvement in the politics of the district and the implantation of ideas of extremism in youth. (Syriac male young community member)

> The security forces belong to a certain component and interfere in the affairs of the district. (Syriac male young community member)

The raising of political and ethno-religious flags and slogans as well as harassment by security forces operating in the area are also key concerns and provocations reported in relation to the above so-called interference, "Putting slogans and flags . . . and harassment as they are security groups, no one can speak" (Syriac male young community member).

## 5.4. Characteristics of those who radicalized

Across locations and population groups, respondents note that in particular the poor and the young were the most likely to join extremist groups and that they were often manipulated into membership:

> The poor class is exploited by the afterlife and ignorance. (Yezidi female young community member, Sinjar Center and Sinuni)

> Young people and adolescents have been exploited by people inside and outside the district. (Yezidi male middle-aged political leader, Sinjar Center and Sinuni)

> The poor class is the biggest victim, especially the young and the children, who are easy to recruit and recruit for [extremists'] despicable purposes (Sunni Arab male elderly community member, Mosul Center)

> Most of them are young people who do not work, that is, they are desperate for material gain to be exploited. (Chaldian male young community member, Hamdaniya Center and Bartella)

> Socially marginalized persons who suffered from harsh conditions such as homelessness, poverty or community violence, which led to their involvement in these groups, most of them young people who do not exceed the age of 40 years. (Sunni Arab male young community member, Qayyarah)

> A rich layer exploits the poor class. Most of them are reckless young people who do not understand the things of religion except what they say to him. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged religious leader, Hatra displaced in Mosul Center)

Respondents in Sinjar Center and Sinuni, specifically note that members of violent extremist groups have gotten younger and younger over time:

> Especially minor children under 18 through the ISIS regime. Before that, older adults were more radical than young people.  (Yezidi male young security force member)

> In the past most extremists were over 40 years old and from different religions and nationalities in Sinjar. When Al Qaeda entered the district, more extremists came from youth, including those Sunnis who joined ISIS. Then many young Yezidis joined armed groups to defend their land and they still carry arms. (Yezidi male young security force member)

It is interesting to note in the above response a recognition that it is not one identity group only that has picked up arms (though whether the respondent views these Yezidi armed groups as extremist or not is unclear). It corresponds further to a more general sentiment among some respondents that while the poor and young are targets for radicalization, extremist ideology can take root across sectors of a given society and all can become participants for a variety of reasons:

> All groups of society are threatened with extremism and in different ways they are exploited by political parties, clerics, tribal sheikhs and all who influence society. (Yezidi male young community leader, Sinjar Center and Sinuni)

> All the classes were exposed to extremism, where we find many engineers in the ranks of the extremists in the past and now of all ages, even the races, where we were seeing supporters in the ranks of the organization. (Sunni Arab male young community member, Mosul Center)

> Personally, I believe that some of them are prominent figures in society, others are ignorant, others are clerics and some are government departments. (Syriac male young community member, Hamdaniya)
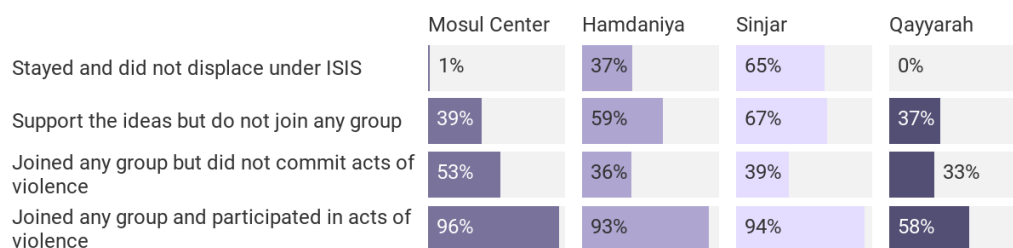
People of different classes, including young people and older people, including socially marginalized people and a few intellectuals who are convinced that Islam is ordering them to do so. (Sunni Arab male elderly religious leader, Qayyarah)

Beyond this, certain specificities by location and identity can be understood from survey responses as well. In Sinjar Center and Sinuni, for example, respondents particularly note that teachers were very involved in the radicalization process and as such some of the most radicalized in the district. Mosul Center and Qayyarah respondents are more likely to point out that people who have grown up experiencing violence and marginalization, particularly by security forces, tend to gravitate toward extremist groups. Furthermore, Qayyarah respondents indicate that former soldiers and prisoners also make up these groups.

Finally, while the majority of respondents who mention gender dynamics note that those who have joined violent extremist groups are overwhelmingly men and boys, across locations people also report that women and girls are joining such groups as well. This indicating that violent extremist ideology and action is not solely the purview of men in these areas, but that women too are radicalizing and being recruited.

Having analyzed the description of the societal groups most affected by radicalization, now it is relevant to explore people's perceptions regarding what it means to actually participate in violent extremism – in other words, which acts or situations make for an individual to be perceived as being affiliated to a violent extremist group. Responses per geographical area are provided in Figure 4. It is important to note that, because there may not be one definitive means by which people perceive affiliation with a violent extremist group, respondents were asked to select all responses that applied for them. As such, the findings serve as a kind of ranking of acts or situations linking individuals to these groups.

Figure 4. What does it take for a person to be considered affiliated with a violent extremist group?

| | Mosul Center | Hamdaniya | Sinjar | Qayyarah |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stayed and did not displace under ISIS | 1% | 37% | 65% | 0% |
| Support the ideas but do not join any group | 39% | 59% | 67% | 37% |
| Joined any group but did not commit acts of violence | 53% | 36% | 39% | 33% |
| Joined any group and participated in acts of violence | 96% | 93% | 94% | 58% |

Overall, the majority of respondents across locations and identity groups agree that an individual is affiliated with a violent extremist group if he/she has joined a group and participated in acts of violence. Of note is the substantial responses within Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts that also indicate that people who stayed and did not displace under ISIS are considered affiliated with a violent extremist group. Within Hamdaniya district specifically, Syriac respondents hold this view in greater proportion to their Shabak counterparts. Only negligible numbers of respondents from Mosul Center and Qayyarah report the same. This latter finding would be expected among respondents in Mosul Center and Qayyarah districts where many residents of these locations did not displace when ISIS took control and also makes sense for Shabak populations who may be more hesitant in categorizing all Muslim populations so broadly.

The more surprising finding to highlight though is that respondents felt that an individual who supports extremist ideology but does not join a group (second option in Figure 4) is more affiliated to violent extremism than an individual who joins a group but does not commit acts of violence (third option in Figure 4). This is seen among respondents in Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts and to a lesser extent in both Qayyarah and Mosul Center. This may be related to an understanding that people joined (or were forced to join) violent extremist groups for a variety of reasons, not all of which are ideological or violent, whereas those with strong views may pose a greater ongoing risk to safety and stability:

> The believer is intellectually more dangerous than the one who belongs to the group for the sake of money. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member, Qayyarah)

> Extremist ideas are more dangerous than deeds; ideas remain over time. (Shia Shabak female middle-aged community member, Hamdaniya)

## 5.5. Reintegration into the community

An important aspect to consider for any CVE strategy is whether communities are able to accept back those individuals affiliated with violent extremism and related groups. In the case of Nineveh, there seems to be a common attitude in this regard (Figure 5). Specifically, the large majority of respondents do not feel there is space for such individuals within their respective communities nor is it possible to rehabilitate them. Only in Mosul Center and Hamdanyida districts is this view somewhat soften with 30% and 35% of respondents respectively indicating that with specialized support individuals allegedly linked to violent extremism can be rehabilitated and reintegrated.
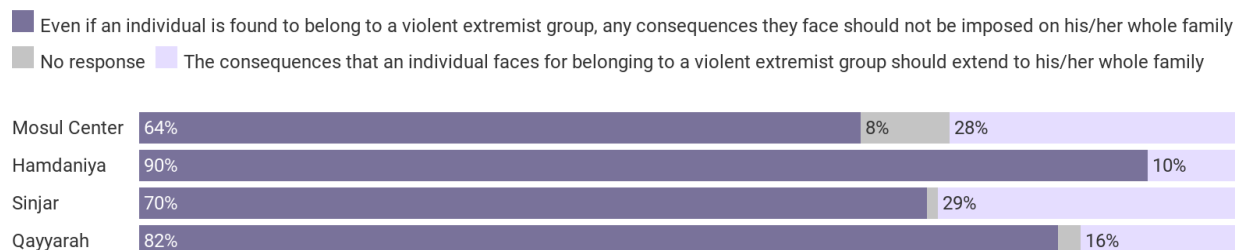
Only in Hamdaniya and Mosul Center the percentage of respondents that would accept reintegration in certain cases seems to be relatively relevant, between 30% and 35%.

Figure 5. Which statement comes closer to your views even if neither is exactly right? Question on individual rehabilitation

■ I don't think people currently accused of being affiliated with violent extremism can be rehabilitated nor there is space for them in the community

■ With time and specialized support, I think that those people currently accused of being affiliated with violent extremism can be rehabilitated and reintegrated

| District | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mosul Center | 70% | 30% |
| Hamdaniya | 65% | 35% |
| Sinjar | 86% | 14% |
| Qayyarah | 82% | 18% |

A different situation appears when inquiring about the extent to which the consequences an individual faces for belonging to a violent extremist group should extend to the whole immediate family or not. In this case, there seems to be a general rejection for actions such as the banishment of relatives. However, again, a small but significant percentage of respondents in some locations, mainly Mosul Center and Sinjar, seem to give support for preventing the return of the families of those accused of belonging to an extremist group.

Figure 6. Which statement comes closer to your views even if neither is exactly right? Question on family rehabilitation

■ Even if an individual is found to belong to a violent extremist group, any consequences they face should not be imposed on his/her whole family
■ No response ■ The consequences that an individual faces for belonging to a violent extremist group should extend to his/her whole family

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mosul Center | 64% | 8% | 28% |
| Hamdaniya | 90% | | 10% |
| Sinjar | 70% | | 29% |
| Qayyarah | 82% | | 16% |

This may in part be linked to the sentiment that a small number of respondents across groups noted in that extremism is passed down in families.

## 5.6. Those at risk now

*Children and young people*

In thinking about which subsets of their respective communities are at risk now for radicalization, overwhelming attention is paid to children and young people. A striking feature of responses in relation to young people is the specific mention of "minors," "children," and those "under the age of 18." This is particularly true among Yezidi respondents, perhaps on account of reported kidnapping of very young children by ISIS and growing recruitment into other armed actors currently operating in Sinjar Center and Sinuni. It is also noted among Sunni Arab respondents in Mosul Center and Qayyarah as well, who indicate that street children, orphans, those leaving school early, and those who feel they have "no place in society" are particularly at risk.

The teachers and administrators interviewed also indicate concern for their students. Enrollment rates are reportedly back to normal in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella and Qayyarah, but remain lower in Mosul Center, given the widespread destruction of parts of the city, and in Sinjar Center and Sinuni, due to displacement and migration. Teachers in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella as well as Sinjar Center and Sinuni indicate that they had limited concerns regarding their students based on experiences in the classroom before the ISIS conflict began. Education respondents (as well as community respondents) in Sinjar Center and Sinuni did note growing worry about Sunni Arab teachers coming from Baaj and Hatra radicalizing Arab students given their strict practice of Islam. In contrast, when referring to the period before the ISIS conflict, some educators in Mosul Center and Qayyarah report having had concerns over "terrorist operations" taking place and impacting their students and fears of "radicalization and alienation and brainwashing" among students toward extremist ideologies prevalent in these areas at the time.

In the aftermath of conflict, as students return to school, educators note new or more pronounced tensions. In many places, the schools contained mixed populations related to displacement identity: IDPs, stayees, and returnees. In Hamdaniya Center and Bartella, there are growing tensions and aggression of Christian, Shabak, and Turkmen students against Sunni Arabs, accusing them of being ISIS. In Mosul Center, there are fears related to students who have perceived ISIS affiliation as well as potential for revenge acts given the current events in the city among young people who had lost friends and relatives during the ISIS regime. Within Qarraya, educators report potential for tensions stemming from the return of students from IDP camps in northern Iraq as

well as Syria and Turkey, given the differences in cultures between those areas and their place of origin. They also note higher rates of drop-out. Finally, within Sinjar Center and Sinuni, particularly in Khanisour, teachers report concerns over school enrollment because of the number of armed groups operating and recruiting. This is in addition to worry over students' experiences during ISIS occupation and conflict and their effects on young people's mental and physical wellbeing.

One through line to these dynamics is the psychological toll it has taken on children and young people. Within Hamdaniya Center and Bartella as well as Mosul Center, educators report students are more prone to violence and hostility now. Across locations, students are reported to prefer isolation and exhibit signs of trauma and depression.

*Others at risk*

Within Sinjar Center and Sinuni, respondents overwhelmingly noted that women are also at risk for radicalization, again perhaps owing in part to the armed groups operating who take women recruits. Respondents in Mosul Center and Qayyarah also point to the poor, homeless, and unemployed in general. Furthermore, Qayyarah respondents indicate that criminals, prisoners, and "prison graduates" are another susceptible group at present to extremism, particularly as residents in this area were previously subjected to targeting and arrest under counter-terrorism laws. An interesting point to note from Hamdaniya Center and Bartella, is risk of "isolated" people or those communities who are closed off: here perhaps an indication of the separation or enclavement of ethno-religious groups within the area.

## 5.7. Prevention

Overall, respondents across locations and groups most frequently list the following as necessary to prevent the spread of extremism: the need for education, accountability of perpetrators as well as political and religious leaders, improved security, and higher standards of living. It is worth noting that many of these dimensions to prevent extremism are also the means that have promoted it. What this looks like and what actions have more importance over others, differs by location.

For Yezidi respondents in Sinjar Center and Sinuni, justice is significant in preventing further extremism. This includes criminal accountability for ISIS perpetrators as well as compensation for those affected, and the return of those still missing. Their rhetoric on justice is notably more advanced than other groups within the study. With regard to security, Yezidi respondents report particularly the need for unified forces comprised of Yezidis as a preventative measure:

> Formation of a force of Yezidis. (Yezidi male middle-aged security force member)

> Establish a military force of Yazidis to protect their areas. (Yezidi male young security force member)

> The central government is concentrated in the borders and the Yazidis in the district and the district to protect their component. (Yezidi female young community member)

Furthermore, there is the need for the "Iraqi government to prevent parties from carrying out those activities which aim radicalize people, and block private parties supported by Turkey and

Syria" (Yezidi male middle-aged security force member). Respondents place full responsibility for both justice and security needs with the central government:

> The central government because the different parties are present within the district and this constitutes a threat within the district. (Yezidi female elderly community member)

> We call on the central government alone within the district and did not share any partisan or power with the central government. (Yezidi female middle-aged community member)

> The central government and awareness-raising fight extremist ideas. (Yezidi male elderly community member)

Yezidi IDPs from Sinjar note that education reform is critical as are more moderate religious leaders, media outreach, and the establishment of youth groups in preventing extremism – again with no mention of a political or security dimension to prevention as to their returnee counterparts above.

In addition, respondents note the need for the involvement of the international community, local government, tribal leaders and sheikhs, and civil society including the education sector. While some Yezidi respondents note the need for cross-group interaction, particularly among youth, many indicate the blocking of those still displaced who are affiliated with ISIS and that, "We did not accept reconciliation if all the collaborators were not brought to court" (Yezidi male middle-aged community member).

In Mosul Center, emphasis is placed on education, poverty reduction and addressing inequality, as well as working with moderate imams. Education is particularly focused on as is employment and monitoring mosques and social media and television:

> Raising people's awareness through satellite channels, communication, schools and universities and cultivating peace in hearts. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member)

> Providing job opportunities for the unemployed and raising the educational level of society in general so as not to be dragged behind any extremist thought. (Sunni Arab male young community member)

> Improve and change education and control of mosques. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community leader)

> Running youth and monitoring mosques and party meetings. Control of communication and television channels. (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member)

Linked to this, many respondents note the need for "rehabilitation centers" for conflict-affected children and young people. At the same time, Mosul Center respondents also point to the need for better relations between security actors and civilians, "Improve the treatment of the military with citizens" (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member). All of these prevention dimensions are seen as the responsibility of the central government and civil society.

Similar issues are raised in Qayyarah and Baaj and Hatra, including in relation to security forces, although there is also greater focus as well on the role of families and tribes and the elimination of identity-based discrimination in preventing extremism as well:

Parents through awareness and the state of material support and tribal sheikhs through the laws of the clan. (Sunni Arab female middle-aged community member, Qayyarah)

The army by improving of its dealings with people and the role of elders in the district by imposing tribal law on anyone who practices violence. (Sunni Arab female young community member, Qayyarah)

Every person is responsible for the members of his family and his surroundings and raising awareness against extremism in addition to the role of the government in providing security and employment opportunities and non-racial discrimination between one component and another. (Sunni Arab male young community member, Qayyarah)

The government to provide security and justice, and not to suppress the Sunni component. On the subdistrict level, the people, community leaders and tribes to establish a mechanism to counter the extremists and raise the awareness of the youth against extremism. (Sunni Arab female young community member, Qayyarah)

Punish every tribal sheikh who supported ISIS. Punish every mosque preacher for extremism. Prevent extremist rhetoric everywhere and punish those who practice it. Monitoring of media channels. Accountability of security forces that infringe on citizens for reasons other than security. (Sunni Arab male young community leader, Baaj displaced in Mosul Center)
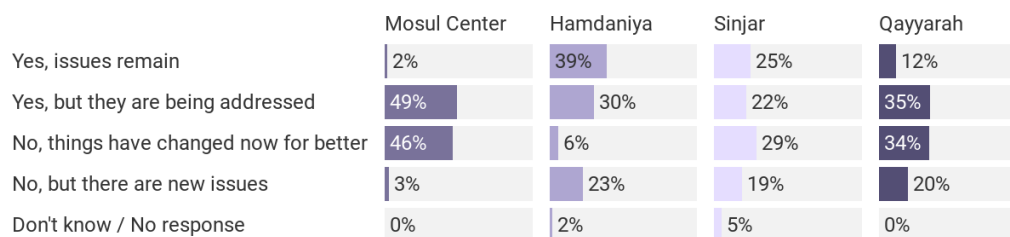
Shia Shabak and Syriac respondents in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella echo similar sentiments to the locations above. Some key differences between the groups emerged in that a significant proportion of Syriac respondents feel that the church is in the best position to prevent extremism and that communities should cooperate with security authorities in exchange for them respecting all communities. The Shia Shabak for their part highlight the need to stop marginalization and for equal representation in local governance.

Finally, educators interviewed also indicate that the role of the family is connected very closely to the role of schools in a young person's life in providing a stable and calm environment to shape mindset and views. The role teachers envision schools can play is in guiding students away from violence and extreme views (Hamdaniya Center and Bartella) and in providing space for support and psychosocial rehabilitation (Mosul Center, Sinjar Center and Sinuni, and Qayyarah). Respondents indicate the need for greater support in carrying out cross-community events, psychological and mental health aids and expertise as well as more material needs for students including transportation.

## 5.8. Remaining frustrations

As would be expected, given the data already presented and understanding of the context, there is variation by location and by the respondents within those locations as noted by the split in percentages regarding whether or not specific cause for radicalization exists and whether or not they are being addressed (Figure 7). Views, in general, seem to be relatively divided between those who see threats of radicalization still present in their district but being addressed and those who indicate that these issues have been resolved – with smaller numbers noting that issues remain and still others that new issues have arisen.

Figure 7. Are the specific issues that people radicalized over still existent in the district?

| | Mosul Center | Hamdaniya | Sinjar | Qayyarah |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes, issues remain | 2% | 39% | 25% | 12% |
| Yes, but they are being addressed | 49% | 30% | 22% | 35% |
| No, things have changed now for better | 46% | 6% | 29% | 34% |
| No, but there are new issues | 3% | 23% | 19% | 20% |
| Don't know / No response | 0% | 2% | 5% | 0% |

In Hamdaniya Center and Bartella, responses from Shia Shabak are significantly different from Syriacs: 78% of Shia Shabak respondents feel that issues that people radicalize over in the district are being addressed, while 59% of Syriac respondents note that issues still remain unaddressed. For the Shia Shabak respondents, those issues again include discrimination in relation to housing and their feelings of marginalization and political exclusion. Many note being upset with the system of "political quotas" within governance. Furthermore, many also report unequal treatment with regard to international humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, "Exclusion from networks in the work of international organizations, which works to restore damaged homes" (Shia Shabak female middle-aged community leader). For their part, 57% of Syriac respondents did not know or did not respond to what if any outstanding grievances they still feel. Those who did respond, rather than point to specific issues, reported feeling that the current situation is "unstable," a situation that further reinforced feelings of unease and discomfort.

For Yezidi respondents in Sinjar Center and Sinuni, answers varied fairly evenly about whether issues remain and if they are being dealt with or not – no view seems to prevail over the others. What remains consistently clear though is what the source of major grievance and frustration is: the abduction and enslavement of women and girls as well as the recruitment of children. Nearly every Yezidi respondent state this in their answers to this question.

Sunni Arabs in Mosul Center are roughly evenly split between feeling that issues remain but are being addressed (49% of respondents) and that conditions have now changed for the better (45%). While noting that the situation in their communities is improving or at least being worked on, Mosul Center respondents' main frustration is with "The government's response to the demands of many citizens who have been waiting for solutions for many years" (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member). The demands that respondents raise are both old and new to this conflict and include: provision of education and poverty reduction strategies, job creation, improvement in security intelligence, better monitoring of media, reconstruction efforts and the removal of bodies from the street and within rubble particularly in West Mosul, and finally, there is anger at the government's "silence about security abuses in [West Mosul] of the killing, theft and torture of the Sunni component" (Sunni Arab male middle-aged community member). The concern is that leaving these demands unmet will further create space for extremists to exploit. Finally, there is upset over the predominance of tribes within governance and society, given that respondents feel they play a negative role.

Sunni Arab respondents in Qayyarah are similarly split over feeling that issues remain but are being addressed (35%) and that conditions have improved (34%). An additional 17% feel that new issues have arisen. Specifically, respondents note that there still remains discrimination against Sunnis in the district, including by security forces operating in the area. They also feel the government effort is not matching the needs of the community. Unlike Mosul Center, respondents feel upset that

tribes are *not* incorporated more within governance. What is specific to Qayyarah respondents is their anger over how ISIS and Islam are portrayed locally, nationally, and internationally. There is great upset over the notion that ISIS represents any form of Islam in the first place and that the group worked in support of the Sunni population or had its support from the bulk of the Sunni population in the country, "What they say about ISIS as it represents the Sunni component, this is the biggest frustration of the Sunni community" (Sunni Arab male young community member). Furthermore, people report anger over "the application of laws and the punishment of criminals" (Sunni Arab male middle-aged respondent). Specifically, it seems in relation to counter-terrorism laws, that while certain known perpetrators may be arrested, they are able to get out of jail through a variety of means while others who may be innocent are targeted and cannot.

For respondents displaced from Hatra, concern remains with the lack of construction taking place within their area of origin. With Baaj, respondents displaced from there note that community members cannot return because it is too dangerous and they fear violence and extremism occurring again.

# 6. Conclusion and Considerations

The findings above both reflect the context of Nineveh Governorate and the diversity of prevailing theories of how violent extremism takes root, by whom, and why. Namely, that while general factors are the same across the governorate, what they look like on the ground and which are more important than others is highly localized. Furthermore, it is clear from the data that extremist thinking is spread across population groups and not in one in particular. Whether they react violently or not, there seems to be some pervasive intolerance among and between groups based on ethno-religious identity as well as perceived ISIS affiliation. Of note is that while respondents recognize why and how some people are manipulated into joining violent extremist groups, they do not feel these individuals can be rehabilitated, though most do make distinctions between having joined a group but not committed acts of violence, and between ISIS members and their families. Along these same lines, respondents by and large recognize that the issues that brought ISIS to bear upon them are not new and that this iteration of violent extremism is a symptom of deeper, more structural causes.

With this in mind, the following considerations should be taken into account when developing generalized and more localized CVE strategies in these contexts:

- *Root causes are often structural with grievances of this conflict compounding past ones and communities feeling the central government is critically responsible for addressing them.* Any interventions need to aim at the underlying issues at play within each community and across Nineveh Governorate as a whole. Solutions need to be longer-term and involve both government and community engagement and participation. While there is need to carry out rapid impact initiatives to start building back trust within state institutions (as many note that government response in their areas has been slow), short-term, quick fixes may actually make things worse in the long run, if not backed up by sustained, actual reforms (Lyall et al., 2018).

  Furthermore, there seems to be a desire for some form of redress across communities for violations suffered both past and present. It will be critical then to link any institutional reform initiative to broader calls for accountability, criminal proceedings as well as reparation, compensation, and truth-seeking, among others. Some groups (Yezidis in particular) have better grasp of this lexicon than others, so it will be important to ensure all communities have a sense of the options available and the ability to advocate for their needs.

- *Meaningfully and sensitively engage children and young people in CVE initiatives and strategies, including appropriately targeting those 'at risk' in the community.* Similar to above, quick fixes to improve children and youth outcomes may not always be effective and in some cases, can do more harm than good (Darden, 2018). Community activities (such as football matches or cleaning streets) may be a good start to engagement, but are not alone enough to sustain youth interest and agency. Having them develop their own ideas for civic engagement and connecting them to others in their community, across sectors, identities, and roles to help in problem-solving, may be more useful depending on context. Particularly, to ensure they do not become disillusioned. Existing networks for this

may already exist as well. Furthermore, because respondents here noted both young children and young adults may be at risk, programming targeting different ages groups is needed.

To this latter point, better targeting in general may be needed to identify those specifically at risk for violent extremism – risk factors for this may be different than for other "delinquent" or harmful behavior and it is important to understand this to ensure the right people are receiving the right help.

- *Any CVE strategy development must be inclusive and avoid alienating stakeholders and entrenching extreme views.* Strategy and programming that aims to change behaviors and views may inadvertent harden people to their pre-existing beliefs (Darden, 2018). Thus, it will be critical to tread carefully in ensuring appropriate and effective strategic engagement with stakeholders and the communities at large, including those who hold extreme views but do not necessarily join violent extremist groups – respondents in this study report them as a significant risk to their communities. What complicates matters further in Nineveh Governorate is that many segments in several districts are still displaced and may not initially be included in any kind of intervention. This is to the detriment of this work. Rather, understanding and slowly including views of these groups into any interventions may potentially help in communities being able to resolve major issues of concern (whether or not it allows for the return of the displaced).

- *Understanding and addressing women and girls' needs within a CVE framework.* Just as children and young people have been highlighted as those particularly at risk for recruitment into violent extremist groups, so too in some communities have women and girls. In all locations, respondents did note that women had also been radicalized, though to a lesser extent than men. Nonetheless, too often CVE interventions focus solely on how women can serve as deterrents to others radicalizing without paying heed to their own risks and agency in joining such groups. As such, strategy and programming in Iraq should look more closely at the different roles women and girls can and do play, in this regard.

- *Placing mental health and psychosocial care at the center of strategy and intervention.* The findings presented here highlight the mental and emotional toll experiencing prolonged violence, conflict, repression, and displacement has had on young people (to say nothing of society as a whole). There is then great need for careful, culturally sensitive, and sustained efforts for such care. That educators specifically but respondents in general note this need is telling given this context where therapy and other mental health treatments are hard to come by and often taboo. The trauma of this conflict coupled with the prolonged violence and neglect of these areas must be addressed. In order to heal the wounds of the community, attention must be paid to restoring the individual as well.

# References

Abdul-Ahad, G. (2017). 'After the Liberation of Mosul, An Orgy of Killing,' *The Guardian*, 21 November.

Abu-Nimer, M. (2018). *Alternative Approaches to Transforming Violence Extremism: The Case of Islamic Peace and Interreligious Peacebuilding*, Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

Abdulsamad, M. & Watne, A. (2017). 'Recruitment to Armed Groups Among Displaced Communities in Nineveh Governorate,' Presentation at the Migration and Displacement Conference, Erbil: International Organization for Migration, University of Kurdistan-Hawler, and Georgetown University.

Borgo, T. & Horgan, J. (eds.), 2009. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, New York: Routledge.

Bradley, M. & Nabhan, A. (2013). 'Iraq raids protesters' camp,' *Wall Street Journal*, 23 April 2013.

Darden, J.T. (2018). 'Compounding Violent Extremism? When Efforts to Prevent Violence Backfire,' *War on the Rocks*, 6 June.

El-Ghobashy, T. & Salim, M. (2017). 'Iraq's Rapid-Fire Trials Send Alleged ISIS Members – Including Foreigners – to the Gallows,' *The Washington Post*, 28 December.

Fink, N.C. (2015). 'The Blue Flag in Grey Zones: Exploring the Relationship between Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in UN Field Operations.' In: J. Cockayne & S. O'Neil (eds.) *UN DDR in an Era of Violence Extremism: Is it Fit for Purpose?* New York: United Nations University.

Haddad, F. (2013). *Can a 'Sunni Spring' turn into an 'Iraqi Spring'?*, Foreign Policy, January 2013.

Hoeft, G. (2015). *'Soft' Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: An Exploration of the Benefits of Deradicalization Programs*, Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism.

Holmer, G. (2013). *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace.

Horgan, J. (2009). *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, Oxon: Routledge.

Human Rights Watch (2004). 'Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq,' *Human Rights Watch*, 2 August.

Human Rights Watch (2018a). 'Families in Iraq with Alleged ISIS Tied Denied Aid,' *Human Rights Watch*, 15 February.

Human Rights Watch (2018b). 'Iraq: Families Alleged of ISIS Members Denied IDs,' *Human Rights Watch*, 25 February.

Human Rights Watch (2018c). 'Kurdistan Regional Government: Allegations of Mass Executions,' *Human Rights Watch*, 8 February.

Jalabi, R. (2018). 'Cubs of the Caliphate: Rehabilitating Islamic State's Child Fighters,' *Reuters*, 8 March.

Khalil, J. & Zeuthen, M. (2016). *Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation*, London: RUSI.

Khan, A. & Gopal, A. (2017). 'The Uncounted,' *The New York Times*, 16 November.

Lawrence, Q. (2008). *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*, Walker & Company, New York.

Lyall, J., Zhou, Y., & Imai, K. (2018). 'Can Economic Assistance Shape Combatant Support in Wartime? Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan,' available at SSRN, 13 April.

Massella, A. (2017). *We Have Forgotten What Happiness Is: Youth Perspectives of Displacement and Return in Qayyarah Subdistrict, Mosul*, Erbil: Oxfam.

Middle East Research Institute (2017a). *The Christians: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict*, Erbil: Middle East Research Institute.

Middle East Research Institute (2017b). *The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict*, Erbil: Middle East Research Institute.

Minority Rights Group, Institute for International Law and Human Rights, No Peace Without Justice & Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2015). *Between the millstones: The state of Iraq's minorities since the fall of Mosul*. Brussels: Minority Rights Group International.

Mogelson, L. (2017). 'The Desperate Battle to Destroy ISIS,' *The New Yorker*, 6 February.

Packer, G. (2006). 'The Lesson of Tal Afar,' *The NewYorker*, 10 April.

Rabasa, A., et al. (2010). *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, Santa Monica: RAND.

Reuter, C. (2015). 'Secret File Reveal the Structure of Islamic State,' *Der Spiegel*, 18 April.

Revkin, M. (2018). 'I Am Nothing Without a Weapon: Understanding Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Syria and Iraq.' In: S. O'Neil & K. Van Broeckhoven (eds.) *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, New York: United Nations University, 104-141.

Save the Children (2017). *An Unbearable Reality: The Impact of War and Displacement on Children's Mental Health in Iraq*, Erbil: Save the Children.

Sinai, J. (2007). 'New Trends in Terrorism Studies: Strengths and Weaknesses.' In: M. Ranstorp (ed.) *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions*, Oxon: Routledge, 31-50.

Social Inquiry (2017a). *Scenarios of Fragility: Baseline Assessment for the Subdistricts of Wana, Zummar, Rabbia, and Sinuni*, Erbil: Social Inquiry.

Social Inquiry (2017b). 'We Don't Want Them Back,' Erbil: Social Inquiry.

Social Inquiry (2018). 'Quo Vadis, Nineveh? Key Social Cohesion Concerns in the Iraqi Governorate for 2018,' Erbil: Social Inquiry.

Social Inquiry & United States Institute for Peace (2018). Data and Conflict Indicators from Advancing the Role of Iraqi Minorities in Stabilization and Governance.